

From Prison, Imran Khan Says Top Pakistani General Betrayed Secret Deal to Stay Out of Politics

Sources close to the ousted prime minister say Khan also accuses Gen. Asim Munir for assassination attempt and cover-ups.

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From his prison cell, former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed escalating criticism of Pakistan army chief Asim Munir's drive to seize political power, according to multiple sources who remain in close touch with Khan.

The communications include new allegations about Khan's history with Munir. According to those in touch with the imprisoned prime minister, Khan is making new allegations that Munir violated an agreement to remain neutral in Pakistani politics in exchange for Khan accepting his appointment as army chief.

The deposed prime minister also alleges that Munir conspired with his civilian political rivals, including former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to cooperate against him in exchange for dropping corruption charges that had forced Sharif into exile.

The escalating personal conflict between Khan and Munir also looms large in the communications. Khan alleges that Munir ordered agents of Pakistan's notorious intelligence service to kill him and that the general covered up assassination attempts by squashing a police probe and burying CCTV footage.

The allegations from Khan about Munir come as the general has continued amassing political power and leading a brutal crackdown on rival political parties, activists, and the

press in Pakistan.

The crackdown included the removal and imprisonment of Khan, Pakistan's most popular politician; violence and arrests targeting his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or PTI, party; and a [rigged election](#) this February.

Khan's fate remains the biggest unanswered question in the country's politics, which the prison communiques suggest are driven by acrimony between him and Munir.

With transnational repression reaching the U.S. — the military reportedly detained Pakistan-based family members of rivals living in the U.S. and Canada — the crackdown is drawing increasingly stronger condemnations from American officials.

Last week, Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., issued a [video statement](#) condemning the targeting of family members of Americans and called for sanctions to be placed on Pakistani military leaders including Munir.

Rep. [@RoKhanna](#) calls for US to sanction "Pakistan's military ruler" Asim Munir along with "any military leaders in Pakistan" over transnational repression

Khanna adds: "We all know that the election in Pakistan was rigged. Imran Khan is still in jail" pic.twitter.com/UmNpBkmX6s

— Just Foreign Policy (@justfp) [June 15, 2024](#)

"Pakistan's military ruler Asim Munir is now targeting American families of pro-democracy activists," Khanna said. "We all know the elections in Pakistan were rigged, and Imran Khan is still in jail. The United States needs to sanction Asim Munir and any military leader in Pakistan who is targeting Americans."

Assassination Attempts

Khan's allegations about Munir were shared with The Intercept by a number of sources close to him who requested anonymity to protect their security.

In the communications, Khan alleges the existence of CCTV footage and other evidence showing that Munir concocted a scheme to have Khan killed at a tumultuous court appearance on March 18, 2023.

Khan's car was [mobbed](#) by spectators on the way to court, some of whom, Khan alleges, were Inter-Services Intelligence agents dressed in civilian clothes. The attempt on his life, Khan says, was only thwarted by a crowd of PTI supporters who surrounded his car.

Khan also offered his own narrative on a November 2022 incident when he was wounded in a shooting attack at a political rally that killed one of his supporters. The Pakistani government detained a single person for the attack, whom officials claimed had been motivated by religious extremism.

According to sources close to the former prime minister, Khan accused Munir of being behind a cover-up of the incident. The general, he claims, blocked an independent probe

into the attack and that eyewitness accounts pointed to the involvement of multiple assailants.

Munir's Political Plays

Pakistan has been held hostage to the political clash between Khan and Munir, with the former prime minister now imprisoned on charges widely seen as politicized.

Khan claims that Munir bargained with his civilian political rivals, including Sharif, the former prime minister, to spare them from corruption charges. In exchange, the politicians like Sharif supported jailing Khan and cracking down on his party.

The crackdown — extrajudicial killings, torture, mass detentions, and other sweeping measures aimed at dismantling the PTI — has so far failed to dim Khan's popularity. In elections this February, candidates affiliated with PTI won sweeping support, [according to exit polls](#), before [electoral rigging](#) engineered by the military allowed a [coalition government of Khan's opposition](#) to form.

Khan characterizes the events as a betrayal by Munir. In Khan's telling, according to the sources close to him, the prime minister's downfall was precipitated after Munir reneged on an agreement. Khan says that the then-President Arif Alvi, a senior member of his party, had the power to block Munir's ascension to the top military post in the country but allowed it to go forward after the general's emissaries said he planned to stay out of politics.

Munir, like Pakistani military leaders before him, plays a prime role in the country's political affairs.

Khan's legal status remains in flux after serious corruption and espionage charges against him were thrown out in court. The former prime minister now [remains imprisoned solely on charges](#) that he improperly married his third wife in contravention of religious guidelines.

PTI meanwhile remains at odds with the military establishment, with halting attempts to mediate a resolution to Pakistan's ongoing political standoff so far unsuccessful.

Deepening Crackdown — and Crises

Khan's removal by his military and civilian rivals came in a 2022 no-confidence vote organized [amid pressure](#) from the U.S. over the prime minister's foreign policy stances.

Since the removal, Pakistan has been wracked by overlapping economic and political crises that have paralyzed the nation of 200 million.

Even with Khan and PTI sidelined, the military continues its attempts to suppress speech. This year, the military [blocked](#) X and [issued a statement](#) denouncing "digital terrorism." Government officials have also made reference to imposing a [national firewall](#) on the country's internet.

Khan's personal safety is widely believed to be in jeopardy by his supporters, including Pakistani Americans who recently lobbied for Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to [contact](#) the Pakistani government about his safety.

In addition to blaming Munir for betraying his trust and attempting to engineer his murder,

from prison Khan has repeatedly raised the specter that the general is leading the country toward a repeat of its traumatic 1971 partition — a stinging embarrassment for Pakistani nationalists.

The partition occurred following a military-led crackdown and massacre after an army rival won elections. The civil war spurred the secession of the eastern half of the country into the nation of Bangladesh.

Correction: June 27, 2024, 2:47 p.m. ET

An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that Imran Khan was prime minister at the time of Asim Munir's ascension, and could have blocked it. This story has been updated to note that Arif Alvi was president at that time.

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