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Massive Rally in Lahore: Imran Khan Leads Calls for Pakistan to End US Alliance

By Jason Ditz

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A popular but largely powerless politician for years, former cricket star and Tehreek-e Insaf leader Imran Khan has parlayed his long-standing opposition to US drone strikes into a massive rally today on the streets of Lahore, [where some 100,000 demonstrators marched to condemn the current US alliance](#) and the Zardari government.

“Our leaders owned this war on terror for the sake of dollars,” Khan declared, “let me curse you. You sold out the blood of innocent people.” The ruling Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP) condemned Khan, saying it made “no sense” to call for public protests and civil disobedience when the country’s [“democratic institutions are functioning independently.”](#)

Khan’s call appears to have found some new currency with the Pakistani public, however, and that is something new for his party, whose platform centers around tackling corruption and reducing the power the nation’s security forces have over ordinary citizens.

Khan concedes that in many ways the rally is an effort to build up his party, saying that given the backroom deals and powerful dynasties inherent in the Pakistani political system the Tehreek-e Insaf was [“never going to win the traditional way.”](#)

But with US missiles falling on Pakistani soil on almost a daily basis, the Tehreek-e Insaf has a built-in issue that resonates across much of the nation, and while both the ruling Zardari government and the major opposition faction of Nawaz Sharif have given lip-service to calling for an end to US drone strikes, neither seems to be willing to force the issue with the Obama

Administration, unsurprising since Pakistan's current economic system depends largely on foreign aid.

The question then becomes not if the PPP has lost the voters, but how long they can hold on to power without them. The Zardari government has repeatedly resisted calls for early elections in the past, and seems to be hoping to hold out until 2013. Even the Sharif brothers' PML-N has called for an early vote, but it is unclear if they will back it up with votes if Khan's popularity might cut into their traditional conservative power base.