[**Burnt bridges**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1721416/burnt-bridges)

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IT has often been said that in order to rule Pakistan, one needs Allah, America and the army on your side. While it is impossible for mere mortals like myself to gauge whose side Allah is on, Imran Khan seems to have rubbed both the army and America the wrong way.

In a historic first, both the US State Depart­ment and the White House publicly [refuted](https://www.dawn.com/news/1698101) claims made by an ex-prime minister of Pak­istan, calling allegations of US involvement in deposing Imran Khan absolutely false.

Equally unprecedented, the DG ISI and DG ISPR felt the need to [jointly hold a press conference](https://www.dawn.com/news/1717163) rebutting Imran Khan’s narrative on not just the alleged cipher, but also several other points of contention.

For his part, Mr Khan, in his characteristic style, continued to excite his base, with name-calling of not just civilian political opponents but also men in uniform. When interviewed by Pakistani journalists, he reminisced fondly about his relationship with Donald Trump, who, he claimed, honoured him and hence they got along very well.

Does the US feel the same way as the ex PM?

Despite pretending to be concerned about Islamophobia, neither Imran Khan nor the majority of PTI supporters have any qualms about expressing a preference for Islamophobic Trump over Joe Biden, whom they resent for never establishing contact with Imran Khan.

Mr Khan and his supporters were banking on a ‘red wave’ to counter Biden and eagerly looking forward to a return of Donald Trump in 2024. But that’s not the result the US midterm elections yielded. Despite inflation, the Democrats [managed to take control of the Senate](https://www.dawn.com/news/1720780) and with key backers, like Rupert Murdoch, pulling the plug on Trump, it seems entirely possible that Trump won’t even be the Republican presidential nominee for 2024.

**Read:** [*Imran & America*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1696119)

Hence, a strategy reset was needed. Enter the *Financial Times* [interview](https://www.dawn.com/news/1720789), in which Mr Khan conveniently U-turned on the cipher narrative, as he is wont to do, and said that he wanted good relations with the United States and that the alleged conspiracy was “over and behind [him]”.

The question, however, is: does the US feel the same way? Relationships are built on trust, and it is unlikely that the United States would trust Imran Khan. In his zeal to build a popular narrative, he not only disregarded the truth but also burnt bridges with those who matter, both domestically and internationally.

In the same *FT* interview, he describes Pakistan’s relationship with the US as that of a “master-slave”. This is hardly original framing. Back in the 1960s, Ayub Khan had titled his autobiography Friends, Not Masters, hinting at Pakistan’s unequal relationship with the US.

But can a nation indebted to the IMF for its survival be on an equal footing with the richest country on earth? Did the four innocent souls who died during the PTI’s long march —the party worker (Hasan Ali), the policeman, the journalist (Sadaf Nadeem) or the motorbike rider — get even a fraction of the attention that Imran Khan’s leg injury got? Did the courts intervene to have FIRs registered on their behalf? The sad answer is no; money and clout result in inequality, whether among people or countries.

If we want to change that we must, first treat our own people with respect before we ask for respect abroad. Imran Khan is no longer untested. He had four years in power. His government did not manage to reduce indebtedness, but instead, increased it. Nor did overseas Pakistanis flush the coffers with foreign exchange. So what’s his new plan to make the Pakistan-US relationship “dignified”?

Bravado is cheap. Making [statements](https://www.dawn.com/news/1640988) like ‘Taliban have broken the shackles of slavery’, may win him accolades with his base, but it surely makes the sane wonder if that’s the type of international isolation he aspires to for Pakistan.

The current PDM government is yet to deliver on the economic front, but internationally their approach is far more clear-headed. In a fairly short span of time, Pakistan has reaped the benefits of a sensible foreign policy and had a robust engagement with the world. This isn’t limited to Western capitals, but also includes Beijing and the Gulf Arab states.

Collaboration and active engagement have led to Pakistan’s [removal](https://www.dawn.com/news/1721001) from the UK’s list of ‘high risk third countries’. COP27 endorsed Pakistan’s proposal to place ‘loss and damage’ on the agenda for climate change. The Manhattan district attorney’s office has returned looted antiquities worth $3.4 million to Pakistan. And, most consequentially, Pakistan has been removed from the FATF grey list.

Although the PTI government had taken several actions to address the deficiencies pointed out by the FATF, it isn’t a coincidence that Pakistan was removed from the grey list after Imran Khan lost the vote of no-confidence. A prime minister willy-nilly praising the Taliban and making up cipher stories can’t be taken seriously internationally.

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