

Pakistan General Elections- Sobering Thoughts the day After

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Pakistan's political dynamics in the last seventy years stand significantly distinguished by a singular irony that in rare periods when there is no military rule, the civilian Prime Minister of Pakistan appoints the Pakistan Army Chief at least notionally. The very Pakistan Army Chiefs so appointed turn around at the next General Elections to put in place their own script as to who the next Prime Minister should head Pakistan. Pakistan General Elections 2018, once again substantiate this propensity of Pakistan Army Chiefs.

Pakistan General Elections 2018 has not thrown up any dramatic surprises as the emergence of PTI Chairman Imran Khan as the Prime Minister of Pakistan has worked out as scripted by Pak-Army-Judiciary nexus and whose opening moves were initiated by this not so benign combination in mid-2017 with political disqualification for life of Former PM Nawaz Sharif on judicially debatable charges.

One thing that does stand out in the 2018 General Elections is that Pakistan's established political dynasties of the Sharifs and the Bhutto-Zardaris have this time given way to the emergence of a Imran Khan with no dynastic baggage to shoulder. This helped him to galvanise the Pakistani voters with the promise of a 'New Pakistan' coupled with his larger than life glamorous halo both as the Captain who brought the World Cup victory to Pakistan and also his glitterati lifestyle. It was this colour that presumably made him a draw with youthful Pakistani voters.

It was fortuitous for Imran Khan that in the run-up to Pakistan General Elections 2018 his burning ambition of two decades to become Pakistan's Prime Minister coincided with Pakistan Army Generals equally burning desire to prevent at any cost the return to power of Former PM Nawaz Sharif as he had become too assertive in deviating from the laid down agenda of Pakistan Army.

However, this time around, on 26 July 2018 as TV Channels abound on debates on Imran Khan as the next Prime Minister of Pakistan is not without political ironies personally for Imran Khan and on a wider plane for Pakistan's political future in terms of political dynamics likely to unfold. The perspectives are rather sobering for the new Pakistani Prime Minister.

Personal political ironies hovering and which will persist over emergence of Imran Khan as next Pakistani PM are perceptually damaging and likely to stunt his political stature. Imran Khan emerges as Pakistan's PM with the tainted image and reputation of being a 'Pakistan Army Stooge' and all the connotations that are attendant on this label in terms of his PM tenure.

Then there is the other damaging reputation of Imran Khan as having been the supporter of the Taliban and also right-wing Islamist political groups, including Hafiz Saeed. Such a political image can be a mill-stone around Imran Khan's neck both in terms of domestic politics and conduct of Pakistan's foreign policies. Presumably it was these stances that endeared Imran Khan to the Pakistan Army hierarchy and prompted the military to adopt him as their preferred Prime Ministerial contender, besides his pliability displayed in 2014.

As next PM of Pakistan with the above baggage Imran Khan will have little political space for putting into place his own version of his vision for Pakistan's future. In any case with no political or administrative experience at his elbow, Pakistani political pundits opine that Imran Khan has no personal 'Vision for Pakistan' and would blindly have to toe the Pakistan Army Chief's vision of Pakistan.

After the euphoria of Imran Khan's PTI supporters evaporates in the first flush of their contrived political victory will then emerge comparative and contrasting analyses of PM Imran Khan with Former PM Nawaz Sharif.

In brief, Former PM Nawaz Sharif was brought down by the Pakistan Army Generals for not submitting to the Agenda of Governance and Foreign Policies of Pakistan. In Pakistan where male machoism reigns supreme, PM Imran Khan would be perceptually viewed as supine and a 'political eunuch'.

On a wider political plane, Imran Khan has in the run-up to General Elections let loose a tsunami of unrealistic 'High Expectations' which neither the Pakistan Army Generals will permit him to implement and nor the economic bankruptcy of Pakistan would provide the financial resources to implement his populist schemes.

Pakistan's younger generation and first time voters may have been carried away with PM Imran Khan's wild promises but as the dust settles down and jobs and populist schemes promised falter, the same Pakistani young generation would eventually turn around as PM Imran Khan's most destabilising foes.

Turning attention away from Pakistan's sobering portents that are likely to generate political turbulence in Pakistan post-2018 one finds that in terms of Pakistan's foreign policies, both regional and global, no promising indicators hover on the horizon. Moreover this is truer for

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and India.

In his first televised speech after it was clear that he would be the Prime Minister, the first country he referred to or figured high on his priority was China. Even on July 25 the Chinese Acting Ambassador had complimented Pakistan's successful conduct of General Elections. China surprisingly does not seem to have politically invested in Imran Khan and his PTI so far. But then PM Imran Khan would not be unaware that China is the highest priority for the Pakistan Army Generals and that the Pakistan Army has a vested interest in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In a complete turnaround from his hard line comments on India and Indian PM Narendra Modi, Imran Khan made some conciliatory noises but made it contingent on the settlement of the Kashmir issue. Surprisingly, Imran Khan borrows Chinese vocabulary to describe that Kashmir is a 'Core Issue' for Pakistan. What should India make out of this flip-flop?

It was only yesterday that Imran Khan after coming out of the polling station that he asserted that India was intent on destroying the Pakistan Army and blamed PM Narendra Modi for bad relations with Pakistan. Is this not the Pakistan Army line?

India would be well advised not to indulge in any political reachout to Pakistani new PM Imran Khan as India must adopt a 'wait and watch' attitude. Imran Khan as Pakistan PM can be expected to second Pakistan Army's hard-line stances on India. With India to go to polls in ten months' time, PM Modi expectedly would not hazard any political initiatives towards a Pakistan Army dominated PM Nawaz Sharif with questionable outcomes.

Further, PM Modi cannot be oblivious to the overwhelming Indian public opinion that this is not the appropriate time for India to indulge in any dialogues with Pakistan till such time that Pakistan Army stops subsidising unrest in Kashmir Valley.

On Afghanistan, Imran Khan has been critical of United States involvement in Afghanistan. No changes seem to be discernible on the horizon. But then PM Imran Khan may not have any other alternative but to enlist Washington's help for sizeable borrowings from IMF and World Bank. Imran Khan in his speech kept harping on a 'balanced relationship' with the United States. He did not elaborate on this aspect.

Overall therefore, Pakistan's foreign policies will see no dramatic change with the advent of Imran Khan as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Pakistan Army will continue to dictate Pakistan's foreign policies and Imran Khan as Prime Minister will have to ditto them.

It is now time once again to turn back to a review of the political dynamics that are likely to unfold in the months ahead. The immediate political challenge that PM Imran Khan will have to contend with is that Pakistan's two major national political parties rejecting the results as 'rigged' and threatening that political protest will follow. It is a rare coincidence that both PML-N and PPP have a convergence in rejecting the poll results. The Pakistani Establishment itself is to blame because of the unconcealed blueprint of the Pakistan Army to script

emergence of Imran Khan as PM. This was further compounded by the technical glitches delaying the announcement of results.

What should not be forgotten is also the reality that Former PM Nawaz Sharif along with his political heir Maryam Sharif have not returned to Pakistan to cool their heels in Pakistani jails. The political potential of this return to Pakistan is not without implications for PM Imran Khan and the Pakistan Army.

So the day after, one is left with the sobering thoughts that while Pakistan Army script has unfolded as it desired but what the Generals may not have fully scripted is the emergence of likely political turbulence detracting from the political victory of Imran Khan.

Concluding, while it may be too early to be definitive in terms of the new Pakistani PM Imran Khan's untested political capabilities to successfully tide over the political, economic and foreign policy challenges, one thing that is certain is that it is not going to be an easy ride for PM Imran Khan. The old adage that "Uneasy lies the civilian head that wears the Crown in Pakistan" will haunt Prime Minister to be –Imran Khan.

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