[**Foreign interference**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1684623/foreign-interference)

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WHEN a political leader makes a doubtful claim about a foreign conspiracy to oust him one is hardly surprised. Most politicians have a tenuous relationship with the truth. But what is astonishing is that an overwhelming majority of people in Pakistan have long believed such claims, focusing largely on the US.

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Here is how the argument goes. Historically, the US has preferred a certain kind of government in Pakistan, such as a military regime, to serve its security and strategic interests. As the lifespan of such governments has begun and ended with the US connection, Washington must have brought them to power and removed them when they were no longer needed, it is argued.

The reality is that political dynamics in Pakistan have nearly always functioned fairly autonomously, and the primary, though not always the sole, stimulus for the rise and fall of governments has been domestic, and not external. Ziaul Haq’s regime was already there before the Afghan jihad and the revival of US-Pakistan relations; in fact, it had a pariah status because of the 1977 coup, the execution of an elected prime minister, and Pakistan’s pursuit of nuclear weapons. It was during Zia’s time that Pakistan was sanctioned in 1979. But with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Zia became a celebrated leader in the West. Although Washington’s support for him had begun to waver before he died, his ‘regime’ lived on.

Earlier, president Ayub Khan had challenged American interests in South Asia by opening up to China. With the 1965 war adventure, he fell out of favour with US president Johnson. But he continued to rule for another four years. Yahya Khan was disregarded until he helped set up the US-China rendezvous. Gen Musharraf had been isolated for a good two years until 9/11. The US re-engagement continued well beyond him.

US-Pakistan ties are not just led by America’s needs.

It seems that the US has abandoned the coup business. No doubt, it still acts to gain and maintain influence in other countries where its vital interests are at stake but it is contestable if it is still in the business of secretly making or breaking governments. Instead, it has gone to war, used the weapon of sanctions and supported mass movements for change like the so-called colour revolutions, all in full view.

Where its interests are not critical but still important, as in Pakistan, the US also tries to influence and sometimes manipulate policies. But it does so by established diplomatic messaging, often in coercive language that comes naturally to Washington. It also exploits the vulnerability of a regime without having to change it or holding out written threats of change.

The elitist, army-led and feudal-dominated ‘organising’ idea of Pakistan has for long had the US as its external pillar. To its credit, from 1954 to 1965, the US strengthened Pakistan’s defence capabilities and potential for economic development, and helped launch the platform for progress. But that was the last time the US really helped Pakistan. After that neither Pakistan nor US-Pakistan relations have been the same.

Pakistan’s poor policy choices and endemic crisis of governance since have made it overly dependent on external financiers like the US and Saudi Arabia who have used it for their own strategic purposes. The US may no longer be the external pillar of the system but it does remain a crutch, a potential strategic and financial threat, and the largest trading partner.

It is a relationship that is necessary for the country but vital for military regimes, a mixed bargain for civilian dispensations but much more for military rulers. No wonder successive governments in Pakistan have craved closer ties with the US, reflecting the leadership’s dependency syndrome more than Washington’s control of Pakistan.

**Read:** [*Opposition seeks military’s stance on ‘foreign plot’ claim*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1683530)

The US-Pakistan relationship is not just led by America’s needs. It is driven in equal measure by Pakistan’s needs. The current US need for Pakistan is not dire enough for Washington to call for any drastic action of regime change. It is, in fact, the establishment’s interests that dominate in Pakistan. It continues to have a soft corner for Washington and is perceived as managing the internal dynamics to attain its desired ends that meet the interests of both countries. The US does not need to overthrow any government.

The Pakistani elite may have failed the people of Pakistan but not themselves. Over the decades, they have fought battles for power skilfully while maintaining the system that sustains them in power. The ‘organising’ idea of Pakistan over which they have presided is owned and operated by them, and not by foreign powers.

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*Published in Dawn, April 12th, 2022*