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When homeland becomes an opportunity for gain

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THE title of this article captures the essence of the moral tragedy inherent in the concept of betrayal. It revolves around a critical question: when do a person's natural priorities – survival, money, status, safety – turn into 'treason' worthy of condemnation? Not everyone who puts personal interest before the collective good is necessarily a traitor, but there is a defining moment when such prioritisation becomes genuine betrayal.

In ordinary life, people instinctively and legitimately put their own interests first. For example, an individual may choose a higher-paying job, even if it is with a foreign company; may travel abroad for education in search of better opportunities – indeed, this can be considered an investment in the homeland if they return. They may seek medical treatment abroad if it is unavailable locally; and expressing one's opinion is a right, not an act of betrayal – so long as it does not harm national security or the country.

There is no betrayal where there is no intent to cause harm, no act that threatens national security, and no state of war or existential danger.

So how does 'self-interest' turn into 'betrayal'?

Psychologically, betrayal begins with the search for justifications for dangerous 'unpatriotic' behaviour. Building these walls of justification stems from an inner awareness that what one is doing is wrong – yet the person constructs layers of excuses to shield themselves.

With repeated behaviour, the individual begins to view the nation as a 'means' rather than an 'end'. The nation is no longer seen as a 'mother' deserving sacrifice, but as a 'resource' to be exploited. National institutions are reduced to 'obstacles' to bypass or 'opportunities' to be leveraged.

At this point, patriotic sentiment dies, replaced by a cold pragmatism that sees the homeland only in terms of what can be taken from it. Psychological mechanisms emerge that allow a person to commit betrayal without guilt, shifting responsibility onto others. The individual blames the state: "If not for the circumstances the state put me in, I wouldn't have done this." Responsibility is diffused: "All officials are corrupt, and I'm just one of them." Distorted comparisons arise: "What I'm doing is less harmful than what others are doing."

At this stage, the traitor can sleep peacefully after selling a classified document, smuggling money, co-ordinating with an enemy, or supporting them.

The traitor reaches the stage of open collusion when they become an 'agent', consciously committing high treason, fully aware they have crossed the point of no return. At that moment, hesitation and any remaining moral restraint vanish.

Here, personal interests – money, security and influence – become the sole benchmark, and the nation is reduced to a 'collateral cost' that can be paid.

This raises an important question: Why is the dominance of individual interest considered betrayal, especially in times of war?

In normal circumstances, society may tolerate limited selfishness. However, in times of war – like those our country is currently experiencing – the equation changes dramatically, and the stakes become existential (destruction, death and occupation). If solidarity is encouraged but not obligatory in peacetime, it becomes essential during war, because leniency endangers everyone. If the enemy is distant or undefined in peace, in war the enemy is clear, close, and ready to exploit any breach.

Responsibility also shifts: while it is primarily individual in peacetime, it becomes collective in wartime, because the collapse of one can lead to the collapse of others.

In war, betrayal is not merely a personal error – it is a 'stab in the back' of the defending community. That is why the punishment for treason has historically been harsher in times of war.

One of the most painful dimensions of betrayal is when it comes from someone close – someone once regarded as a loyal 'son' of the nation: a senior officer who sells secrets, a high-ranking official who embezzles public funds and flees, a media figure who promotes the enemy's narrative, or a trusted individual who betrays that trust.

Such cases create collective shock, revealing that what we believed to be a solid wall was merely a façade.

In the context of wartime, there is no justification for opportunistic self-interest at the expense of the nation – especially in countries like ours in the Gulf, which are neither occupying powers nor totalitarian regimes, and have not chosen war nor acted as unjust aggressors. Their societies are cohesive and aligned with their leadership.

In this context, prioritising individual interest over national loyalty is inexcusable betrayal.

In short, betrayal of the nation begins the moment a person stops seeing themselves as part of a greater whole, and instead views the nation as a neutral arena of interests – or merely an opportunity for gain.

A person who sees their homeland as a 'hotel' that can be abandoned, a 'store' to be looted, or an 'enemy' whose adversaries should be allied with, has already lost their sense of belonging before committing any act of treason.

The deepest paradox remains that the traitor is often the last to realise they are one. Their justifications seem logical to them, and their 'interest' appears sacred. However, history and society ultimately assign them their place – and the nation does not forget those who betrayed it, even if it chooses to forgive them.