

The Failure of Political Engineering and a Real Opportunity for Change

News:

“Today, our democracy is hanging by a thread,” said Khan in his first public address since his release, describing those who had gone after him as a “mafia”. His speech was not aired on television. ([The Guardian](#))

Comment:

Since the late 50s, the military brass started to tinker with Pakistan's political system to shape outcomes amenable to their liking.

Political engineering of Pakistan's political medium accelerated during Zia's rule, but it really took hold during the era of democracy in the 1990s.

The army brass developed certain tools like corruption charges, blackmail, torture, bribery, kidnapping, assassination, etc. to manage political actors and later these tools became standard methods, measures and tactics to bring civilian actors to power, manage them while in power, and then to discredit and remove them from power, once the political actors had served their purpose.

The army brass perfected these methods, measures, and tactics during the reign of the Bhutto family and the Sharif dynasty, playing off one against the other.

The army institution grew accustomed to these methods, measures, and tactics, and its officers accepted such tools to control the corruption of the Bhutto and Sharif families in exchange for the protection of institutional interests.

So after successfully using such tools to fashion political outcomes for three decades, Bajwa did not think twice about employing such tools to promote, manage, and then dismiss Imran Khan.

However, Khan balked at the army chief's attempt to control him and fought back, especially after his dismissal exposing COAS's attempts to silence and malign him.

These attempts also caused consternation in the institution of the army as well as the public. This is because many saw Khan relatively clean and sincere compared to the deep-seated corruption of dynasty politics and incessant interventions of the army leadership in tinkering with the political establishment.

Moreover, Khan was able to tap into the latent anti-American feelings of Pakistani society as a whole but in particularly the youth who had grown up in post 11/9 world and resented deeply both the political class for rampant corruption as well as the army brass for making too many concessions to America's war on GWOT.

Bajwa, followed by Munir, thought that the tools the army brass had perfected at political engineering would serve them well in managing Khan. Subsequently, they underestimated Khan, his youthful demographic support base in society and his followers in both the army institution and amongst the retired officers.

Hence, the country is now in uncharted waters. The tools used for political engineering have not only failed but have also created disquiet in the army institution. This has also deprived Munir of flexibility in the containment of Khan. Furthermore, there is no viable opposition to PDM apart from Khan and PTI. For the general elections to be credible, the army brass must field an opposition like they have always done in the past. Otherwise, the public will not accept the results.

When outcomes of political engineering have failed in the past, the army has intervened with martial law. But given the strong opposition against the army brass, its failure to manage Khan and the ensuing political saga, a severely weakened economy, the declaration of martial law are not only grave mistakes, but it will be perceived by many as Munir's desperate attempt to cling onto power at all costs without addressing a myriad of contentious issues.

It is also uncharted waters for Khan. He has emerged stronger than before, but he was hopeless when in power, committed embarrassing u-turns, lacked a comprehensive programme for change and is surrounded by tarnished politicians and advisors who are stained with the same corruption as their counterparts in PDM.

So, in the coming days and weeks, the political situation in Pakistan will remain in flux, providing golden opportunities for people committed to radical change. A change that is rooted in Islam and seeks to upend the current political order for good and return honour and dignity to the land of pure.

﴿مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلاَ إِنَّا نَنْصُرُ اللَّهَ قَرِيبٌ﴾

“When will Allah’s help come?’ Behold! Allah’s help is indeed near!” [Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 214].

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Abdul Majeed Bhatti**