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Date Posted May 28 2007, 10:55:04
Name Iqbal Zubair
Country Pakistan
Heading Look in the mirror Imran Khan
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Imran Khan, Islamist politician by day, London playboy by night. by James Forsyth and Jai Singh
 KHAN EMBODIES THE HYPOCRISY of Muslim elites who inveigh against the West by day and enjoy its pleasures by night. His fame in Pakistan comes from cricket not politics: the best cricketer Pakistan ever produced. In London many remember him as an even greater playboy. Throughout 1980s Khan was linked to a string of beautiful women. In 1988 he told Australia's Sunday Mail, "Pakistan society encourages marriage. There, I lead a very steady, comfortable life.

Here, it is more exciting. The pace is faster. Because of the nightclubs and parties, it is a very good place to be single."

As his cricket career wound down he began to develop political ambitions, he became more reticent about his lifestyle. In 1992 a London Evening Standard reporter asked him if he found his conquests fulfilling he turned bashful: "Er, by answering that question I put myself in a difficult position because this will get quoted in Pakistan. And, in Pakistan, the mere fact that you admit you're having affairs upsets a lot of people's sensitivities. I respect my culture. a lot of young people look up to me. It's a big responsibility for me not to make these admissions in public. Everyone knows I'm single and a normal man. But there's no need to stick it down their throats." His ex-girlfriends were less discreet, though. One observed to the Times, that Imran "juggled his girlfriends extremely elegantly".

A man who once captained the Oxford University cricket team and was a feature at London's trendiest places, now turned against the culture he had previously enjoyed. In 1995 he denounced the West with its "fat women in miniskirts" (presumably the skinny ones in miniskirts Khan had dated were okay) and proclaimed that the "West is falling because of their addiction to sex and obscenity." He also chastised Pakistanis who looked to the West for ideas, saying "I hate it when our leaders or elite feel that by licking the soles of the feet of foreign countries we will somehow be given aid and we will progress."

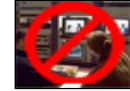
So it came as something of a surprise that year when he married an English society beauty, Jemima Goldsmith, who was half his age and far worse--for the Islamists he was courting politically--half-Jewish. The reaction to the marriage in Pakistan was hostile and put a rapid stop to Khan's political momentum. In a Pakistani newspaper column defending his marriage Khan mused that, "I suppose if my marriage proves one point, it is that I am not a politician."

Khan initially won liberal and Western hearts by building a cancer hospital and fashioning himself as a reformer, but he has turned increasingly to hard-line Islamist politics. After Khan cast a vote in favor of the Islamist candidate for prime minister in 2002, a leader in his party told a Pakistani monthly, "Khan has more than a soft corner for the ousted Afghan Taliban. He thinks that the orthodox

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religious militia did a great service to Afghanistan and Islam before they became a target of the Americans." However, Khan could never become the standard-bearer of Pakistan's Islamists while married to a Western girl-- even if she had converted to Islam. Unsurprisingly, in 2004 he and Goldsmith divorced, each citing cultural differences.

Khan is the only member of his party in parliament, and enjoys little popular support. His strategy for getting to the top is to climb on the anti-Musharraf bandwagon. "By the time we have the next general elections," said Khan recently, "we would see two broad-based political alliances in the country, pro-Musharraf and anti-Musharraf." The easiest way to attack Musharraf, of course, is to attack his American protectors. Unfortunately, Musharraf has decided he will stay in power beyond 2007.

NOT THAT KHAN scorns America entirely: He likes its money. On May 15, Khan was in Washington, D.C. raising \$175,000 for his cancer hospital, as well as he went to Denver, Los Angeles, and New York. But don't expect him to mention back in Lahore that American generosity is keeping his hospital going.

Even his political allies find Khan's duplicity hard to take. In 2002 one of his party leaders remarked: "Even we are finding it difficult to figure out the real Imran. He dons the shalwar-kameez and preaches desi and religious values while in Pakistan, but transforms himself completely while rubbing shoulders with the elite in Britain and elsewhere in the West." Khan claims that his marriage proved he wasn't a politician but his divorce and his recent demagoguery show that he now is one, albeit one of the worst sort.

James Forsyth is an assistant editor and Jai Singh is research editor at Foreign Policy.

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You are not as good looking as you portray yourself to be, the one who has not committed any sins shall cast the first stone.

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► Look in the mirror Imran Khan _____ Amir, Canada (2007-06-04 07:12:44)

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