

Imran Khan's Innings Over

After spending over two decades building his political career, Imran Khan's administration came to an unceremonious end after becoming the first prime minister in Pakistan's history to be thrown out in a vote of no confidence. The clock was ticking on Imran Khan's tenure as soon as he secured the premiership in August 2018. Pakistan's problems had only grown after decades of mismanagement and plunder by both military and civilian regimes. If Imran Khan really was going to tackle such issues he had his work cut out.

Imran Khan's ascent to power can be attributed wholly if not partially to the full weight of the military, bureaucratic and judicial elites being welded together, guaranteeing his victory. In a system where manifestos and principles, or even the ability to govern are irrelevant to the result of the election, it is said that even if the donkey of the so called electable were to be selected to run as a candidate, it would never the less probably win the election. This is largely because established political dynasties maintain a stranglehold over their respective constituencies and thus regardless of their political affiliations are guaranteed to win their seats.

The security elites of Pakistan "persuaded" these dynasties that it was in their collective interests to change their allegiance to whomever the security establishment favours. This is in fact an admission that the system is in fact actually ineffectual and does not foster capable governance nor does it create those with statesman-like qualities that establish any form of good governance.

The system of patronage with the army as its head gave Imran Khan the rule but kept the keys to power from him. With a host of coalition partners subservient to the security establishment, Imran Khan's government was hobbled from the start. He did not in fact, as promised at the start of his political career, bring grassroots change, rather his acquiescing to the status quo could never lead to meaningful change of a decrepit system.

Imran Khan is someone who bucked the trend of the self-serving political class that Pakistan has generated in its 70 year history, Imran Khan's time in government has coincided with what can be classed as in the old Chinese adage as "interesting times." COVID-19 and now the war in Ukraine has sent prices soaring and depleted what little reserves Pakistan and its beleaguered public could muster. Imran Khan's economic policies were mostly dictated to him by institutions like the IMF and World Bank and significantly added to the woes of an already poverty stricken nation.

Devaluing the rupee, increasing indirect taxes widening the tax base to those already struggling rather than targeting the elites by whose patronage he gained power, did nothing to alleviate the difficulties faced by the general masses of Pakistan. In fact, real incomes in Pakistan fell for the first time in its history during Imran Khan's tenure.

Dissolving the assemblies, although a bold move by Imran Khan and constituting a real test of his popularity, was unlikely to succeed as Pakistan's judges have always been subordinate to the establishment and are adept at maintaining the status quo. In reality, it didn't matter whether Imran Khan's administration survived as he has failed to bring what he aspired to achieve.

His failure was inevitable as he failed to understand that Pakistan's problem is not the need to reform its political system rather its problem has always been the system itself. Rather than politics where politicians present policies established upon deeply held convictions on what is the correct means of governance, politics in Pakistan is nothing more than a distributed client patron network, where political allegiance is garnered by what favours or interests are served, not principles of governance or ideology.

Although Imran Khan's supporters will point to the US as the source of duress to remove Imran Khan from power, citing his visit to Russia which coincided with the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a pretext, they ignore the insignificance of the relationships between Pakistan and Russia in the international domain.

As Pakistan is buffeted by the winds of international disorder at the emergence of a more multipolar world, its elite realise that things are going to get significantly worse, and what is required to preserve the status quo is a scapegoat, upon whom the multitude of problems that beset Pakistan can be unloaded.

So rather than emanating from any foreign power the conspiracy against Imran Khan's government is wholly domestic, and is designed, as is usual in Pakistan, to maintain the business as usual, no matter how detrimental that is to the interest of Pakistan and the region as a whole.

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