

Pakistan's Pivot to Russia and Ouster of Imran Khan. The Taliban and the U.S. Failed "Nation Building Project" in Afghanistan

Historical Analysis

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Before his ouster as prime minister in a no-trust motion in the parliament on April 10, Imran Khan claimed that Pakistan's Ambassador to US, Asad Majeed, was warned by Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu that Khan's continuation in office would have repercussions for bilateral ties between the two nations.

Shireen Mazari, a Pakistani politician who served as the Federal Minister for Human Rights under the Imran Khan government, quoted Donald Lu as saying:

"If Prime Minister Imran Khan remained in office, then Pakistan will be isolated from the United States and we will take the issue head on; but if the vote of no-confidence succeeds, all will be forgiven."

During Imran Khan's historic two-day official visit to Moscow on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, besides signing several bilateral contracts in agricultural and energy sectors, President Putin reportedly offered Imran Khan S-300 air defense system, Sukhoi aircraft as replacement for the Pakistan Air Force's dependence on American F-16s and an array of advanced Russian military equipment on the condition that Pakistan abandons its traditional alliance with Washington and forge defense ties with Russia, according to two government officials who accompanied Imran Khan on the Moscow visit.

Alongside China, India and Iran, Pakistan under the leadership of Imran Khan was one of the few countries that adopted a non-aligned stance and refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, despite diplomatic pressure from Washington.

After the United States "nation-building project" failed in Afghanistan during its two-decade occupation of the embattled country from Oct. 2001 to August 2021, it accused regional

powers of lending covert support to Afghan insurgents battling the occupation forces.

The occupation and Washington's customary blame game accusing "malign regional forces" of insidiously destabilizing Afghanistan and undermining US-led "benevolent imperialism" instead of accepting responsibility for its botched invasion and occupation of Afghanistan brought Pakistan and Russia closer against a common adversary in their backyard, and the two countries even managed to forge defense ties, particularly during the four years of the Imran Khan government from July 2018 to April 2022.

Since the announcement of a peace deal with the Taliban by the Trump administration in Feb. 2020, regional powers, China and Russia in particular, hosted international conferences and invited the representatives of the US-backed Afghanistan government and the Taliban for peace negotiations.

After the departure of US forces from "the graveyard of the empires," although Washington is trying to starve the hapless Afghan masses to death in retribution for inflicting a humiliating defeat on the global hegemon by imposing economic sanctions on the Taliban government and browbeating international community to desist from lending formal diplomatic recognition or having trade relations with Afghanistan, China and Russia have provided generous humanitarian and developmental assistance to Afghanistan.

Imran Khan fell from the grace of the Biden administration, whose record-breaking popularity ratings plummeted after the precipitous fall of Kabul last August, reminiscent of the Fall of Saigon in April 1975, with Chinook helicopters hovering over US embassy evacuating diplomatic staff to the airport, and Washington accused Pakistan for the debacle.

Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley squeamishly described the Kabul takeover in his historic Congressional testimony that several hundred Pashtun cowboys riding on motorbikes and brandishing Kalashnikovs overran Kabul without a shot being fired, and the world's most lethal military force fled with tail neatly folded between legs, hastily evacuating diplomatic staff from sprawling 36-acre US embassy in Chinook helicopters to airport secured by the insurgents.

Apart from indiscriminate B-52 bombing raids mounted by Americans, Afghan security forces didn't put up serious resistance anywhere in Afghanistan and simply surrendered territory to the Taliban. The fate of Afghanistan was sealed as soon as the US forces evacuated Bagram airbase in the dead of the night on July 1, six weeks before the inevitable fall of Kabul on August 15.

The sprawling Bagram airbase was the nerve center from where all the operations across Afghanistan were directed, specifically the vital air support to the US-backed Afghan security forces without which they were simply irregular militias waiting to be devoured by the wolves.

In southern Afghanistan, the traditional stronghold of the Pashtun ethnic group from which the Taliban draws most of its support, the Taliban military offensive was spearheaded by Mullah Yaqoob, the illustrious son of the Taliban's late founder Mullah Omar and the newly appointed defense minister of the Taliban government, as district after district in southwest Afghanistan, including the birthplace of the Taliban movement Kandahar and Helmand, fell in quick succession.

What has stunned military strategists and longtime observers of the Afghan war, though, was the Taliban's northern blitz, occupying almost the whole of northern Afghanistan in a matter of weeks, as northern Afghanistan was the bastion of the Northern Alliance comprising the Tajik and Uzbek ethnic groups. In recent years, however, the Taliban has made inroads into the heartland of the Northern Alliance, too.

The ignominious fall of Kabul clearly demonstrates the days of American hegemony over the world are numbered. If ragtag Taliban militants could liberate their homeland from imperialist clutches without a fight, imagine what would happen if the United States confronted equal military powers such as Russia and China. The much-touted myth of American military supremacy is clearly more psychological than real.

Imran Khan is an educated and charismatic leader. Being an Oxford graduate, he is much better informed than most Pakistani politicians. And he is a liberal at heart. Most readers might disagree with the assertion due to his fierce anti-imperialism and West-bashing demagoguery, but allow me to explain.

It's not just Imran Khan's celebrity lifestyle that makes him a progressive. He also derives his intellectual inspiration from the Western tradition. The ideal role model in his mind is the Scandinavian social democratic model which he has mentioned on numerous occasions, especially in his speech at Karachi before a massive rally of singing and cheering crowd in December 2012.

His relentless anti-imperialism as a political stance should be viewed in the backdrop of Western military interventions in the Islamic countries. The conflagration that neocolonial powers have caused in the Middle East evokes strong feelings of resentment among Muslims all over the world. Moreover, Imran Khan also uses anti-America rhetoric as an electoral strategy to attract conservative masses, particularly the impressionable youth.

It's also noteworthy that Imran Khan's political party draws most of its electoral support from women, youth voters and Pakistani expats residing in the Gulf and Western countries. All these segments of society, especially the women, are drawn more toward egalitarian liberalism than patriarchal conservatism, because liberalism promotes women's rights and its biggest plus point is its emphasis on equality, emancipation and empowerment of women who constitute over half of population in every society.

Image on the right: Bhutto in 1971 (Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 nl)



Imran Khan's ouster from power for daring to stand up to the United States harks back to the toppling and subsequent assassination of Pakistan's first elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in April 1979 by the martial law regime of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq.

The United States not only turned a blind eye but tacitly approved the elimination of Bhutto from Pakistan's political scene because, being a socialist, Bhutto not only nurtured cordial ties with communist China but was also courting Washington's arch-rival, the former Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union played the role of a mediator at the signing of the Tashkent Agreement for the cessation of hostilities following the 1965 India-Pakistan War over the disputed Kashmir region, in which Bhutto represented Pakistan as the foreign minister of the Gen. Ayub Khan-led government.

Like Imran Khan, the United States "deep state" regarded Bhutto as a political liability and an obstacle in the way of mounting the Operation Cyclone to provoke the Soviet Union into invading Afghanistan and the subsequent waging of a decade-long war of attrition, using Afghan jihadists as cannon fodder who were generously funded, trained and armed by the CIA and Pakistan's security agencies in the Af-Pak border regions, in order to "bleed the Soviet forces" and destabilize and weaken the rival global power.

Karl Marx famously said: "History repeats itself, first as a tragedy and then as a farce." In addition to a longstanding [CIA program](#) aimed at cultivating an anti-Russian insurgency in Ukraine by training, arming and international legitimizing neo-Nazi militias in Donbas, Canada's Department of National Defense [revealed on January 26](#), that the Canadian Armed Forces had trained "nearly 33,000 Ukrainian military and security personnel in a range of tactical and advanced military skills." While The United Kingdom, via [Operation Orbital](#), had trained 22,000 Ukrainian fighters.

A "prophetic" RAND Corporation report titled "[Overextending and Unbalancing Russia](#)" published in 2019 declares the stated goal of American policymakers is "to undermine Russia just as the US subversively destabilized the former Soviet Union during the Cold War," and predicts to the letter the crisis unfolding in Ukraine as a consequence of the

eight-year proxy war mounted by NATO in Russian-majority Donbas region in east Ukraine on Russia's vulnerable western flank since the 2014 Maidan coup, toppling Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and consequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia.

Nonetheless, regarding the objectives of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, then American envoy to Kabul, Adolph "Spike" Dubs, was assassinated on the Valentine's Day, on 14 Feb 1979, the same day that Iranian revolutionaries stormed the American embassy in Tehran.

The former Soviet Union was wary that its forty-million Muslims were susceptible to radicalism, because Islamic radicalism was infiltrating across the border into the Central Asian States from Afghanistan. Therefore, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 in support of the Afghan communists to forestall the likelihood of Islamist insurgencies spreading to the Central Asian States bordering Afghanistan.

According to documents declassified by the White House, CIA and State Department in January 2019, [as reported](#) by Tim Weiner for The Washington Post, the CIA was aiding Afghan jihadists before the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. President Jimmy Carter signed the CIA directive to arm the Afghan jihadists in July 1979, whereas the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December the same year.

The revelation doesn't come as a surprise, though, because more than two decades before the declassification of the State Department documents, in the [1998 interview](#) to *The Nouvel Observateur*, former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, confessed that the president signed the directive to provide secret aid to the Afghan jihadists in July 1979, whereas the Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan six months later in December 1979.

Here is a poignant excerpt from the interview. The interviewer puts the question: "And neither do you regret having supported the Islamic jihadists, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?" [Brzezinski replies](#): "What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?"

Despite the crass insensitivity, one must give credit to Zbigniew Brzezinski that at least he had the courage to speak the unembellished truth. It's worth noting, however, that the aforementioned interview was recorded in 1998. After the 9/11 terror attack, no Western policymaker can now dare to be as blunt and forthright as Brzezinski.

Regardless, that the CIA was arming the Afghan jihadists six months before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan has been proven by the State Department's declassified documents; fact of the matter, however, is that the nexus between the CIA, Pakistan's security agencies and the Gulf states to train and arm the Afghan jihadists against the former Soviet Union was forged years before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Pakistan joined the American-led, SEATO and CENTO regional alliances in the 1950s and played the role of Washington's client state since its inception in 1947. So much so that when a United States U-2 spy plane was shot down by the Soviet Air Defense Forces while performing photographic aerial reconnaissance deep into Soviet territory, Pakistan's then President Ayub Khan openly acknowledged the reconnaissance aircraft flew from an

American airbase in Peshawar, a city in northwest Pakistan.

Then during the 1970s, Pakistan's then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government began aiding the Afghan Islamists against Sardar Daud's government, who had toppled his first cousin King Zahir Shah in a palace coup in 1973 and had proclaimed himself the president of Afghanistan.

Sardar Daud was a Pashtun nationalist and laid claim to Pakistan's northwestern Pashtun-majority province. Pakistan's security agencies were alarmed by his irredentist claims and used Islamists to weaken his rule in Afghanistan. He was eventually assassinated in 1978 as a consequence of the Saur Revolution led by the Afghan communists.

It's worth pointing out, however, that although the Bhutto government did provide political and diplomatic support on a limited scale to Islamists in their struggle for power against Pashtun nationalists in Afghanistan, being a secular and progressive politician, he would never have permitted opening the floodgates for flushing the Af-Pak region with weapons, petrodollars and radical jihadist ideology as his successor, Zia-ul-Haq, an Islamist military general, did by becoming a willing tool of religious extremism and militarism in the hands of neocolonial powers.

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