**Crass Politics**

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Machiavelli, regarded as the father of nationalism, is usually perceived as a proponent of politics divorced from conventional morality and bringing forth all means in the quest for political power, even the most unscrupulous. There are many takers of that view, and in most third-world countries, including Pakistan, morality has no place in the power game.

As against this perception, there is no shortage of people who see Machiavelli as a pragmatist who recognized the harsh realities of political life. In their estimation, he was the first person to acknowledge the true nature of ‘reasons of the state’ and the place of ‘necessity’ in politics. The concept of ‘reasons of state’ promotes the narrative that the security and interests of the state take precedence over all other considerations. Similarly, it is held that “necessity” recognizes no laws and that morality has no place when the interests of the state are at stakePakistan,. Pakistan again is essential of the applicability of these views. The judiciary in Pakistan has been legitimizing the military coups by invoking the doctrine of necessity, and the dictators have found cover under the self-defined interests and security of the state to derail democracy, taking the country away from the course envisioned by its founding father.

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In contrast to the foregoing views, some claim that Machiavelli did not subordinate moral standards to political ones, maintaining that he was concerned both with what means and what ends were right. It is argued that his advocacy for the adoption of ruthless strategies was not to preserve power for his own sake but to create and maintain a strong state, the moral purpose of which was the good of the whole community. History is replete with examples where politicians and military dictators have used the slogan “the good of the whole community” and maintained a strong state as a justification for their actions, even though those steps proved disastrous in the end. The military dictators in Pakistan came with an ostensible plea and determination to eliminate the rampant corruption but lured by the attraction of wielding power, became involved in dirty politics and left the country in a still greater mess regarding corruption. Similarly, politicians have also been using the farce of accountability to victimize their political opponents, causing unfathomable damage to political morality and the chances of putting in place a system of good governance. It is also said that Machiavelli never actually said that the ends justified the means. Instead, he demonstrated how well-intended and morally good actions could have worse outcomes than allegedly immoral but bold and resolute actions. At times, force and violence, cruelty, and deceit are justified as lesser evils. Machiavelli implied that the morality appropriate to politics was a consequential morality in which actions were judged based on the good consequences they promoted for the general good of society.

The case for consequential morality in political life rested on the claim that it was unrealistic and naive to think that good ends could be achieved without resorting to dubious means. Politicians who keep their hands clean sometimes cause the evil of the status quo to continue or worse evil to result. In these circumstances, it would be self-indulgent, irresponsible, and morally wrong to insist on doing the ‘right thing’ regardless of how bad the consequences might be.

These arguments have taken on a new lease of life in recent times with the rise of the phenomenon of terrorism, if ever they needed one. In the face of terrorist attacks, upholding absolute rules against torture and arbitrary detention, rights to a fair trial, and freedom of conscience, thought, and expression has been dismissed as naïve. Politicians and academics have justified infringing on these rights as a lesser evil, necessary to protect national security. But those who oppose such violations are not idealists from the other world. They are deeply suspicious and highly cynical about the veracity of the stated goals of the politicians and the justifiability of their true policy objectives. They question whether morally dirty decisions serve general interests or the common good. All too often private, corporate, or commercial interests and controversial ideological ambitions masquerade as general interests in politics. Those who are suspicious of the Machiavellian art of politics also question the supposed ‘necessity’ of the dirty means they use and find that such claims are often exaggerated, counterproductive or simply fraudulent. Suspending rights, and using fraud, force, and violence are rarely the best and only alternatives in politics, even if national security is at stake.

As is evident from the foregoing discourse there is no dearth of arguments for and against any issue. People can advance forceful arguments to justify their acts and others can condemn those actions with equally weightier arguments to prove them wrong. God forbid the atheists would give you innumerable arguments to negate the existence of God. But the reality is that there are certain touchstones developed by human societies with international acclaim to judge the veracity and justification of human conduct, including that of politicians and rulers.

The principle that “majority is authority” is accepted and followed by the entire world in all domains of life, including the practice of statecraft and governance. Democracy is supported and practiced by the majority of nations. As our constitution stipulates, are accepted as sovereigns on whose behalf the state is governed by their chosen representatives. The rule of law and the protection of fundamental human rights are regarded as indispensable ingredients of good governance. Any deviation and aberration regarding these universally acknowledged and accepted norms are illegitimate, wrong and unjustifiable irrespective of the stakes involved. The legitimacy of the means takes precedence over everything else.

Seen through the prism of the conclusion drawn at the end of the foregoing paragraph the conduct of our politicians has been inimical to the internationally recognized democratic norms. It is politics without morality and disrespect for the law and the constitution. The consequences of this crass politics are that Pakistan today stands at the edge of a precipice.

Unfortunately, the man who pledged to reverse this phenomenon through his revolutionary agenda, establish the rule of law, orchestrate a corruption-free society, and end the culture of political vendetta has perpetuated these vices with impunity. Not only that, but even after leaving power through constitutional means, he continues to engage in illegal and unconstitutional actions to foment political instability in the country. That has to stop. However, those who launched him have a responsibility to take corrective action to save the country. Instead of their traditional interventionist role, they may facilitate a dialogue between the warring parties for evolving consensus-based political and economic reforms to expiate for their past follies. Because in the permeating ambience of unyielding confrontation and tit-for-tat actions from both sides, they are the only ones who can break the deadlock.

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