**Ten lessons from “Resurrection: Ertugrul” for nation-building**

By Ali Shah

*Ali Shah heads research and analysis at the NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS. Ali is the author of the book, Pakistan in the Contemporary International System (2020), published by NIPS. He can be reached at* *ali.shah78@gmail.com**.*

The appreciation of Pakistanis for the Turkish historical drama series*, Resurrection: Ertugrul*, veritably transcends socioeconomic and political lines. Perhaps this is because, in addition to its entertainment value, the series also offers a couple of instructive insights on nation-building.

First, the series demonstrates that political action can be moral. Ertugrul and his companions attempt to harmonize the demands of politics and morality, that is, how to yoke together what is politically necessary and what is morally virtuous in a way that stimulates social dynamism. Indeed, the series can be viewed as a morality tale par excellence in which the actions of good and bad characters personify, respectively, virtues that prove beneficial for nation-building and vices that undermine national consolidation.

Second, the series shows how history can be creatively utilized for inspiring people with hope and a sense of direction in the present. It serves as an excellent commentary on the contemporary geopolitics of Eurasia. While focusing on the 13th century struggles and challenges involved in the remarkable ethnogenesis of the Ottomans, the storyline resonates with modern audiences because it evokes major modern geopolitical meta-trends that have shaped the dynamics of instability in West Asia and South Asia. It shows how the inadvertence of external involvement combined with political compromises has continued to compound regional problems.

Some might say the drama misrepresents history. It, in fact, belongs to the genre of historical fiction based on a creative rendition of the actions of historical personalities, so faulting it for distorting history is like saying that the history plays of Shakespeare about the medieval and early modern English monarchs distort the history of England. Such a claim would be simply untenable.

Third, the series valorizes the crucial importance of the defensive use of force as the fundamental means for preserving national freedom and liberty. The struggle of Ertugrul and his companions as well as the use of force by them is a strictly defensive one against the unprovoked aggression of their internal and external rivals. Some might say, though mistakenly, that the series promotes violence. Before any such claim is made, there is a need to distinguish between the offensive and defensive use of violence, namely, the offensive violence of aggression and the defensive resistance against that aggression. The latter is always a legitimate response to the former. The series does not promote offensive violence, but rather highlights that if the first were absent, the need for the second would not arise.

Fourth, the series underscores the significance of impregnable defense as the first condition of peace and security. It demonstrates that viable polities are well-defended polities. Some might misperceive the series as extolling militarism at the cost of pacifism, and think that it fails to highlight peaceful pursuits of learning, scholarship, and culture during the Ottoman times. Here, it is instructive to ask why it was possible in the first place to pursue learning and produce knowledge during the heyday of the Ottomans. It was the powerful defense of the realm combined with the non-discriminatory but strict enforcement of law and order that led to the creation of social peace which allowed the uninterrupted cultivation of science, arts, and culture within Ottoman dominions. In olden days as well as the contemporary era, scholars, philosophers, scientists, and artists have gravitated to peaceful and prosperous societies rather than those riven by conflict and war, because only secure and well-defended societies would find sufficient energy, resources, and time to build and promote world-class institutions and networks of learning, research, and knowledge production.

Fifth, the series does, in fact, portray quite vividly the indispensability of learning and knowledge for statehood. The crucial interventions of Ibn Arabi, the famous medieval Muslim Sufi, polymath, and philosopher, in support of Ertugrul and his companions during critical moments of the storyline signifies the precedence of learning and knowledge in the epochal processes of nation-building and societal progress.

The interaction of Ibn Arabi and Ertugrul further captures the civilizational fact that only the cultivation of enlightened and incorruptible human beings, acting as political, economic, cultural, and societal leaders, can make durable national development and growth possible. This interaction demonstrates that the idealism of virtue can in fact be the best form of realism.

Sixth, the series shows that inter-faith harmony, protection of minorities, and the untrammeled political and socio-economic participation of women are key principles that ensure national and societal development. Some of the finest scenes of the series show women taking the lead in war and peace, as well as those that depict religious tolerance and cultural diversity being promoted actively by the protagonist and his associates in the regions brought under the jurisdiction of their embryonic polity.

Seventh, the series brings home the lesson that states and societies will prosper through promoting internal and external connectivity, open trade, reciprocity, and cooperation. Some of the most memorable scenes from the series show the continuous cycle of peaceful tribal routines of joint work, cooperative exchanges, festive celebrations, and common meals.

Eighth, the series highlights the importance of unbiased decision-making and impartial dispensation of justice as the two major pillars of thriving societies. The series also emphatically discourages nepotism and favoritism. Ertugrul never wavers in holding himself, his family members, and closest associates accountable for errors of commission and omission in the disposal of public responsibilities. At various points of the series, the protagonist warns his mother about the dangers of appeasement, confronts his eldest brother for his customary but misplaced pacifism in the face of covert and overt as well as internal and external aggression, sends both his younger brother and his eldest son into temporary exile for failure to promote public trust and interest, and even relieves his closest associates of their responsibilities for their momentary dereliction of duty. He himself does not escape accountability, whenever his actions are deemed excessive by his tribespeople and elders.

Ninth, the unswerving loyalty of all these individuals and others to Ertugrul, who himself walks the talk, further shows that the incorruptible loyalty of public officials and citizens to their competent leaders and the state is perhaps the strongest bastion of national survival. It is the elixir which brings nations back from the brink of death and disaster.

Tenth, the series conveys that states and societies cannot realize their true potential as long as they continue to remain subordinate allies in an uneven partnership with other states and societies. Ertugrul’s decision to part ways with the uneasy alliance of the Kayi (Ertugrul's tribe) and the relatively stronger Dodurga (Kayi's cognate relations) tribes, by championing and leading the migration of his supporters to the town of Sogut and its environs in northwestern Turkey, there to found an independent branch of the Kayi tribe, which grew in time to become the great Ottoman state, teaches us that strategic autonomy, even during the period of weak or nascent statehood, is essential for achieving unhindered national development, prosperity, and greatness.