

Sheikh Hasina

Joe Biden

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN'S REGIME CHANGE?

By Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs

Imran Khan

Donald Lu

Two former leaders of major South Asian countries have reportedly accused the United States of covert regime change operations to topple their governments. One of the leaders, former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, languishes in prison, on a perverse conviction that proves Khan's assertion. The other leader, former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, fled to India following a violent coup in her country.

Their grave accusations against the US, as reported in the world media, should be investigated by the United Nations, since if true, the US actions would constitute a fundamental threat to world peace and to regional stability in South Asia. The two cases seem to be very similar. The very strong evidence of the US role in toppling the government of Imran Khan raises the likelihood that something similar may have occurred in Bangladesh.

In the case of Pakistan, Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, met with Asad Majeed Khan, Pakistan's Ambassador to the US, on March 7, 2022. Ambassador Khan immediately wrote back to his capital, conveying Lu's warning that PM Khan threatened US-Pakistan relations because of Khan's "aggressively neutral position" regarding Russia and Ukraine.



Asad Majeed Khan

The Ambassador's March 7 note (technically a diplomatic cypher) quoted Assistant Secretary Lu as follows: "I think if the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington because the Russia visit is being looked at as a decision by the Prime Minister. Otherwise, I think it will be tough going ahead." The very next day, members of the parliament took procedural steps to oust PM Khan.

On March 27, PM Khan brandished the cypher, and told his followers and the public that the US was out to bring him

down. On April 10, PM Khan was thrown out of office as the parliament acceded to the US threat. We know this in detail because of Ambassador Khan's cypher, exposed by PM Khan and brilliantly documented by Ryan Grim of The Intercept, including the text of the cypher. Absurdly and tragically, PM Khan languishes in prison in part over espionage charges, linked to his revealing the cypher.

The US appears to have played a similar role in the recent violent coup in Bangladesh. PM Hasina was ostensibly toppled by student unrest, and fled to India when the Bangladeshi military refused to prevent the protestors from storming the government offices. Yet there may well be much more to the story than meets the eye.

According to press reports in India, PM Hasina is claiming that the US brought her down. Specifically, she says that the US removed her from power because she refused to grant the US military facilities in a region that is considered strategic for the US in its "Indo-Pacific Strategy" to contain China. While these are second-hand accounts by the Indian media, they track closely several speeches and statements that Hasina has made over the past two years.

On May 17, 2024, the same Assistant Secretary Lu who allegedly played a lead role in toppling PM Khan, visited Dhaka to discuss the US Indo-Pacific Strategy among other topics. Days later, Sheikh Hasina reportedly summoned the leaders of the 14 parties of her alliance to make the startling claim that a "country of white-skinned people" was trying to bring her down, ostensibly telling the leaders that she refused to compromise her nation's sovereignty.

Like Imran Khan, PM Hasina had been pursuing a foreign policy of neutrality, including constructive relations not only with the US but also with China and Russia, much to the deep

consternation of the US government. To add credence to Hasina's charges, Bangladesh had delayed signing two military agreements that the US had pushed very hard since 2022, indeed by none other than the former Under-Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, the neocon hardliner with her own storied history of US regime-change operations.



Victoria Nuland

One of the draft agreements, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), would bind Bangladesh to closer military-to-military cooperation with Washington. The government of PM Hasina was clearly not enthusiastic to sign it. The US is by far the world's leading practitioner of regime-change operations, yet the US flatly denies its role in covert regime change operations even when caught red-handed, as with Nuland's infamous intercepted phone call in late January 2014 planning the US-led regime change operation in Ukraine.

It is useless to appeal to the US Congress, and still less the executive branch, to investigate the claims by PM Khan and PM Hasina. Whatever the truth of the matter, they will deny and lie as necessary. This is where the UN should step in. Covert regime change operations are blatantly illegal under international law (notably the Doctrine of Non-Intervention, as expressed for example in UN General Assembly Resolution 2625, 1970), and constitute perhaps the greatest threat to

Anti-government protestors march towards Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's palace on August 5, 2024





Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's supporters protest his arrest in the northern city of Lahore on May 9, 2023

world peace, as they profoundly destabilise nations, and often lead to wars and other civil disorders.

The UN should investigate and expose covert regime change operations, both in the interests of reversing them, and preventing them in the future. The UN Security Council is of course specifically charged under Article 24 of the UN Charter with "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." When evidence arises that a government has been toppled through the intervention or complicity of a foreign government, the Security Council should investigate the claims.

In the cases of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Security Council should seek the direct testimony of PM Khan and PM Hasina in order to evaluate the evidence that the US played a role in the overthrow of the governments of these two leaders. Each, of course, should be protected by the UN for giving their testimony, so as to protect them from any retribution that could follow their honest presentation of the facts.

Their testimony can be taken by video conference, if necessary, given the tragic ongoing incarceration of PM Khan. The US might well exercise its veto in the Security Council to prevent such an investigation. In that case, the UN General Assembly can take up the matter, under UN Resolution A/RES/76/, which allows the UN General Assembly to consider an issue blocked by veto in the Security Council. The issues at

stake could then be assessed by the entire membership of the UN.

The veracity of the US involvement in the recent regime changes in Pakistan and Bangladesh could then be objectively analysed and judged on the evidence, rather than on mere assertions and denials. The US engaged in at least 64 covert regimes change operations during 1947-1989, according to documented research by Lindsey O'Rourke, political science professor at Boston College, and several more that were overt (e.g. by US-led war).

It continues to engage in regime-change operations with shocking frequency to this day, toppling governments in all parts of the world. It is wishful thinking that the US will abide by international law on its own, but it is not wishful thinking for the world community, long suffering from US regime change operations, to demand their end at the UN. ■

Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs is a world-renowned economics professor, bestselling author, innovative educator, and global leader in sustainable development.

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Lindsey O'Rourke



Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs