

Imran Khan Is Exactly What the US Hates in a Pakistani Politician

Lack of condemnation from the US over Khan's politically motivated imprisonment only confirms Washington's long history of preferring dictators pliable to its interests

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Global Research, August 11, 2023

[Middle East Eye](#) 8 August 2023

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [PAKISTAN](#)

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Last week, the [Russian](#) dissident Alexei Navalny [was sentenced](#) to 19 years in a penal colony - [accused](#) of financing "extremism" and "rehabilitating the Nazi ideology".

Quite rightly, the [United States](#) and [Britain](#) instantly denounced the move, with the US State Department [describing the conviction](#) as "an unjust conclusion to an unjust trial".

Britain's Foreign Secretary [James Cleverly claimed](#) the outcome "shows Russia's complete disregard for even the most basic of human rights", piously adding: "Dissent cannot be silenced."

Three days later, Imran Khan - until last year, the democratically elected prime minister of Pakistan - [was sentenced](#) to three years' imprisonment, courtesy of what looked like a kangaroo court, under murky circumstances.

These two cases are eerily similar. Few believe the charges laid against Navalny. Yet it is vital for President Vladimir Putin to remove him from the political stage - especially with Russian presidential elections scheduled to be held in March 2024.

Likewise, few believe the corruption charges laid against Khan carry any plausibility. Yet it is vital to get him out of the way ahead of Pakistan's general election, scheduled for this autumn.

There are dark forces which want both men out of the way. Navalny was subject to an [attempted poisoning](#) three years ago, while Khan was wounded in an [assassination attempt](#) late last year.

Let's spit out the ugly truth. Alexei Navalny and Imran Khan are both political prisoners, held on trumped-up charges by the Russian and Pakistan authorities.

Yet the West is only concerned about the fate of one of them.

Double Standards

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was swift to condemn the additional jail sentence imposed on Navalny, condemning "Russia's conviction of opposition leader Alexei Navalny on politically motivated charges. The Kremlin cannot silence the truth. Navalny should be released".

No US condemnation of Khan's politically motivated trial.

British Foreign Secretary Cleverly was guilty of the same double standard.

Both Britain and America will be well aware that the charges against Khan – profiteering from official gifts – are flimsy.

In fact, when Khan was in office, he changed the law so that it would be more difficult for politicians to profit from gifts received on foreign visits.

Previously, if an official wanted to retain an item, they were able to purchase it at 20 percent of the value set by the [Toshakhana evaluation committee](#). During his premiership, Khan raised the fee to 50 percent.

Khan is probably the least corrupt politician – admittedly not a high bar – in Pakistan's modern history. He represents a reversion to the early school of post-independence politicians, from the Qaid-i-Azam, [Mohammed Ali Jinnah](#), to the country's first president, [Iskandar Mirza](#), whose integrity was absolute.

None of this matters to the US and Britain, which have always preferred to deal with dictators who are pliable to their interests: [Mohammad Ayub Khan](#), installed in a military coup in 1958; General [Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq](#), who ruled with an iron fist during the 1970s and 80s; and more recently [General Pervez Musharraf](#), who came to power in a bloodless coup in 1999 and served as Pakistan's president from 2001 to 2008.

History proves that the US is structurally hostile to any Pakistani political leader with a democratic mandate.

Lonely Battle

Khan, to his enormous credit, had set out to challenge the deeply corrupt, dynastic two-party system that has dominated Pakistani politics, through the Bhutto family's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Sharif family's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), for more than half a century.

In doing so, he sought to end the country's status as a client state of the US.

Almost unheard of among recent generations of Pakistani leaders, he stuck to his principles – falling afoul of the US in the process.

Throughout his long period in opposition, he fought a lonely battle against the US's brutal war on terror, [condemning drone strikes](#) and standing up for the rule of law.

To his credit, Khan remained a thorn in the flesh of the US once in power. But he has paid the price.

I trace his demise to the [fall of Kabul](#) in August 2021, when Khan clashed with Washington over the freezing of Afghan state assets, as well as the American desire for access to Pakistani airspace.

From that moment, his card was marked. Khan had the impertinence to defy the US: the Biden administration's refusal to denounce his imprisonment amounts to complicity.

I love Pakistan, have travelled to this beautiful country many times, and have respect for the Pakistan army and its role in maintaining stability after independence 75 years ago. But it is widely reported to be the architect of Khan's downfall.

Not for the first time, it is allowing itself to be dragged into national politics.

Deceitful Claims

Imran Khan is today the most popular politician in the country. [Polls indicate](#) that he would sweep to victory in any free and fair election.

Holding an election in Pakistan without Khan would be like putting on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* without the prince.

Whoever wins an election without Khan would carry zero political legitimacy, and be despised as the local client ruler, ruling on behalf of the United States.

As for Khan, he has joined the long list of democratically legitimate national leaders who had the temerity to affect the US by striking out with an independent foreign policy.

Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected civilian president, spent his final years in jail before [dying in court](#).

Salvador Allende of Chile dared to win an election that the US wanted him to lose – and was dislodged from office in the most [brutal of circumstances](#).

Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first democratically elected leader, who challenged the US by building an alliance of non-aligned nations, ended up in a prison where he was judicially murdered.

Mohammad Mosaddegh of Iran. Too many others.

The silence of the US and Britain, both countries which deceitfully claim to believe in democracy, says it all.

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