

Biden Administration Is Silent as Former Pakistani Prime Minister Is Sentenced to 10 Years For Revealing How the U.S. Pushed for His Removal

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The Biden administration claims that U.S. foreign policy works to uphold human rights and democracy while containing rising authoritarian powers such as Russia and China.

Biden administration officials routinely condemn the jailing of opposition figures in Russia like Alexey Navalny and by socialist governments like Nicaragua and Venezuela.

But the Biden administration has voiced no outcry over the arrest of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who just days ahead of parliamentary elections on February 8, was given a ten-year prison sentence for revealing state secrets about how the U.S. pushed for his removal from power.^[1]

The document that Khan revealed showed that U.S. State Department officials had threatened Pakistani officials with consequences were Khan not removed from office, citing anger over Khan's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Captain of Pakistan's national cricket team throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Khan served as Pakistan's Prime Minister from August 2018 until his ouster in April 2022.

In May 2023, he was arrested by paramilitary troops as part of a wave of repression directed against his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Party along with independent journalists like [Arshad Sharif](#), who was hounded out of Pakistan and assassinated in Kenya.^[2]

According to a January report in *Time* magazine, thousands of PTI members have since been arrested and dozens of party leaders resigned following lengthy interrogations.

Khan's name was even banned from Pakistani media, and the PTI Party was banned from using its trademark cricket logo on ballot paper, significantly hampering its chances among an electorate that is 40% illiterate.^[3]

Arif Rafiq, a Pakistani specialist at the Middle East Institute, [told *The Intercept*](#) that

“Khan was convicted on flimsy charges following a trial where his defense was not even allowed to produce witnesses. He had previously survived an assassination attempt, had a journalist aligned with him murdered, and has seen thousands of his supporters imprisoned. While the Biden administration has said that human rights will be at the forefront of their foreign policy, they are now looking away as Pakistan moves toward becoming a full-fledged military dictatorship.”

Over the last two decades, the U.S. government has provided [billions of dollars of military aid to Pakistan](#), which has long been used as a base for clandestine operations into Afghanistan. This aid has helped to fortify the military's power and fuel state repression.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a CIA offshoot [spent \\$3.952,238 in Pakistan in 2021](#) supporting civil society groups. Part of the purpose of the funding was likely to assist in regime change efforts once it was clear that Khan was too independent.

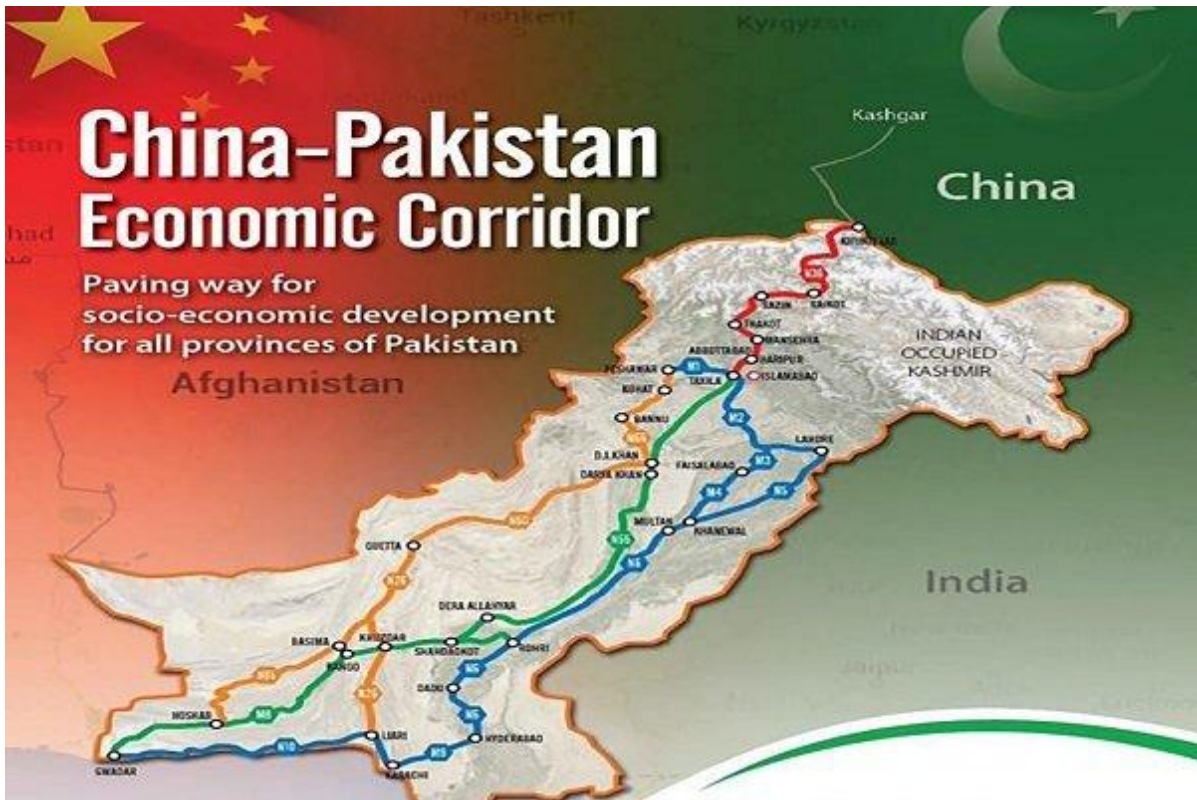
Khan's rise to power had resulted not only from his status as a cricket star but also his generous philanthropy. [The World Socialist Website \(WSWS\)](#) criticized him for embracing austerity measures recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that resulted in the [slashing of social spending](#) and food subsidies and selling off of public sector enterprises wholesale.

[Athiyan Silva](#) and [Kumaran Ira wrote](#) that Khan “exploited social anger at the previous PML-N government to win the July [2018] election, making demagogic promises, including to create more jobs and provide relief for the poor, while criticizing the murderous U.S. drone attacks in the Federally Administered Tribal Area.”

Once in power, Khan “formed his government by picking ministers who have already worked under former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) governments, which imposed IMF austerity measures and collaborated with the U.S.-led NATO war in Afghanistan.”

Dropping his campaign rhetoric against U.S. drone murder, Khan met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after his election and began tacking closer to Washington, though sustained commitment to developing Pakistan's economy and industry via the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, the “flagship project” of China's Eurasian BRI (Belt and Road Initiative).^[4]

Launched in 2015, the CPEC is a planned network of roads, railways and energy projects linking western China to Pakistan's strategic Gwadar Port on the Indian Ocean, near the oil-rich Persian Gulf.



Source: globalvillagespace.com

Pompeo stated that it would be “unacceptable” for Pakistan to use U.S. financial aid to pay off infrastructure and industrial debts to China, which is a key reason why Khan became a target for regime change alongside his lack of support for U.S. policy toward Ukraine.



Imran Khan and Mike Pompeo in 2018: The friendship did not last. [Source: en.m.wikipedia.org]

In a March 2022 meeting, Donald Lu, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, [told](#) the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., Asad Majeed Khan, that Khan had to be removed as Prime Minister in a parliamentary vote of no confidence. Otherwise, Lu said,

there would be consequences for Pakistan.^[5]

Khan's replacement, former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was a right-wing businessman from a [corrupt, oligarchic family](#) who [promised a "paradise for investors"](#) and [reversed Khan's opposition to the war](#) in Ukraine.^[6] In the fall, the Biden administration helped broker a [bailout from the International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF) after Pakistan came to an [agreement](#) to purchase arms for use by the Ukrainian military in its war with Russia.

Just days before the meeting with Majeed, Lu had been questioned at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing over the neutrality of India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in the Ukraine conflict.

In response to a question from Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)^[7] about a recent decision by Pakistan to abstain from a UN resolution condemning Russia's role in Ukraine, Lu [said](#),

"Prime Minister Khan has recently visited Moscow, and so I think we are trying to figure out how to engage specifically with the Prime Minister following that decision."^[8]

Lu [subsequently told Majeed](#) Khan that "people here and in Europe are quite concerned about why Pakistan is taking such an aggressively neutral position [on Ukraine], if such a position is even possible. It does not seem such a neutral stand to us."

Lu in turn said:

"I think if the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington because the Russia visit is being looked at as a decision by the Prime Minister. Otherwise, I think it will be tough going ahead."^[9]

The day before the meeting, Khan had [addressed a rally](#) responding directly to European calls that Pakistan support Ukraine. "Are we your slaves?" Khan thundered to the crowd: "What do you think of us? That we are your slaves and that we will do whatever you ask of us?" he asked. "We are friends of Russia, and we are also friends of the United States. We are friends of China and Europe. We are not part of any alliance."

Khan's fiercely independent stance was intolerable for the U.S., which demands obedience like a Mafia godfather. And so Khan had to go, like Lumumba, Castro, Qaddafi, and so many others.

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Notes

1. Khan has now been sentenced to an [additional 14 years](#) in prison for allegedly accepting illicit gifts while he was in office and was barred from holding public office for ten years. His wife, Bushra Bibi, was also given a 14-year prison sentence. Khan questioned the fairness and impartiality of the trial during the hearing, asking the judge: "Why are you in a hurry to announce the verdict? I have not even recorded my final statement." Mr. Khan then exited the courtroom, and the judge announced the sentence in his absence.
2. According to [The Intercept](#), the Pakistani military has enshrined authoritarian powers for itself that drastically reduce civil liberties, criminalize criticism of the military, expand the institution's already expansive role in the country's economy, and give military leaders a permanent veto over political and civil affairs.
3. Charlie Campbell, "Pakistan Can Keep Imran Khan Out of Power, but It Can't Keep His Popularity Down," *Time*, January 17, 2024. Khan was the target of several assassination attempts and was shot and wounded in a political rally. In November, Imaan Mazari, a human rights lawyer on who represents families of those forcibly disappeared, works on issues of forced evictions and media freedom, was [taken from her home](#) by men in plainclothes and elite security forces at 3am without an arrest warrant after speaking at a rally against enforced disappearances. Mazari was charged under the broad Anti-Terrorism Act including sedition, rebellion against the state, and terror-financing. PTI leaders have only been able to contest the upcoming elections [as independents](#) and have been [subjected to](#) police raids and harassment.
4. [Athiyana Silva](#) and [Kumaran Ira](#), "[Pakistani premier Imran Khan imposes austerity mini-budget](#)," *World Socialist Website*, October 2, 2018.
5. See Ryan Grim and Murtaza Hassain, "[Secret Pakistan Cable Documents U.S. Pressure to Remove Imran Khan](#)," *The Intercept*, August 9, 2023.
6. Shehbaz Sharif was the [younger brother](#) of three-time Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a protégé of the late U.S.-backed dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, who contributed to the Islamicization of Pakistan in the 1980s when he provided support under the CIA's oversight for the anti-Soviet Afghan mujahadin. In 2017, Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered Nawaz Sharif to step down as prime minister due to Panama Papers-related corruption revelations.
7. Interestingly, Senator Van Hollen, whose father was a foreign service officer and whose mother worked for the CIA and State Department, was born in Karachi, Pakistan.
8. Grim and Hassain, "[Secret Pakistan Cable Documents U.S. Pressure to Remove Imran Khan](#)."
9. Grim and Hassan, "[Secret Pakistan Cable Documents U.S. Pressure to Remove Imran Khan](#)."

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