

Pakistan's Coup Regime Tries to Arrest Imran Khan - But Faces Massive Popular Resistance

With staunch US support, Pakistan's unelected "imported government" is trying to arrest former Prime Minister Imran Khan, the most popular politician in the country, to prevent him from running in elections. But protesters are protecting him.

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If 2022 was the year of popular uprisings in Pakistan, raising hope for protesters fed up with a thoroughly corrupt and repressive civil-military regime, 2023 seems to be the year when the government is trying every dirty trick in the book to kill that hope.

After a [US-backed regime-change operation](#) removed [elected Prime Minister Imran Khan](#) from power in April 2022, Pakistan witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon in the nation's history: For the first time, a civilian politician who was ousted from power didn't simply end up in the dustbin of history, alongside interchangeable corrupt politicians who for decades played musical chairs, competing to plunder the country.

On the contrary, what occurred were massive outpourings of support for Khan and widespread opposition to the *ancien régime* put in power by Washington's mercenaries in the military high command.

The enormous popular rejection of the current "imported government", as Khan calls it, has made Pakistan's elites increasingly desperate. They want him eliminated.

Assassination was their first method of choice - but they fumbled. At a rally in November, a [gunman shot Khan in the leg](#), injuring but failing to kill him.

In the meantime, Plan B is being implemented: Arrest Khan on bogus charges and disqualify him from politics forever.

The former prime minister has been relentlessly holding peaceful demonstrations,

demanding elections. The government knows that Khan would easily win, so it wants to prevent him from running.

A Gallup poll in March found that Khan is by far the [most popular politician in Pakistan](#), with a 61% approval rating, compared to 37% disapproval.

The current, unelected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has the complete opposite: a 32% approval rating, compared to 65% disapproval.

The figures are clear: Nearly two-thirds of Pakistanis support Khan and oppose the unelected government.

Nearly 61 per cent of Pakistanis have a "positive impression" of PTI chief Imran Khan, while just 36 per cent do so of PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif and foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari <https://t.co/6j41OU5WZu>

— WION (@WIONews) [March 8, 2023](#)

Pakistan's "imported government" orders the arrest of Imran Khan

Faced with its deep unpopularity, on March 8, Pakistan's regime initiated Plan B.

Khan was leading a peaceful protest – one of the countless rallies he has organized since the April 2022 regime-change operation.

This time, massive state security forces went on a rampage and tried to arrest Khan. But they could not do it. Standing between them and Khan were tens of thousands of his supporters.

The only way to get to Khan would have been a bloodbath. This was avoided – although one Khan supporter was killed.

We are heartbroken & outraged that PTI political worker Ali Bilal (Zille Shah), a person with disability, was murdered by the state in Lahore yesterday. He was only exercising his right to peaceful assembly (which he often turned festive) & ☐ protest! [#StopThisFascism pic.twitter.com/3AutOvTW32](#)

— Aurat March - عورت مارچ (@AuratMarchKHI) [March 8, 2023](#)

Then again, on March 13, Khan called for a rally in the city considered to be the heart of Pakistan: Lahore.

Despite the entire state security machinery targeting him and his supporters, the rally in Lahore was one of the biggest the city has seen.

Khan and the protesters marched confidently and peacefully in every corner of the city, where they seemed unstoppable, greeted with joy by ordinary Pakistanis of all walks of life.

Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan stages a rally with thousands of supporters in

Lahore as courts in Islamabad issue two more arrest warrants against him
pic.twitter.com/fTKg2OW4t2

— TRT World Now (@TRTWorldNow) [March 14, 2023](#)

The former prime minister was undeterred, committed to holding demonstrations in the provinces of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), in the lead-up to what he hopes will be national elections.

On March 14, the regime escalated its crackdown. [Police surrounded Khan's house](#) in Lahore and tried to arrest him.

In response, thousands of supporters gathered at Khan's home, protecting him.

Current situation of Zaman Park Lahore now at 10:15pm. Massive rallies across the country are gathering there for the protection of Imran Khan. [#زمان_پارک_لاہور](#) pic.twitter.com/Lyx6X0JdZO

— PTI Islamabad (@PTIOfficialISB) [March 15, 2023](#)

The police responded with extreme violence, wounding dozens of protesters.

From his house, Khan symbolically [delivered a speech](#) via video stream, sitting with the tear gas cannisters that had been fired outside.

Tear gas shells fired at Imran Khan's residence in Zaman Park Lahore.
pic.twitter.com/BipjKywcVH

— Shiffa Z. Yousafzai (@Shiffa_ZY) [March 15, 2023](#)

The regime tries to ban Khan from public life

Khan's determination to relentlessly participate in mass mobilizations has led the regime to try to ban him from public life.

Even Western organizations that are often biased, such as Amnesty International, have condemned the unelected Pakistani government's authoritarian tactics, which have included [prohibiting all speeches](#) and rallies by Khan, as well arresting people who [criticize the military on Twitter](#).

Authorities in Pakistan has placed a blanket ban on protests in Lahore. The authorities have used a draconian colonial-era law to crush dissent hours before several protests, including the [#AuratMarch.#IWD2023](#)
<https://t.co/G4Z6Lz7Ujt>

— Amnesty International (@amnesty) [March 8, 2023](#)

There are two main factors preventing an all-out assault to arrest Khan: the wrath of the population that would ensue, and fear that significant ranks within the armed forces would revolt and turn their guns on their superiors, à la Vietnam.

Indeed, it has been because of Khan's popularity not just among ordinary Pakistani civilians but within the military ranks as well that the former prime minister has survived so far.

Khan's popularity among some parts of the army is easy to explain. Rank-and-file soldiers and the majority of the junior and mid-rank officer corps are not keen on Washington dictating a War on Terror 2.0. They have always appreciated Khan's principled opposition, since day one, to any military solution to the militancy in Afghanistan and the northwest of Pakistan.

Throughout 2022, Khan's political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI, the "Movement for Justice"), exponentially rose in popularity, in contrast to the all-too-visible political shenanigans of the coalition of feudal family dynasties and other corrupt forces in power.

If it is true that Khan mismanaged both political and economic governance while in power, then the current lot has engendered a virtual implosion and collapse in the country.

Khan challenges Pakistan's pro-Western elites

It is difficult to overstate how incensed ordinary Pakistanis are with the political mafias, significant sections of the military top brass, and the chief mafia don: Washington.

One of the most disturbing aspects of what has been happening is the virtual connivance of liberal-left forces and the Pakistani deep state in attempting to eliminate Khan from the Pakistani political scene.

The visceral hatred of Khan by Pakistan's comprador elites cannot be explained by simply having differences with Khan on various policies - something that Khan's own critical supporters have as well.

No, for this elite class of the liberal, pro-Western Pakistani intelligentsia, Khan has committed the ultimate crime: socio-cultural class betrayal.

Khan lived abroad for so long during his impressive cricket career. He studied at Oxford, and speaks perfect English. Thus Pakistan's Westoxicated elites thought that Khan would behave just like them.

Instead, Khan has rejected the condescending attitude that the country's Western-educated elites show toward ordinary Pakistanis.

Khan has mobilized tens of millions because of his sincerity to reimagine a new Pakistan, prioritizing social justice and an [independent foreign policy](#).

The fact that one small, sectarian leftist party or the other is not being given the credit of leading the revolt against the unpopular regime has made them neurotically envious of Khan.

It is clear for all to see: Khan and the critical supporters both in and outside of his political party have become the most dangerous threat to Pakistan's status quo.

That is why we have seen very unusual and fast-paced meetings between US officials and Pakistan's generals and regime officials: Washington's "friends again".

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

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

Elimination of Khan is absolutely necessary for the troika of these power centers: local comprador political elites, the military high command, and Washington.

Why? Because they know that Khan and his party will sweep any elections that are held.

US encourages Pakistan to “continue working with the IMF”

In the meantime, Pakistan is enduring a deep economic crisis. The country has nearly exhausted its foreign exchange reserves.

The regime is in talks with the US-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) to [save itself from bankruptcy](#). All of the corresponding policies of austerity and taxing the poor – “structural adjustment” – are to be expected.

CIA officer turned [US State Department spokesman Ned Price](#) said in a press briefing on March 8 that Washington wants Pakistan to “continue working with the IMF” to impose “reforms that will improve Pakistan’s business environment”, in order to “make Pakistani businesses more attractive and competitive”.

In other words, the US State Department wants Pakistan to double down on neoliberal economic policies, such as lowering wages and cutting social spending.

If hated before, the current “imported government” is now despised more than ever.

Imran Khan’s independent foreign policy angers the mafia don in Washington

Khan’s foreign policy was anathema to Washington.

He refused to recognize apartheid Israel as a legitimate state.

He improved ties with Russia for straightforward reasons of economic necessity (as well as promoting the geostrategic stability in the broader Central Asian region).

Khan mended ties and cooperated with Iran, even [praising its revolutionary “dignity”](#).

He strengthened ties with China.

At the same time, Khan repeatedly said he desired friendly relations with Washington, proposing that they work together in peacebuilding in Afghanistan and the wider region.

But these other foreign policy aims were utterly unacceptable to the mafia don, which seems to be set on a [war path with Beijing](#) (and others).

Pakistan has been a close ally of China since the 1960s. But Islamabad's intense obsession with pleasing Washington is a flagrant slap in the face of Beijing.

The meetings that top Pakistani military officials, including the powerful Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, have held with officials in Washington and London are not being missed upon by Beijing or Moscow.

Though Pakistan is suffering through some of the worst economic woes in its history – thanks to the robber barons in power – the US still knows that the South Asian nation has one of the most formidable militaries in the world, and is a nuclear-powered country of 230 million.

Washington also knows that it can easily woo the military top brass by reminding them of how only the US and its weapons and fighter jets can allow Pakistan to stay apace with arch-rival India, trying to match its military supremacy in the region.

This is why the US is so keen on Pakistan participating in Joe Biden's second "Summit for Democracy" in March 2023. (Despite the fact that Pakistan's current government was not elected, and repeatedly resisted calls for holding a vote.)

As prime minister, Khan respectfully declined the invitation to the first summit in 2021, because he knew exactly what the intention was: A declining empire seeking to muster as many nations as it can to be a part of its "coalition of the willing" against official enemies like China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, etc.

According to leaks by Pakistan's own ambassador to the US (who has a soft spot for Khan), Washington wants to reestablish its old military base in Pakistan, which was closed down in 2011.

The US is also reportedly dictating to Pakistan which militant groups to go after and which ones should be left alone – such as the anti-China East Turkestan independence movement or the ISIS elements giving trouble to Beijing and the Taliban government in Kabul.

Most importantly, Washington wants to compel Islamabad to do everything possible to significantly reduce or halt any progress on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

Moreover, Washington and the Persian Gulf monarchies are having a splendid time in convincing the new favorable military-civilian regime in Islamabad to undertake an political 180 that Khan would never agree to: gradually normalizing relations with Tel Aviv.

Nevertheless, what all of these power centers conspiring against Khan overlook is that they are dealing with a different Pakistani population now. The people's political consciousness has exponentially risen with the ouster of Khan from power.

Hence, whether Khan is assassinated or somehow arrested or disqualified from politics, the powers-that-be might get a rude awakening, and be surprised that they are dealing with a new Pakistan, with or without Khan – one that will have zero tolerance for their venality, corruption, and subordination to Washington.

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Featured image: Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan gives a speech from his home on March 15, with tear gas cannisters that had been fired at protesters by the police trying to arrest him (Source: GER)

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