

Why Pakistan's Deep State Tried to Assassinate Imran Khan?

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On Nov. 3, a spine-chilling assassination attempt was mounted on Pakistan's most charismatic and popular political leader, Imran Khan, while he was addressing a political rally in Wazirabad, a small town near the capital of Pakistan's Punjab province, Lahore.

As corroborated by eye witness accounts, there were two shooters. One of them was an amateur religious zealot armed with a pistol and meant as a diversion who was caught by the supporters of PTI, Imran Khan's political party. The other was a professionally trained sniper who shot a burst of bullets at Imran Khan's container with a sub-machine gun and escaped the crime scene unharmed.

It's worth pointing out that it wasn't an assassination attempt but a shot across the bow meant to send a loud and clear warning to the leadership of Imran Khan's PTI. The sharp shooter aimed the gun at Imran Khan's legs and emptied an entire magazine of the sub-machine gun, and hit the bull's eye.

Clearly, the assassin had explicit instructions only to target lower limbs of victims and avoid hitting vital organs in upper body that could've caused deaths and needless public furor. Injuries suffered by the rest of PTI leadership, mainly in the legs, and bystanders was collateral damage. One bystander, named Moazzam, was killed on the spot, but circumstantial evidence points that he was likely shot dead from the bullets shot by the guards protecting the container who mistakenly assumed that he was the shooter.

Multiple bullets and fragments of lead from two to three feet high metal plate around the container pierced Imran Khan's both legs. After taking a close look at Imran Khan's x-rays, as shown by his personal physician, Dr. Faisal, one bullet fractured Imran Khan's right shin bone. A tiny piece of shrapnel landed near patella on the knee-cap. Another lead fragment almost pierced femoral artery that could've caused profuse bleeding and even death if left untreated for long.

The amateur zealot, identified as Naveed s/o Bashir, was armed with a locally made pistol he had bought for Rs.20,000 (\$100). Most pistols found in Pakistan are semi-automatic and are utterly unreliable. They seldom fire an entire magazine without misfiring a couple of bullets. That's what happened with the shooter, too. A bullet got stuck in the chamber and a valiant PTI supporter, Ibtisam Hassan, leapt on him and snatched the pistol from his hands.

Russian-made Kalashnikovs, on the other hand, are weapons of choice for sharp shooters. And since the times of Soviet-Afghan war in the eighties, Kalashnikovs are so easily available in Pakistan that one could conveniently get an AK-47 from any arms dealer. In all likelihood, the sniper was armed with an AK-47, as the classic rattling sound of Kalashnikov burst could be clearly heard in the video of the incident, and he likely escaped the crime scene in the narrow alleys of the town on a motor-bike with an accomplice.

The confessional statement of Naveed s/o Bashir was an eyewash, as he was a decoy. The whole assassination attempt appeared astutely choreographed. The purported assassin was not only caught red-handed but was also filmed shooting bullets in the air with a pistol while the actual hitman who professionally executed the assassination attempt remains as elusive as the masterminds of the cowardly plot.

Subsequently, Imran Khan implicated incumbent Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and DG-C of ISI Major Gen. Faisal Naseer in the plot to assassinate him. But the police refused to register the first information report due to fear of repercussions from the deep state for naming a serving military officer in the police report.

In any case, the director of intelligence couldn't have ordered mounting an assassination attempt on a popular political leader and the country's former prime minister all by himself without a nod of approval from Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, then the army chief of Pakistan's military, who retired from service on Nov. 29, weeks following the assassination plot on Nov. 3.

In Pakistan's context, the national security establishment originally meant civil-military bureaucracy. Though over the years, civil bureaucracy has taken a backseat and now "the establishment" is defined as military's top brass that has dictated Pakistan's security and defense policy since its inception.

Paradoxically, security establishments do not have ideologies, they simply have interests. For instance, the General Ayub-led administration in the sixties was regarded as a liberal establishment. Then, the General Zia-led administration during the eighties was manifestly a religious conservative establishment. And lastly, the General Musharraf-led administration from 1999 to 2008 was once again deemed a liberal establishment.

The deep state does not judge on the basis of ideology, it simply looks for weakness. If a liberal political party is unassailable in a political system, it will join forces with conservatives; and if conservatives cannot be beaten in a system, it will form an alliance with liberals to perpetuate the stranglehold of "the deep state" on policymaking organs of state.

The biggest threat to nascent democracies all over the world does not come from external enemies but from their internal enemies, the national security establishments, because military generals always have a chauvinistic mindset and an undemocratic temperament. An additional aggravating factor that increases the likelihood of military coups in developing

democracies is that they lack firm traditions of democracy, rule of law and constitutionalism which act as bars against martial laws.

All political parties in Pakistan at some point in time in history were groomed by the security establishment. The founder of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was groomed by General Ayub's establishment as a counterweight to Sheikh Mujib's Awami League, the founder of Bangladesh, during the sixties.

Nawaz Sharif was nurtured by General Zia's administration during the eighties to offset the influence of Bhutto's People's Party. But he was cast aside after he capitulated to the pressure of the Clinton administration during the Kargil conflict of 1999 in disputed Kashmir region and ceded Pakistan's military positions to arch-rival India, leading to Gen. Musharraf's coup against Nawaz Sharif's government in Oct. 1999.

Imran Khan's PTI draws popular support from Pakistani masses, particularly from younger generations and women that are full of political enthusiasm. PTI won the general elections of 2018 and formed a coalition government, and Imran Khan was elected prime minister. But a rift emerged between Imran Khan's elected government and the top brass of Pakistan's military in Nov. 2021 over the appointment of the director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's powerful military intelligence service.

Eventually, Imran Khan succumbed to pressure and appointed the spymaster nominated by the top brass. But by then, the military had decided that Imran Khan had become too powerful a political leader and was encroaching on the military's traditional domains, defense and national security policy. Therefore, deploying the astute divide-and-conquer strategy, the deep state lent its weight behind the opposition political alliance. Imran Khan's political allies abandoned the PTI government and the coalition government fell apart in April.

Due to the British imperial legacy and subsequent close working relationship between the security agencies of Pakistan and the US during the Soviet-Afghan war of the eighties, Pakistan's security establishment works hand in glove with the deep state of the United States, like the Turkish security establishment which is a NATO member.

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."

Imran Khan fell from the grace of the Biden administration, whose record-breaking popularity ratings plummeted after the precipitous fall of Kabul in August 2021, 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.

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 three and a half years of Imran Khan’s 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.

Image: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Licensed under the Public Domain)



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 former 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.

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 that 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 Counter Punch Magazine, 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 Arab 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, anticommunist 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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