

Failed Assassination of Imran Khan May Push Pakistan's US-backed Coup Regime to Tipping Point

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First Washington supported a soft coup against Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan. Then the unelected regime banned his speeches, charged him with "terrorism," and banned him from politics. Now a failed assassination attempt may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Pakistanis have been out on the streets protesting in the millions over the past few months. Even though the country has been afflicted by the horrific floods, the political momentum for radical change has not abated.

An assassination attempt on former Prime Minister Imran Khan this November has brought matters to a tipping point. Today, Khan's popularity as a political leader and public figure is at its peak – a fact even his detractors will concede.

And this is precisely what has got him into trouble.

[Khan was ousted in a regime-change operation](#) at the beginning of April. We can now conclusively say that the group responsible for the ouster included virtually the entire corrupt feudal-dynastic political class, the chief of army staff and some of his cohorts in the military high command, and of course the godfather overseeing it all: the United States.

It was a classic case of a "color revolution," which unfolded within just a few weeks. Elite sections of civil society, including the ostensibly more "progressive" ones, as well as the entire mainstream media, set the stage for the powerful to do their dirty work through lawfare.

With [political support from Washington](#), they organized a bogus vote of no confidence, with the help of huge sums of money coming from both inside and outside Pakistan to buy off members of Khan's own party, the Movement for Justice (PTI).

What has followed has been nothing less than historic. Pakistan has seen many civilian politicians deposed unceremoniously, but the bulk of ordinary people have been fairly indifferent to such elite intrigues.



Imran Khan address a rally in Lahore, Pakistan in October

Imran Khan's PTI broke the two-party dictatorship

The curse of the country has been that sometimes the civilian politicians in power, and their blatant plundering of the country, have actually made military rule seem better – or at least no different.

The ouster of Imran Khan engendered sadness and anger among large segments of the population, who believed that the “Khan experiment” was now dead.

But the former prime minister demonstrated an indefatigable resolve to fight back, which is frankly miraculous in a country where wealth and power are so obscenely monopolized by civilian and military elites who despise Khan.

From one city to the next, all across the country, Khan has held major rallies. His speeches have aroused a population that otherwise thought they would just have to live in despair, with the *ancien régime* coming back to power.

Over the past few months, in the scorching heat of the summer and through the devastating floods, Khan has not budged an inch on his simple core demand: elections to determine who should be governing the country.

But what seems like a fairly banal demand is anathema to the traditional mainstream political parties, especially the two which have played musical chairs in impoverishing the country, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

PML-N in particular, with its current unelected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has gone into panic mode, because it has always been accustomed to dominating the most powerful and populous province of the country, Punjab.

The most fascinating and encouraging aspect of Khan's PTI is that it is perhaps the first national political party that has constituencies and support in all of Pakistan's provinces.

This is no small feat for a young political party that has broken the stranglehold of the two-party duopoly that has dominated Pakistani political life for the past three decades.

Surely, it seems to strongly indicate that Pakistanis desperately wanted political change – and a lot of it.



A rally in support of Imran Khan in Lahore, Pakistan in October

Pakistan's military is internally divided

While Imran Khan was giving speeches at massive demonstrations throughout the country for the simple demand of elections to take place, it seemed like the new PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) regime was just interested in concocting ridiculous tricks to indict Khan.

The unelected government has tried pretty much everything: It sought to outlaw voting by overseas Pakistanis (who it knows overwhelmingly support Khan). It [hit Khan with absurd "terrorism" charges](#). And it used its Electoral Commission to disqualify Khan from contesting elections.

Rather than addressing the gargantuan social and economic problems that Pakistan is confronting at the moment, it was obvious to any person that the regime is fixated on destroying Khan and quashing his overwhelming support among the population.

But of course the current government is not alone in this saga, nor is it perhaps the principal player. There are two national security states, one deep and another even deeper, involved

in the attempts to crush Khan.

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the majority of the armed forces, the middle and junior ranks of the officers, and especially the soldiers, support and believe in Khan much more than their chief of army staff and other sections of the top brass.

This is unprecedented. And this is why a heavily militarized national security state like Pakistan's has been so reluctant to repress these popular mobilizations. Top General Qamar Javed Bajwa knows fully well that if he did implement such orders, the officers' and soldiers' guns may turn the other way – and a potential rebellion within the military could take place.

These are the same armed forces that for the past 20 years have been forced to sacrifice and die for America's "War on Terror." It seems fairly obvious that, by this point, they are more attracted to Khan's pledge that he will be a friend with America in peace but not in war than they are to any new orders the military high command comes up with in connivance with Washington.

Khan knows this sentiment among the armed forces very well. In fact, a barrage of retired soldiers and officers, in addition to ordinary Pakistanis, are volunteering full-time as Khan's security detail. The government "protection" that former prime ministers receive is more a threat to Khan than managing his welfare and safety.

Washington's hand behind the scenes

It is in this context that Chief of Army Staff Bajwa has gone in full panic mode. Both he and the United States can see that the buffoons in charge of Pakistan have completely ruined their plans of eliminating Khan from the political scene.

Their regime change, in short, has blatantly backfired.

To relieve his stress and receive some "wise counsel," General Bajwa made a trip to Washington for meetings with high-ranking US officials. This was highly unusual, as the chief of army staff (COAS) was expected to retire in just a few weeks.

Bajwa met with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and the second-in-command of the State Department, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of relations between the U.S. and Pakistan. It was my pleasure to host Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, to the Pentagon where we discussed our long-standing defense partnership and areas of mutual interest. [pic.twitter.com/ptiZDiqc8I](https://twitter.com/ptiZDiqc8I)

— Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III (@SecDef) [October 5, 2022](#)

According to [media reports](#) and statements by multiple officials, including Pakistan's ambassador to the US, four principal issues were underscored in those meetings:

1. The next COAS, to be determined by the end of November, should be pro-Washington and restart security cooperation, approving drone attacks and

American military bases in Pakistan.

2. Pakistan must start distancing itself from its age-old ally, Beijing, by reducing CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) initiatives, especially in the port of Gwadar; and it should not interfere with terrorist actions undertaken by the extremist ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) from Afghanistan or Pakistan.
3. Islamabad should “normalize” relations with the Israeli apartheid regime, manufacturing consent with a massive psyops media campaign.
4. No elections should be held until Khan’s popularity decreases in some way or the other.

Perhaps feeling emboldened and empowered by his meeting with the mafia don in Washington, General Bajwa granted some authority to the military-intelligence apparatus to openly speak against Khan. That was a fatal mistake.

In a very foolish and infantile press conference by the Director-General (DG) of the ISI (Pakistan’s military intelligence, perhaps second only to the COAS himself in terms of power in the country), the DG went wild and loose with criticisms of Khan.

General Bajwa has maintained all along that the military is completely “neutral” in the country’s political process. This press conference demolished that myth.

Then, in another unprecedented move, Khan hit right back at the DG of the ISI, scathingly shaming him.

Messing with the DG of the ISI is just not done. Yet Khan did it.

Most importantly, and extraordinarily, this has led to widespread condemnation of the top echelons of the military-intelligence apparatus by ordinary Pakistanis.

This is despite the fact that the regime threatened people who criticize the military on social media with seven years in prison.

The genuine fear that Pakistanis have of their national security state seemed to have vanished overnight.

BEWARE FOLKS: FIA will now have powers to take action on tweets, vlogs etc available on social media that attempt to harm army, navy or air force-OR anything on social media that is likely to cause mutiny. The offender will get seven years imprisonment.pic.twitter.com/99fYi5lhF3

— Riaz ul Haq (@Riazhaq) [October 26, 2022](#)

Meanwhile, the political parties in government, which in the past showcased themselves as being at the forefront in the struggle against the military establishment, are not only silent but complicit in what that establishment is doing to critics.

Illegal detentions, torture, and murders are happening on this government’s watch. High-profile journalist Arshad Sharif, who had exposed corruption in the regime, was murdered in strange circumstances after he fled to Kenya.

But the PDM government, the so-called “anti-establishment” forces, are simply watching this all happen.

The only positive outcome of this is that these political groups have been thoroughly exposed for their hypocrisy, lies, and opportunism.

China makes rare criticism of Pakistan

After General Bajwa made his trip to reassure Washington that its demands would be met, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited China in a period of unusual friction between the two countries.

Though soundbites of being “all-weather friends” were regurgitated, President Xi Jinping, in a highly unusual fashion, stated that Pakistan needs to do more to protect Chinese workers.

“President Xi expressed his great concern about the safety of Chinese nationals in Pakistan, and conveyed his hope that Pakistan will provide a reliable and safe environment for Chinese institutions and personnel working on cooperation projects there,” [Beijing’s Foreign Ministry reported](#).

This kind of public criticism had never been done before. It seems to indicate that Beijing knows very well how Islamabad is concerning itself with improving ties with Washington, rather than retaining the deep ties it has held over decades with China.

A series of terror attacks have killed and wounded Chinese citizens in Pakistan, especially targeting geostrategic infrastructure projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Beijing has asked for permission to send its own security detail to protect their citizens, but Islamabad has apparently taken Washington’s orders to reject this request.

Pakistan is arguably China’s most powerful ally, but we are seeing tensions emerge now that were never witnessed in the past.

Despite Prime Minister Sharif’s reassurances, Beijing knows very well that the real power lies in the hands of General Bajwa and the military high command. And the latter’s renewed love affair is with Washington, not Beijing.

Failed assassination of Imran Khan backfires

A gunman tried to murder Imran Khan on November 3 as he marched through Wazirabad in a protest.

The would-be assassin fired several shots; one hit Khan in his shin; one killed a PTI official; and several others were injured.

Khan himself claimed he had information from supporters inside the intelligence agencies that showed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his allies [ordered the assassination attempt](#).

"How did I get the information? From within the intelligence agencies."

Former Pakistani PM [@ImranKhanPTI](#) tells me about the attempted assassination on his life:

1/2 pic.twitter.com/cQVHKsaE9I

— Becky Anderson (@BeckyCNN) [November 7, 2022](#)

At this point, one can only speculate about the thinking behind this atrocity. Many Pakistanis believe that, if a trained shooter from the intelligence agencies wanted to kill Khan, then he could have.

But General Bajwa is due to retire in just a few weeks, and is not too keen about the possibility of setting off a civil war, or at least significant social unrest.

Many observers believe the shooting was a warning to Khan and his supporters.

But this explanation seems weak because, by now, the whole world knows that Khan is as hard as a rock, and virtually nothing has deterred him from openly confronting the powers that be – be they in Islamabad or Washington.

This assassination attempt may, once again, backfire badly.

The grotesque action took place in the midst of the “long march” called by Khan, starting in Lahore and ending in Islamabad.

It is important to note that not only has Khan forcefully emphasized that his rallies and marches must remain peaceful, but that indeed these tens of millions of Pakistanis who have come out have been incredibly disciplined and peaceful in their protests.

This fact should silence Western orientalist who propagate the idea that large “Mozlem” crowds engage in frenzied violence when let loose.

The myth that Imran Khan was the military’s puppet

The routine mantra that has been repeated ad nauseum is that Imran Khan had previously been a darling of the military establishment, but that he later had a falling out with the high command at the end of 2021, and that is what led General Bajwa and his colleagues to dump Khan and punish him.

This line of thinking stems from the very useful term of propaganda employed to describe Khan’s ascent to power: the so-called “hybrid regime.”

Though it is virtually impossible to find a consistent definition of what this term actually meant, we can surmise that it was a liberal smear implicating Khan as a puppet of the military, who would obediently follow its script.

While it is undoubtedly true that the Pakistani military wanted to punish the other two political parties by reminding them who is really in charge of national security policy in the country, it is simultaneously true that Imran Khan was the most popular politician in the country – and by a long shot.

It is completely erroneous to claim that the army’s top brass felt like it was getting its puppet into power. In fact, the military needed Khan more than Khan needed it, given that Khan and his political party were the only ones popular enough for the army to retake

power.

The important detail is that the military high command knew it was a gamble to empower a fiercely independent Imran Khan – but it was a risk they felt they had no choice but to take.

At the very least, the military top brass knew that Khan would not engage in conspiratorial plots with the Americans to undermine the military, as the other parties had done.



A rally in support of Imran Khan in Lahore, Pakistan

The fact that both Khan and the military had similar views on ending the war in Afghanistan hardly qualified Khan to be called a puppet.

In fact, well before the tussle between Khan and General Bajwa over who should be the next director general of the ISI at the end of 2021, the military and their friends in the Persian Gulf were irritated by Khan's constant reference to the Chinese way of eliminating poverty and the need for a welfare state, as he spoke to crowds of rich Arabs in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

On top of this, Khan's unflinching and vocal support for the Palestinians and his consistent condemnation of apartheid Israel led the establishment to consider him a "loose cannon" who could not be controlled, a civilian politician who would not simply take orders on issues of national security.

If the term "hybrid regime" simply meant civilian politicians unwilling to defy the military-intelligence apparatus of their states – or deep states – then virtually every US administration can be described as a hybrid regime.

The one American leader who did try to defy the consensus of the national security state during the Cold War was John F. Kennedy – and we know the price he paid for it.

Thus, this entire narrative was farcical. If anything, so-called hybrid regimes existed all throughout the 1990s and afterward in Pakistan.

The “progressive” government of the late Benazir Bhutto, for instance, was plundering the country along with her husband at home, while allowing the military establishment to fully support the rise to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan. That sounds like a hybrid regime more than anything under Khan.

Pakistan’s role in the US new cold war

It is difficult to write about these political developments that are unparalleled in the history Pakistan.

The sheer audacity of Imran Khan and the tens of millions of protestors who detest the current regime and sections of the top brass of the military is rather extraordinary.

Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the larger geopolitical power plays at work here.

We have seen how Washington has been humiliated by its own former puppets, like Saudi Arabia and India, which have refused to go along with this “new cold war” that the US is waging against China and Russia.

[#Kremlin](#): Vladimir Putin met with Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, who is in Russia on a working visit <https://t.co/jrvKVN0fzXpic.twitter.com/WF7aupsZau>

— President of Russia (@KremlinRussia_E) [February 24, 2022](#)

In such conditions, it seems that Washington wants to resuscitate its old Cold War relationship with the formidable Pakistani military.

In its crusade to halt the progress of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, to prevent the expansion of BRICS, and in general to impede Eurasian integration, Washington wants the new Pakistani chief of army staff to play old Cold War games of subversion, terrorism, and hybrid warfare.

Khan is no revolutionary socialist. But one doesn’t need to be a revolutionary socialist to believe your country has the right to have its own independent foreign policy.

And because Khan is committed to that, be it in defense of his relationship with China and Russia and especially his robust defense of Kashmiris and Palestinians, he will remain an impediment for the godfather in Washington.

The outcome of this chaotic situation in Pakistan is deeply uncertain. But there is one thing that is crystal clear: the political battle is between Khan and the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis on the one side; and the powerful and wealthy civilian and military Pakistani elites and their sponsor, Washington, on the other.

Despite legitimate criticisms of how Khan governed when in power, progressives clearly ought to be able to figure out where they stand now.

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