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## **Imran Khan's Ideological Foundations: Riyasat-e-Madina, Strategic Autonomy, and the Vision of "Naya Pakistan"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines Imran Khan's ideological concept and foundation of Naya Pakistan. This article analyzes his concept that is based on four interconnected pillars. Firstly, the Riyasat-e-Madina model is examined that was based on ethical framework of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W's way of government in early Islam that prioritized welfare, equity, and governmental responsibility and accountability. Secondly, a Non-Alignment 2.0, that was a plan for strategic autonomy and a balanced approach towards global powers while safeguarding national sovereignty. Third pillar was Islamic unity, which is defined as one Ummah politically and ethically that impacts diplomatic relations and identity politics. Lastly, the humanitarian and anti-corruption viewpoints, which shaped his global and domestic politics, based on ethical accountability, social equity, and opposition to systemic injustices. This article is an attempt to answer the question that how Imran Khan developed an ideological framework that connected Islamic moral values with Pakistan's governance as well as foreign policy direction from 2018 to 2022? To answer this, the article highlights Khan's political narrative that was a methodical ideological pursuit rather than a simply populist objective. This study is based on a qualitative methodology based on discourse analysis of official speeches of PTI, Khan's international addresses, policy declarations of party, and pertinent academic literature to investigate themes and normative assumptions. This article asserts that the concept of Naya Pakistan amalgamated Islamic principles' ethics with practical governance. This fact presented a unique ideological framework designed to reshape national identity of Pakistan and its position in a changing global landscape.

**Keywords:** Naya Pakistan, Riyasat-e-Madina, Non-Alignment 2.0, Islamic Solidarity, Anti-Corruption Ethics.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Imran Khan, a cricketer turned into politician, assumed the role of Prime Minister following the 2018 elections after 22 years political struggle. The supporters of PTI welcomed Imran Khan's premiership as a radical shift from government of Nawaz Sharif. This article examined foreign policies of Imran Khan because his period signified as a moment to redefine the nation's destiny both domestically and globally. The narrative of Imran Khan was based on principles of Riyasat-e-Madina (State of Medina) as his political surge came after persuasive anti-corruption narrative. The policy shifted in alignments with superpowers also a changing dynamic that seek the compromised interests of Pakistan as well as country's sovereignty. He viewed that previous policies entangled costly conflicts, and diverted resources from developmental priorities. Khan, therefore, aimed to



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restructure foreign affairs of Pakistan based on his dedication of “Naya Pakistan”. This stance encompassed not only foreign policy or internal structure but also autonomy and economic equity.

### **Ideological Foundations: The Cornerstone of “Naya Pakistan”**

The foreign policy of Khan’s government stemmed from a particularly articulated ideological framework. It was not developed in a strategic vacuum as he tried to pull apart compromised foreign connections that was taken by previous governments (Hussain, Ismail, Noorunnisa, & Amiry, 2024). The footing of Imran Khan in foreign affairs functioned not only morally but philosophically as well. His stance represented more than simple diplomatic rhetoric and it was designed to guide the state’s every international activity. The administration of PTI projected a philosophically confident Pakistan that served as strategically autonomous, and ethically principled in its foreign policy (Shah & Iqbal, 2025).

### **The Riyasat-e-Madina Model**

The discourse of Imran Khan numerously identified his Riyasat-e-Madina (State of Medina) stance. It was the most prominent and frequently referenced concept in his political philosophy. The earlier state of Madina was based on Islamic community in Medina under the supervision of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This state was not based on theocracy only, but was a model for a modern, egalitarian, and justice based welfare state (Abbasi, Madni, Bhatti & Zeb, 2023). Despite this, Khan attempted to eradicate corruption, set up the rule of law, and tried to provide a social safety for people specifically to unprivileged society. However, its domestic obligations were intrinsically linked with the implications of its foreign policy (Shah & Iqbal, 2025).

Riyasat-e-Madina model framed his domestic and foreign policy, since he argued that a Pakistan’s reputation in world order and moral authority ultimately linked with its internal characteristics. He viewed that elite’s corruption, disparity in institutional laws and implications, and socio-economic disparity plagued Pakistan. These issues caused disrespect and caused issues in independent trajectory on the global stage. Imran Khan, in his first address to the nation after assuming the premiership declared, “Until Pakistan transforms into a state such as Riyasat-e-Madina, it would remain a nation with diminished self-worth and will be incapable of achieving true sovereignty and independence” (Dawn, 2018).

This model served different tasks in foreign policy as compare to previous governments by providing a source of authentic, non-Western soft power (Abbasi et al., 2023). It also fostered moral superiority as Pakistan’s foreign policy was framed not as pragmatic concessions but as principled stances grounded in a higher ethical framework. The government projected that by promoting this policy, Pakistan might attain a good position in Islamic World. The country could turn up as the leader of the Islamic world based on ethical and governance principles, rather than only on geopolitical influence or religious rhetoric (Falki & Asrar, 2023). Khan’s impassioned stance on worldwide Islamophobia, his speeches on World’s leading forums on Islamophobia, Kashmir and Palestine unequivocally illustrated his position as a moral champion for the Muslim Ummah (Khan, 2020).

PTI government’s model critiqued foreign policy of previous governments several times. Similarly, Khan often depicted Pakistan’s foreign policy as Westernized that was dominated by Western powers as well. These previous policies estranged from the nation’s Islamic principles and the welfare of its citizens (Singh, 2018). National Security Advisor,



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Moeed Yusuf stated that this vision created a values-driven foreign policy, distinguishing it from the purely transactional approaches of previous governments (Levesques, 2022). Consequently, the endeavor to realize a *Riyasat-e-Madina* constituted the step in restoring national sovereignty and dignity.

### **Non-Alignment 2.0: The Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy**

If *Riyasat-e-Madina* offered the ethical foundation, “Non-Alignment 2.0” constituted the strategic necessity. This was not merely a revival of the Cold War-era Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), in which Pakistan’s involvement was hesitant due to its partnership with US. It was a modern Khan-centric philosophy of strategic autonomy designed to liberate Pakistan from the burdensome position of a frontline state in the conflicts of other states. Khan condemned the previous strategies of engaging in the American-led “War on Terror” as a mercenary pursuit that yielded “billions of dollars” for Pakistan but resulted in “80,000 lives” lost and internal turmoil (Jamal, 2022). White Paper on foreign policy clearly articulated the objective to “transition from a security-focused foreign policy to a trade-oriented foreign policy” and to “adopt a stringent policy of neutrality in international conflicts” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2022). This Non-Alignment was defined by several fundamental principles:

**Anti-Campism:** It was a rejection of involvement in renewed Cold War between the US and China. However, Pakistan’s relationship with China strengthened strategically and economically via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Khan’s administration prudently characterized it as a bilateral economic cooperation rather than an alliance directed against a third nation (Zaib, 2023). Khan also insisted on a partnership with the United States founded on “mutual respect” and commerce, rather than on security aid with political conditions (Khan, 2023).

**Role as Mediator:** Autonomy enabled Pakistan to pursue the role of an impartial mediator. Khan proposed to mediate discussions between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Kashmir Observer, 2020) as well as publicly endorsed and facilitated the U.S.-Taliban negotiations in Doha that culminated in the American exit from Afghanistan (Maizland, 2025). This involvement bolstered Pakistan’s image as a responsible, autonomous actor striving for regional tranquillity, although analysts contended that its effectiveness in establishing a stable post-withdrawal framework was ultimately constrained (Fazlullah, 2022).

**Sovereignty as Inviolability:** This concept staunchly safeguarded national sovereignty. Khan’s response to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan exemplified this well, as he lauded the Afghans for having “broken the shackles of slavery,” presenting it as a validation of his opposition to foreign occupation and involvement (Osborne & Hearst, 2021). However, this pursuit for liberty came across the unyielding realities of geographic as well as economic limitations. The necessity for financial bailouts from IMF and the strategic depth of the connection with China established inevitable dependencies that frequently contradicted the discourse of unrestrained independence. It also exposed the intrinsic contradiction within this ideological foundation. The concept of non-alignment was consistently undermined by the “structural and historical imperatives” of Pakistan’s regional security predicament and economic vulnerability (Pande, 2022).

### **Islamic Solidarity: The Ummah as a Political Entity**

The notion of Islamic Solidarity, associated with the ideology of *Riyasat-e-Madina* functioned as a separate foreign policy dimension. Imran Khan viewed Pakistan’s identity as an Islamic nation as substantive that required proactive leadership and support for the worldwide Muslim community (Anwar & Butt, 2025). This pillar fulfilled both ideological



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and strategic functions and honored a commitment to his domestic religious base and corresponded with his conviction in Muslim unity as a remedy for the community's current issues. It provided a strategic platform to enhance Pakistan's voice, garnered diplomatic backing on fundamental problems, and established economic connections beyond conventional allies (Anwar & Butt, 2025). The implementation of this approach comprised three main aspects:

**Advocating Fundamental Issues:** Khan emerged as one of the most outspoken global leaders over the matters of Kashmir and Palestine. Subsequent to India's abrogation of special status of IOK in August 2019, Khan initiated an unyielding diplomatic campaign, equating the actions of the Indian government with Nazi ideology and forewarning of a possible "bloodbath" and even nuclear confrontation (Khan, 2020). He also made himself out to be a defender of Palestinian rights by using forums, like the UNGA to speak out against Israeli actions that he said were against international law (Al Jazeera, 2021). These positions were clear and had a big effect on how Pakistan got along with India and its feelings about the West.

**Convened and Lead Islamic Forums:** Imran Khan worked hard to bring the OIC back to life. He led the 48<sup>th</sup> OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in Islamabad in 2022 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2022). He talked about humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Khan took part in the "Kuala Lumpur Summit" in 2019 that was a strategic move that was seen as an attempt to create a more assertive coalition of Muslim nations that was not part of the Saudi-led OIC framework. However, pressures later forced a re-evaluation (Karim, 2021).

**Addressing Islamophobia:** Imran Khan firmly spoke out against Islamophobia in the West and called it a systemic, political issue that is similar to racism. Khan did a good job of pushing for the creation of an International Day to Fight Islamophobia (Al Jazeera, 2022); however, it was officially accepted in 2022. He confronted Western politicians directly, notably former French President Emmanuel Macron, about blasphemous cartoons, calling them as attack on Muslim feelings that made radicalism worse (Hashim, 2020).

The complexities of inter-Muslim state politics posed challenges to ideological commitments to the Ummah. Pakistan's efforts to balance its relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran, and its participation in the Abraham Accords (the Arab-Israeli peace talks), which Pakistan did not participate, showed how difficult it is for Muslim nations to work together when their national interests are at odds (Ibrahim & Rauf, 2022). The rhetoric was persuasive, but it often fell short of the "realist calculations" that governed inter-state relations in the Muslim world.

### **The Humanitarian and Anti-Corruption Perspective: An Ethical Evaluation of Global Order**

A unique and essential aspect of ideological framework of Imran Khan was his re-contextualization of a domestic political narrative, specifically the fight against corruption and the acquisition of power by elites. PTI took a moralistic but populist approach to the study of international politics. The party determined that unjust systems and illegal money transfers were the fundamental factors that contributed to injustice and instability everywhere (Ahmed, 2022). The perspective of PTI was manifested in following forms:

**Climate Justice as a Humanitarian Imperative:** Imran Khan supported climate justice strongly as he belongs to a country that was vulnerable to climate change. He stressed on difference between the low carbon emissions of underdeveloped countries like Pakistan. He brought up that terrible floods and climate related disasters causing too many issues for Pakistan that are due to climate change (Geo News, 2020). He not only raised voice for



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environmental policy but also criticized global disparities and a called for reparative justice from developed countries.

**Corruption as a National Security Threat:** Imran Khan, throughout his political career, indicated consistently that in deprived countries corrupt elites steal national wealth with the help of Western financial safe havens and legal systems (BBC News, 2018). This served as primary reason for poverty and the ineffectiveness of state institutions in developing countries. Khan's desire for reimbursement of embezzled money was not just an economic matter, but it was the matter of national justice and sovereignty (Malik, 2023). During his participation in international conferences, Khan stated that Pakistan remained a victim of the global financial corruption ecosystem (Miller, 2025).

**Unlawful Financial Flows and Debt Justice:** Khan, in his speeches, severally raised issue of justice ideas and corruption as well as outflow of illegal money to other countries in larger picture. He criticized financial systems majorly in poor countries as corrupt governments had stolen the money, which led these countries towards expensive loans from the IMF with strict terms (Miller, 2025). However, he interacted to the IMF because he had to, but he always talked about how unfair this scenario was.

His ideological framework about climate change allowed him to reach a global audience beyond traditional diplomatic channels, capitalizing on widespread discontent with inequality and elite privilege. Imran Khan founded Pakistan not as a beggar, but as a dedicated opponent of an unjust world order (Dawn, 2021). The moralistic stance of Khan may oversimplified complex geopolitical and economic matters and sometimes alienated traditional partners who were criticized. Khan's dichotomous point of view about corruption and morality often clashed with the subtle and complex realities of diplomacy between countries and power relations in local areas, which could make it less effective (Sarwar & Safi, 2025).

The four ideological pillars of Imran Khan's policy included Riyasat-e-Madina, Non-Alignment 2.0, Islamic Solidarity, and the Humanitarian-Anti-Corruption Lens. These were skillfully integrated into a powerful story for "Naya Pakistan." These pillars gave a clear, but ambitious, answer to questions about Pakistan as an Islamic welfare state. They wanted strategic independence, were loyal to the Muslim *Ummah*, and saw the world through a lens of justice vs corruption. However, putting these rules into action determined that there were problems with them. In that condition where Muslims were obliged to set a direction due to rivalry between them, the quest for Islamic brotherhood was directly against the ideal of non-alignment. Occasionally, the moralistic measures against corruption impacted on the state's relationships with West. Even though, the groups operating within the state's own bureaucracy were against this setup. Throughout its existence, the ideology of Riyasat-e-Madina was in direct opposition to the hard realities in Pakistani economic dependency. Apart of this, country also contended with geopolitical constraints. These aspects of Imran's policy were more of a mindset that underwent transformation than they were a specific plan.

## Conclusion

Imran Khan left Pakistan in possession where foreign policy is revolutionary as well as contentious. However, the process was not just revolutionary in terms of how diplomacy was conducted, but was an ideologically motivated effort to radically transform Pakistan's identity in the global community. Khan shifted Pakistan's policy from one that prioritized security to sovereign autonomy with higher priority. He also tried to give geo-economic determinism to country. This stance allowed Imran Khan to give a way in which the nation engaged with the rest of the globe. His unique influence and vision convoluted legacy, and



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the long-lasting impact that have futuristic aspect in Pakistani statecraft.

On the other hand, foreign policy of Imran Khan was characterized by a singular and personal touch. It was originated from interconnected concepts that, when taken as a whole, formed a framework that was logical, albeit extreme. Within the country, the concept of sovereignty evolved into an unwavering and inflexible that went beyond a simple policy choice. The rejection of perceived commands strongly was a clear indication of implication of his policy. The rejection from the outside implications whether they came from Washington, the International Monetary Fund, or any other authority was witnessed. Pakistan made conscious effort to break away from that political bloc politics which held it back for decades. The concept of neutrality was a logical next step, and it meant that Pakistan was breaking away from bloc politics.

On the other hand, Pakistan's diplomatic efforts were reintroduced by Imran vigorously and morally. The strong support of Khan for Islamophobia, climate justice, and outflow of illegal money in UN was a premeditated effort to shift Pakistan's image from that of a security danger to that of a supporter of global justice during the course of his campaign. Similarly, raising the issue of Kashmir was not only a political move but was an assertion that was an unbreakable moral obligation. Soft power and partnerships were based on common ideas that developed his plan, particularly in the Muslim *Ummah*.

During his government Pakistan heightened its status in Middle East specifically when he strengthened relations with Afghanistan and China. Pakistan's importance highlighted when the state played bridge-building role in Afghan crisis. The steps of Pakistan towards Russia were a component of a more complex and multipolar pattern of behaviour. Khan's unwavering support in OIC gave the impression that he was a leader who was taking a stand against a hypocritical international system.

The government of Imran Khan proved how a civilian leader could work effectively with a populist foreign policy. In fact, the military and other dominating institutions are responsible for fundamental security concerns, but it was emphasized that a charismatic civilian leader may be in charge of diplomatic speech, moral advocacy, and economic engagement. Khan's relations with other countries were an ambitious experiment driven by his ideology. It functioned as a revolution in the way that people talked about things than it did like a completely defined, long-term strategic strategy.

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