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## Imran Khan's Shine Won't Last as Pakistan's Prime Minister



**Michael Kugelman**

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### **ARGUMENT**

On March 25, 1992, Pakistan experienced one of the greatest moments in its history.

Playing before a crowd of nearly 90,000 people on a pitch in Australia, Pakistan's national cricket team defeated England to win the sport's world cup. For the first time in its 45-year existence, cricket-mad Pakistan was the champion of the world. Back home, euphoric Pakistanis poured out of their homes to celebrate. It was, [in the words](#) of cricket writer Mohammad Ramis, "the jubilation of their lives."

Pakistan's squad was led by 40-year-old team captain Imran Khan, a star batter and bowler then in the twilight of an illustrious career.

Fast-forward to today. Khan, now a star politician, is poised to become Pakistan's next prime minister after his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party triumphed in elections last week.

Khan has now pulled off an exceedingly rare feat: He has achieved the highest possible level of success as both an athlete and a politician. Many top (and mediocre) sportspersons have gone into politics, but precious few have gone on to lead governments. As the *New York Times* has [noted](#), the best analogue to Khan is George Weah: a Liberian soccer star in the 1990s who was elected president in 2017. A more surprising example is Ted Heath, who won the Sydney-Hobart yacht race—thought to be one of the most challenging races of its kind—in 1969, just a year before becoming the British prime minister.

But Khan [attributes](#) his successful transition to politics to his ability to make a clean break with his athletic career and to focus entirely on his political objectives, even while leveraging his win-at-all-costs mentality from his playing days to motivate himself in the political arena. To be sure, Khan's household name status from his cricket days also gave him an initial boost when he was first launching his political career.

And yet, there's something else that's unique in all this—and also strikingly paradoxical. As an athlete, Khan was universally loved in Pakistan. But as a politician, his combination of deeply held and fiercely defended beliefs, his mercurial nature, his inconsistent and in many cases controversial policy positions, and his own dramatic personal transformation make him a deeply polarizing figure.

Consider, for example, that Khan is extraordinarily dedicated and determined, and stubbornly committed to taking up singular causes—from combating corruption to opposing U.S. drone strikes. Some years ago, I sat in on a meeting with Khan. He spent several minutes denouncing drones, until one of my colleagues was asked if she had anything to add to the conversation. My nervous colleague, who had told me earlier that she'd long had a crush on Khan, could only blurt out that she couldn't believe she was in the same room with him. Khan's towering frame stiffened. He briefly looked at her with some mild irritation, frowned, and then returned to railing against drones.

But even while Khan fixates laser-like on the issues he values most, he is also remarkably mercurial, and even erratic. He often gives rambling speeches that have [unnerved](#) some of his supporters, and he engages in head-snapping policy flip-flops. He has loudly [condemned](#) terrorist attacks on Pakistan's Shiite Muslim minority, but he also offers [full-throated support](#) for Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which are used as pretexts for attacks on religious minorities. He [denounces](#) terrorists in the strongest terms, but he also [opposes](#) targeting them with force—and he has [labeled](#) the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan a holy war justified by Islamic law. Khan is full of praise for Pakistan's security establishment even while being one of the few senior politicians in Pakistan to [endorse](#) the demands of an ethnic Pashtun-led movement that directs its ire at the repressive policies of the army.

During his cricket days, Khan was comfortably ensconced in the West. He spent ample time in England, becoming a big part of its celebrity culture and developing a reputation as a frequent partier whose first marriage was to a celebrity English heiress more than two decades younger than him. He has since morphed into a pious and conservative politician who regularly rails against the West, particularly the United States. Khan now prefers to keep his personal life out of the headlines, but his marital situation continues to captivate the Pakistani media. This includes a brief marriage to journalist Reham Khan in 2014, which lasted less than a year, and his third marriage, to Bushra Maneka, [described](#) as his spiritual guide, in early 2018.

Today, Khan has burnished his own image as an incorruptible reformer intent on expunging the rot from a corrupt system dominated by political dynasties such as the Sharif and Bhutto families, which control Pakistan's two longest-lasting political parties. And yet the PTI includes several top leaders who once belonged to those very parties, and it has taken tactics out of their playbooks. This includes recent [successful PTI efforts](#) to attract "electables"—influential and moneyed electoral candidates with the ability to deliver large numbers of votes—to the party's cause.

In some ways, this shouldn't be a surprise. Khan had a tendency to undercut his incorruptible image on the cricket pitch as well. In his 1994 autobiography, Khan [admitted](#) to tampering with the cricket ball, picking at the seam and even bringing a bottle cap onto the field to surreptitiously scratch it—a serious offense in cricket, since it adds an unexpected twistiness to a bowler's spin. Khan's defense was that everyone was doing it, and that he only did it occasionally. Others,

however, [weren't so](#) sure.

Even if Khan isn't 100 percent clean, his anti-corruption message has resonated among many, particularly young, urban, conservative, middle-class voters in Punjab—Pakistan's most populous province and top electoral prize. His younger fans, some of whom weren't alive for his cricket heroics in 1992, revere the charismatic Khan and defend him vigorously—and sometimes aggressively—on social media.

But Khan has plenty of critics, too, especially Pakistani liberals and members of the country's more progressive political parties, as well as the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), which ran the previous government and constantly sparred with the PTI. Khan's detractors don't just dislike him, they despise him with a vengeance. For some, he is "[Taliban Khan](#)," a man with a soft spot for militancy. For others, he is "[Im the Dim](#)"—a moniker [reportedly first coined](#) during his cricket days—a reference to a hopeless naif. He's also been described as a [demagogue](#), a [charlatan](#), and a [misogynist](#).

These days, many critics also denounce him as a [military stooge](#): someone who achieved political success only because the army helped elevate him and who is now poised to become premier only because the armed forces engineered efforts behind the scenes to bolster the PTI's electoral prospects.

Predictably, Khan's election victory means different things to different people. For his staunchest supporters, his triumph offers resounding proof that there is a third way in Pakistani politics and that leaders with no ties to family dynasties or established parties can rise to the top. For his harshest critics, his win represents a silent coup for an army intent on bringing its preferred candidate to power.

Khan's many contradictions make him a hard man to figure out—and yet we'll learn a lot more about him, and his ability to lead the country, once he takes office in the coming weeks.

He's already confronting a brewing economic crisis, an aggrieved political opposition still smarting from what it describes as blatant pre-poll and election-day rigging, and clear and present extremist threats that resulted in a recent spate of attacks on electoral candidates—including the [single deadliest terror strike](#) in Pakistan since 2014. He also must confront the challenge of Pakistan's growing debt to China, not to mention an Indian rival nervous about his nationalistic rhetoric. Above all, Khan will have to reckon with an army that won't hesitate to cut him down to size if it concludes having him in power no longer serves its interests.

Neither Khan nor the PTI has ever led a national government before, and he will be operating in one of the most polarized political environments in Pakistan in recent memory.

In short, Khan's honeymoon period won't last long, if he even gets one at all, and he'll be put to the test right away.

But then again, Imran Khan has defied the odds before. Twenty-six years ago, he led a squad hampered by injury and poor performance to the pinnacle of the cricket world. In an inspiring speech before the match, [according to some accounts](#), he implored his team to "fight like cornered tigers." (Others, curiously, [say](#) the speech never happened.)

To be sure, Khan faces bigger challenges now than he ever did on the cricket pitch. A cornered tiger wouldn't stand a chance. Additionally, no elected Pakistani prime minister has ever [finished](#) a full five-year term. Still, Khan is arguably like no previous Pakistani leader. He is charismatic, relatively clean, and unencumbered by any entanglements in dynastic families. He is, if nothing else, a breath of fresh air for a populace suffocated by many years of politics as usual.

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## With author and expert panel, INDUS launches new book: *"Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: US Crisis Management in South Asia"*



South Asia is the world's most dangerous region, with the potential for nuclear war between nuclear weapons states.

That is one of the realities Dr. Moeed Yusuf, Associate Vice President of the Asia Center, United States Institute of Peace, and an INDUS Expert and Scholar, explores in his new book, "Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: US Crisis Management in South Asia."

On July 15, [INDUS—Mobilizing People's Power](#) hosted Yusuf and Dr. Rizwana Abbasi, Associate Professor at National Defence University, Islamabad, to discuss his latest work and related topics. The event was moderated by Nasir Naveed, INDUS Director of Policy and Planning.

"Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments" explores the United States' role in managing an India-Pakistan security crisis through three major crises after the nuclearization of South Asia: the 1999 Kargil conflict, the 2001-2002 military standoff, and the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Yusuf described the current dynamics of the region and the potential for conflict and mediation. A crisis between India and Pakistan can escalate quickly. A third party may not have enough time to intervene and de-escalate.



While answering questions from the audience, Abbasi said that Pakistan should not involve itself in an arms race with India but must focus on a credible deterrence. She added that both India and Pakistan must resume a peace dialogue and that the Lahore Declaration is the best place to start.

At the conclusion of the discussion session, Yusuf answered questions from the media and autographed copies of his book.

## Pakistan Elections



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Civil liberties are personal guarantees and freedoms that the government cannot abridge, either by law or by judicial interpretation. However in today's Pakistan, rising violence, intolerance, weak rule of law, endemic corruption, lack of social and economic justice, and religious freedom, social exclusion of the vulnerable and the marginalized are a common phenomenon that the people of Pakistan face on a daily basis. Pakistan Civil Liberties Union – PCLU is a watchdog organization intended to combat all the above issues at every cross section of our society.

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When successful, the processes of community integration and civic promotion begin with the individual and, alongside support from Federal, State, and municipal programs, advance collectively, often through socialization with informal groups and professional and cultural associations. However, due to regional, organizational, and programmatic differences, the catalytic potential of civil society organizations is underutilized. Partnerships with local, regional, and national civil society organizations will advance community integration, promote the concept of citizenship, and highlight pathways to achieve the "American Dream."

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## MEDIA REVIEW

### Imran Khan's opportunity with America

Michael Kugelman

Despite his rhetoric, Imran Khan may seize an opportunity to improve relations with the United States as Washington undertakes a "dramatic shift in policy" toward Afghanistan. The war cannot be won militarily; Washington is engaging in direct talks with the Taliban. The U.S. will want Pakistan to help convince the Taliban now is the time for peace. This is something Khan is uniquely positioned to do, although it very well might fail. [[Dawn](#)]

### 'Pakistan in worse than 2008 economic crisis; integrated VAT is essential'

BR Research conducted an interview with Dr Ehtisham Ahmad, a respected economist and former IMF official, about Pakistan's current financial situation. "The modern design of tax administration is based on management of information: the VAT yields information on the whole value chain because the information on wages and profits is generated at each stage of the value chain. This together with information from assets is critical to make income taxes effective. A simple and integrated design of policy and administration are critical." [[Business Recorder](#)]

### **ExxonMobil close to hitting huge oil reserves in Pakistan, bigger than Kuwait's**

In May 2018, the ExxonMobil had acquired 25 percent stakes in offshore drilling in Pakistan. The agreement has reduced the drilling share of other partner exploration companies to 25 percent each. Abdullah Hussain Haroon, Pakistan's caretaker minister for maritime affairs and foreign affairs, also talked about the current water crisis and its impact on Indo-Pak relations: "India is acting to control water flows which would endanger Pakistan's food security and they would ruin our crops." [[ArabNews](#)]

### **Russia-Pakistan Relations: Economic And Diplomatic Dimensions – OpEd**

Venita Christopher

"Relations between both the states are gradually being developed on the basis of mutual benefits and convergence of interests. This is reflective of clear shift in the foreign policy of Russia towards Pakistan." Security and counterterror cooperation is ongoing; economic and energy opportunities exist despite a delay to past initiatives; and there is cooperation at the multilateral level, in organizations like the SCO. The author suggests greater diplomatic engagement and a meeting with Russian President Putin. [[EurasiaReview](#)]

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