Parliamentarians fire back at US Congress' push for Imran Khan's release

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National Assembly legislators have reportedly condemned a letter from 62 US Congress members that asked President Joe Biden to pressure Pakistan into releasing Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s founding chairman Imran Khan. Around 160 members of Pakistan's National Assembly sent a letter to Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, characterising the congressional appeal as an intrusion into Pakistan's internal affairs, according to a local media report. The Pakistani

lawmakers, including notable figures such as Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Naveed Qamar, Mustafa Kamal, Aasiya Naz Tanoli, and Khalid Magsi, expressed deep concerns over the perceived interference. They called upon Prime Minister Sharif to formally convey to the US Congress that Pakistan is currently grappling with democratic challenges, which have been compounded by what they labelled as disruptive politics. The letter outlined accusations against Imran Khan, asserting that he promoted political violence and made criminal threats against state institutions. It specifically referenced the large-scale unrest on May 9 2023, during which protesters allegedly incited by Imran targeted buildings including Parliament, state-run television, and Radio Pakistan. The Pakistani lawmakers' letter further stated that Imran Khan's tactics were not new, citing previous incidents in August 2014 and May 2022 when his political moves allegedly 'paralysed the country.' The letter added that Imran Khan continues to provoke unrest and violence from jail, with particular reference to his use of social media for what the lawmakers described as "digital terrorism." The letter also suggested that disgruntled expatriates in the US and U.K. have played a role in Imran Khan's negative campaign, leading to heightened concerns within both countries about the activities of their citizens. Last week, around 60 Democratic lawmakers from the US House of Representatives wrote to President Joe Biden urging him to pressure Pakistan into releasing Imran Khan, the jailed founding chairman of the PTI. "We write

today to urge you to use the United States' substantial leverage with Pakistan's government to secure the release of political prisoners including former Prime Minister Khan and curtail widespread human rights abuses," the lawmakers wrote in a letter on Wednesday. US Representative Greg Casar, who led the letter, said it marked the first such collective call from multiple members of the US Congress for the release of Imran, who otherwise has had testy relations with Washington as a long-standing critic of US foreign policy. Imran has been in jail since August 2023 and has faced dozens of cases after he was removed from the prime minister's position in April 2022 through a parliamentary vote of no confidence. The PTI leader had blamed his ouster on a US conspiracy led by Assistant Secretary Bureau Of South And Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu and claimed that Pakistan's military was also involved. Imran has denied all charges against him, while the party has said that more than 200 cases against him are politically motivated. The pending cases against him mostly pertain to the May 9 violence. Imran has denied responsibility and has been acquitted or granted bail in many cases. He also faced the 190 million pound Al Qadir varsity land corruption case. The case alleges that Imran and Bushra obtained billions of rupees and land worth hundreds of kanals for legalising Rs50 billion – at that time £190 million – that was identified and returned to the country by the UK during the PTI government in 2019. A UN human rights working group said in July that Imran's detention violated international

law. The US and Pakistani military both had denied any involvement in Imran Khan's ouster,

calling his removal a democratic process.