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CONSEQUENCES OF 9TH MAY...

MOST PTI LEADERS DEFECTED JUST AFTER:

After six months since Imran Khan's arrest on 9th May 2023 PTI leaders were found (still) ditching their party for incidents which occurred half a year ago. One of the latest additions to the long list of defectors was Sadaqat Ali Abbasi, who resigned from his party position and retired from politics during a live TV interview a month earlier. The said PTI leader had disappeared for several months, leading to speculations of being 'picked up' after 9th May. Upon his return, he was quick to condemn the 'radical' views against the establishment.

BUT he was not the only one. Ever since the events of 9th May, PTI leaders were leaving the PTI and Imran Khan. It was almost like an exercise how each member went through the same process: getting 'picked up' or arrested, coming forward, condemning the 9th May incidents, and then quitting the party and or politics altogether. But how did the most popular party in the country go from widespread acceptance to the margins of obscurity within half a year? To understand this, one could trace the events that led to that infamous May-Day and the subsequent exodus of PTI members, coupled with the party's disengagement.

It can be argued that ***the beginning of the end*** started when the 'same page' was torn out in April 2022 concluding the vital relationship between the PTI and its benefactors via No-Confidence Vote in the parliament, executed under Article 95 of the Constitution. A total of 174 out of the 342 members in the parliament voted in support of the opposition's said motion. In Bilawal Zardari's words: 'The one we had declared selected, the non-democratic burden this country was bearing for the past three years, today, April 10, 2022, welcome back to purana (old) Pakistan'.

Referring to ***WARA IRFAN***'s analysis on media pages of 10th November 2023: Soon after the arrest of Imran Khan on 9th May 2023, its leadership started fleeing the PTI party. On 17th May 2023, three leaders, including former federal minister Aamer Mehmood Kiani, MNA from Karachi Mahmood Baqi Moulvi, and MPA in Sindh Assembly Dr Sanjay Gangwani, announced their decisions to part ways with the Imran-led party. They spoke out that the riots were an attempt to trigger a sort of 'Arab Spring' in Pakistan; referring to a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011.

Next day, on 18th May 2023, Malik Amin Aslam, Dr Muhammad Amjad and Dr Imran Ali Shah announced that they were parting ways with the party. Aslam, who remained an adviser to the PM on climate change when Imran Khan was the prime minister, said '... he spent 13 years with PTI but it is not possible for me to continue after the attacks on military installations and Jinnah House Lahore'. In Karachi, PTI's lawmaker in the Sindh Assembly, Dr Shah, said '...the vandals didn't even spare national institutions and the May 9 events changed his mind about his political future'.

On 22nd May 2023: In the wake of the May 9 arson attacks, Chaudhry Parvez Elahi's confidant Wajahat Hussain decided to part ways with PTI and rejoined his parent party PMLQ.

On 23rd May 2023: In a major blow to the PTI party, former human rights minister and PTI stalwart Shireen Mazari quit the party and announced her retirement from active politics citing personal reasons. She said her children and her health were her main priority. *'From today, I'm not part of PTI or any active party because first [for me are] my family, my mother and kids'*; she said. Following the initial 9th May protests, at least 13 PTI leaders, including Mazari, were arrested under the Maintenance of Public Order ordinance. She was granted bail by courts on multiple occasions but was re-arrested immediately every time.

Fayyazul Hassan Chohan, a former provincial minister and PTI spokesperson, also quit the PTI because *'he could not imagine speaking against the army'*. Chohan also lashed out at his former boss and claimed that he had developed differences with the PTI chairman for the last year and that the doors of Banigala and Zaman Park were closed for him. *"Almost one year ago, I sent a WhatsApp to Imran and also forwarded it to a journalist for the record. I don't want to remain in a party which never cared about me,"* he said.

Makhdoom Iftikhar Ali Gilani, a former PTI MPA from Uch Sharif, also announced his decision to quit the party in the backdrop of the 9th May violence in the country. A former PTI MPA from Khanewal and later ticket-holder from PP-209, Abdul Razzaq Niazi, in a press conference in Lahore, also parted ways with the PTI. In Karachi, another two of PTI MPAs, Omar Omari and Bilal Ahmed Ghaffar, also announced they were to quit the party while condemning 9th May.

On 24th May 2023: In another significant blow to the PTI, the party's senior vice president and spokesperson Fawad Chaudhry announced that he was *'parting ways with former PM Imran Khan'*. Taking to X, formerly Twitter, he said he had resigned from his party position and had decided to take a break from politics.

On 25th May 2023: Asad Umar, a close aide and head of Imran's economic team, stepped down from his party office in light of the crackdown on PTI. According to Umar, he was not quitting the party offices *under pressure* — a statement in contrast to claims made by the PTI chairman, who accused the powers that be of coercing members to exit.

During those hard days, at least nine other party leaders including Maleeka Bukhari, Jamshed Iqbal Cheema and his wife Musarrat, Malik Akram Kanhon, Javed Ansari, Dr Muhammad Afzal, Ch Ehsanul Haq, Ch Jehanzeb Rasheed, and Saeed Akbar Niwani had parted their ways with Imran Khan and PTI. Maleeka said that it was their failure that we could not control the workers. Mob should not have entered the military installations.

On 26th May 2023: Former Punjab cabinet members Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan and Murad Raas, among a dozen leaders, announced their decision to leave the party as they did not support the 9th May attacks on state buildings and army installations; collectively agreeing with Dr Awan:

"I believe that the martyrs ... their love and the country's respect are a part of our faith. Those who disrespected martyrs attacked Pakistan's foundation and ideology. Imran Khan and Pakistan can't function together."

On 27th May 2023: Former Sindh governor Imran Ismail announced that he was leaving the PTI and resigning from all party positions; saying: *'I have decided that I am resigning from positions of the PTI, as I am the additional secretary general and a member of the core committee. I am also leaving the PTI ... Khan sahib I bid adieu to you and PTI.'*

PTI Sindh President Ali Haider Zaidi also announced his decision to **quit politics** and resign from positions within the PTI, describing it as a difficult decision that he arrived at after extensive deliberation. In a video

message, Zaidi affirmed his commitment to serving Pakistan and emphasised that his initial purpose for joining politics was to contribute to the betterment of the country.

On 1st June 2023, The PTI suffered a major setback when the party's provincial president, Pervez Khattak, announced in a press conference his decision to step down from his party position. A PTI representative, who preferred not to be named, claimed that Khattak, a former federal minister, had only resigned as PTI president of Khyber PK, just like Asad Umar, and would remain part of the party.

- Later, on 12th July 2023: PTI terminated the basic party membership of Mr Pervez Khattak after he failed to respond to a show-cause notice that sought an explanation ***'for inciting members to leave the party'***. His termination letter, shared by the PTI on X, said: *'Now, therefore, you are served with this notice of termination from your basic membership of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, with immediate effect'*.
- On 17th July 2023, Khattak launched his own breakaway faction of the party by the name of **Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Parliamentarians** (PTI-P). In a video of the gathering, Khattak was seen saying that: *'...like-minded former parliamentarians from KP have gathered today and after consultation, we agreed to decide a future political strategy. It is mutually decided that we will lay the foundation of a new party, which will be named Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Parliamentarians'*. According to a handout issued by the party, Khattak was the new party's chief while more than 57 ex-PTI MPAs also joined him to raise the new faction of PTI.

On 29th June 2023: The PTI faced another setback as its Karachi chapter president, Akram Cheema, revealed his departure from the party. He had been appointed as city president by PTI chairman Imran Khan a month before, succeeding Aftab Siddiqi, who had also left the party after the 9th May episode, primarily due to *'difference of opinion'*. He was picked up by law enforcement agencies and after a gap of around one week, he was arrested in two cases about the 9th May riots. He was given bail after two days and he quit the party while condemning attacks on military institutions.

On 4th October 2023: Senior PTI leader and former federal minister Usman Dar, whose whereabouts had been unknown for three weeks, resurfaced in a pre-recorded interview, televised, where he announced a parting of ways with Imran's party, alleging that the former prime minister was the *'mastermind of the May 9 riots'*. Dar was reportedly picked up from Karachi in the second week of September.

On 16th October 2023: Former minister Farrukh Habib, whose whereabouts had been unknown after his arrest from Gwadar a month earlier, resurfaced in a press conference, where he announced parting ways with Imran Khan's party. He also joined the newly formed Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP).

The fragmentation of PTI: On 6th June 2023: Jahangir Khan Tareen, once a close aide of the PTI chief, launched a new party, the **Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP)** with several other PTI defectors — including those who left in the aftermath of the 9th May incidents — by his side. Tareen said the events of 9th May had changed the politics of Pakistan and should never happen again; adding that: ***'So we have gathered here today. We will collectively try to steer Pakistan ... out of the quagmire. Our country needs us today. We will together heal the wounds inflicted on Pakistan.'***

Former PTI stalwarts Fawad Chaudhry, Ali Zaidi, Imran Ismail, Mahmood Maulvi, Firdous Ashiq Awan, Ajmal Wazir, Nauraz Shakkor, Fayyazul Hasan Chohan, Amir Mahmood Kayani and former PTI financier Aleem Khan had also joined Tareen's side.

ONSLAUGHT AGAINST PTI & KHAN:

Referring to the **WALL STREET JOURNAL** dated 28th June 2023: An unprecedented crackdown, by the PDM government with mighty backing of the *establishment*, was initiated against PTI leaders and workers, with thousands arrested; most groups raising concerns regarding arbitrary arrests, custodial torture, and forced disappearances. PTI leaders were forced to quit party / party positions in televised press conferences. Businesses of PTI leaders who did not quit the party were sealed. Family members of PTI leaders who went into hiding were harassed by police and military intelligence forces. In many instances, their houses were raided late at night and ransacked; valuables were also seized; the dowry for Mian Aslam Iqbal's daughter's wedding was seized by Punjab Police; and the homes of Lal Chand Malhi and Ali Nawaz Awan were demolished; **daily DAWN** dated 27th May 2023 is referred.

A crackdown was also initiated on vocal women supporters of Khan's party - the most prominent of which was Khadija Shah, a businesswoman and granddaughter of former Pakistani Army Chief, Asif Nawaz Janjua; daily **PAKISTAN TODAY** of 10th May 2023 is referred.

Former Federal Ministers, Shehryar Khan Afridi and Ali Muhammad Khan, former Governor Punjab Omer Sarfraz Cheema, and former Punjab provincial ministers, Yasmin Rashid and Mehmood-ur-Rasheed have been incarcerated since the end of the riots; **The EXPRESS TRIBUNE** dated 10th May 2023 is referred.

Even once released by the courts, they were immediately re-arrested in other cases; Khan has been rearrested six times, while Afridi, and Rashid have been rearrested twice. Cheema's wife was arrested as she came to attend her husband's hearing. Afridi was not allowed to attend his brother's funeral and was kept in inhumane conditions in a 'death cell' reserved for those on death row; **Sigamony, Terence's** article in **Brecorder** dated 30th May 2023 is referred.

Media censored and journalists abducted: Mobile internet coverage was suspended as riots spread throughout the country. The ban effected gig workers, including those working for Uber, Foodpanda, and Careem, as well as freelancers and remote workers who relied on mobile internet. It was estimated that during the three days that mobile internet remained suspended, Pakistan's telecom companies bore a loss of Rs 2.49 billion (US\$8.9 million), while the country's software export industry lost Rs. 10 billion (US\$36 million). Starting from 13 May 2023, the authorities started restoring Internet access; daily **THE NATION** dated 13th May 2023 is referred.

Access to social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, was also restricted in the aftermath of the riots. Both the blockage of internet and social media were implemented by Pakistan Telecom Authority after a notification for the same was issued by the interior ministry, under Rana Sanaullah. Access to social media was fully restored by 16th May 2023; however, the government had hinted at another social media blockage with defense minister, Kh Asif, claiming that *'the script of the May 9 violence was prepared via social media'*; **ARAB NEWS PK** dated 14th May 2023 is referred.

The INTERCEPT dated 2nd June 2023 reported that several leading media houses were called to a secret meeting by the Pak-Army in which they were directed to ban all coverage of Imran Khan. As a result, Khan's name disappeared overnight from all local print and electronic media, with journalists euphemistically referring to him as **"Qasim ke Abba"** (Qasim's father) as the moniker became a top twitter trend in Pakistan. This directive was reinforced by Pakistan's media regulator PEMRA, prohibiting coverage of Imran or PTI.

Journalists that were seen as aligned with the PTI were targeted. Imran Riaz Khan, one of the most popular journalists on Pakistani social media, was kidnapped from outside Sialkot Central Jail on 11 May 2023 after being initially detained by Punjab Police. He remained missing as the IGP of Punjab Police, Usman Anwar, put the blame on military agencies for his disappearance in front of the Lahore High Court, and expressed his inability to locate the journalist; **AL-JAZEERA** dated 23rd May 2023 is referred.

- Another prominent journalist and TV anchor, Sami Ibrahim, head of Bol News was picked up from Islamabad on 24 May 2023, {later released on 30 May 2023}; **DAILY TIMES** dated 25th May 2023 is referred.

Reporters without Borders and the International Federation of Journalists raised concern over the abductions. In January 2026, *an anti-terrorism court convicted and sentenced eight journalists* and social media commentators to life imprisonment in absentia for terrorism-related offences linked to online content supporting Imran Khan. The court ruled that their digital activity promoted fear and unrest under anti-terrorism laws. Those sentenced included former army officers who later became YouTubers, Adil Raja and Syed Akbar Hussain, along with journalists Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir and Shaheen Sehba, as well as commentator Haider Raza Mehdi and political analyst Moeed Pirzada. Saeed Khan, described the ruling as **'political theatre'**.

Civilians in military courts: In the immediate aftermath, the administration attempted to transfer a number of cases to military courts for trial due to the seriousness of the crimes committed during the riots. Four accused people involved in targeting defense sites had their transfer allowed by an anti-terrorism court [ATC] in Faisalabad, while eight accused people involved in the attack on the GHQ had their transfer granted by an ATC in Rawalpindi. Additionally, the commanding officer received 16 suspects, among them an ex-PTI Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA), who was charged with looting and vandalizing Corp Commander House in Lahore. Later, trials of as many as 102 defendants, who were deemed to be involved in attacks on military installation, were transferred from anti-terrorism courts to military courts; **the EX-PRESS TRIBUNE** dated 1st June 2023 is referred.

Several constitutional petitions were made before the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare the trials unconstitutional, including by the former Chief Justice Jawwad S. Khawaja, who deemed it as **'militarization of justice'**. Prominent lawyer, Aitzaz Ahsan, was also one of the petitioners as he considered the move as 'a complete anathema to the constitutional separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, the inalienable right of every Pakistani to be treated in accordance with law, and the fundamental rights of life, liberty, fair trial, and due process'. Imran Khan, also filed a civil petition separately. The petitions were clubbed together into a **military courts case** with a 6-member Supreme Court larger bench hearing it; **DUNYA NEWS** dated 28th June 2023 is referred.

Lawyers Targeted: The legal fraternity, particularly those demanding the upholding of the Constitution of Pakistan and cessation of trials of civilians in military courts, were also targeted. A prominent lawyer, Uzair Bhandari, was abducted and later released after he left Imran Khan's residence after consulting with him on the matter of military courts. The house of Advocate **Latif Khosa, former Governor of Punjab**, was attacked by armed men after he made a speech against the interim government in Punjab and the trial of civilians in military courts; **PAKISTAN TODAY** dated 18th June 2023 is referred.

CASES IN THE COURTS:

Imran Khan was released after the Supreme Court of Pakistan declared his arrest as 'illegal'. Khan remained free until he was arrested again on several cases, with many being from the military alleging Khan had relation to the riots. *The Lahore High Court concluded that there was no audio or video evidence that it was aware of, that Imran Khan was related to the 9th May riots;* **the EXPRESS TRIBUNE** dated 28th July 2024 is referred.

- Imran Khan also stated, that he was ready to apologize for the riots should a single piece of evidence be found implicating PTI in the violence that ensued on 9th May. *In May 2024 Khan was acquitted from two 9th May-related cases due to insufficient evidence.*
- In June 2025, a Lahore anti-terrorism court rejected the police's request to conduct a polygraph (lie detector) and Photogrammetry (photo identification) test on Imran Khan. The presiding judge said Khan was already granted two chances to demonstrate cooperation, which he chose not to avail, saying *'This is the first case in Pakistan where a suspect is actively refusing to prove their innocence'*.

In July 2024, a comprehensive order issued by Judge Khalid Arshad of the Anti-Terrorism Court of Pakistan linked Imran Khan to the orchestration of attacks on military bases, government buildings, and police personnel. This order disclosed that Khan had directed PTI leaders to incite chaos and apply pressure for

his release in the event of his arrest, according to testimonies from two prosecution witnesses. The court document detailed a meeting on 7th May 2023, where Khan allegedly instructed PTI leaders to brace for possible disturbances on 9th May if he were apprehended. In a video message, he reportedly cautioned that Pakistan could face turmoil similar to the 2022 Sri Lankan protests should he be detained, prompting his followers to participate in what he called a '**real jihad for real freedom**'.

The Chief Minister of Khyber PK, Ali Amin Gandapur, was also said to back Khan's position, suggesting that a hunger strike by Khan would trigger widespread protests both domestically and internationally. The prosecution argued that Khan masterminded a criminal conspiracy, mobilizing senior PTI figures to provoke actions that led to the Attack on the Corps Commander House, Lahore, with the intention of intimidating the government. Judge Arshad's ruling highlighted that pre-arrest bail was not applicable for individuals plotting to undermine the government and committing acts of terrorism. As a result, Imran Khan's bail application was denied, upholding the court's stance on his supposed participation in the unrest; **the EXPRESS TRIBUNE** dated 11th July 2024 is referred

On 25th August 2025, an anti-terrorism court in Faisalabad convicted 59 individuals, including senior PTI leaders Omar Ayub, Shibli Faraz, and Zartaj Gul, sentencing them to 10 years in prison in connection with the events of 9th May. The court also sentenced 16 others to three years' imprisonment for attacking the residence of PMLN leader Rana Sanaullah and ordered the confiscation of properties belonging to 42 PTI supporters. A total of 34 accused, including former information minister Fawad Chaudhry and MNA Zain Qureshi, were acquitted due to insufficient evidence.

The judgment described the events as part of a broader conspiracy allegedly planned at meetings in Rawalpindi and Lahore, though defense counsel questioned the credibility of key prosecution witnesses. Earlier, the defense counsels argued that only three witnesses were presented in relation to the alleged conspiracy said to have been planned at Rose Hotel in the Chakri area of Rawalpindi and at Imran Khan's Zaman Park residence; they had also contended that the participation of these witnesses—Asmat Kamal, Hassam Afzal, and Muhamad Khalid, were all police officers—in the two alleged meetings was highly doubtful based on their own disclosures. Non-bailable arrest warrants were issued for 75 absent convicts, and overall, more than 160 PTI members had their properties confiscated under Section 7(2) of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997; **the EXPRESS TRIBUNE** dated 26th August 2025 is referred.

- **In August 2025**, media theories developed that Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, had sought **a sincere apology** over the riots, following a column by Suhail Warraich, a senior editor at the Daily Jang newspaper. Warraich claimed Munir had made the remarks during a conversation in Brussels, implying that political reconciliation could follow an apology—widely interpreted as being directed at the PTI. However, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) later clarified that the army chief had neither made any political statement nor requested an apology, and had not given any interview during the Brussels visit; **daily DAWN** dated 21st August 2025 is referred.

PTI VS PAK-ARMY: A YEAR AFTER:

Since the events of 9th May 2023, very little appears to have changed in Pakistan, at least from the political perspective. In fact, more expectations were there for bad blood between the PTI and the security establishment; both sides were unwilling to reconsider the combative stance they had taken towards each other.

In a press conference on 7th May 2024, the ISPR (Pak-military's media) made it clear there would be no moving forward without a sincere apology from the PTI and a public disavowal of '**the politics of anarchy and hate**'. In response, the PTI denounced the statement as a pack of lies - full of contradictions.

Fact remained that the violence directed at military symbols and installations in several parts of the country on that day of 2023, was a direct consequence of the narrative built by the PTI following its ouster. The party had spent months framing the possibility of its chief's arrest as a '**red line**', all the while blaming and shaming the security establishment for its ouster from government in April 2022. This combustible mix, triggered by the controversial arrest of Imran Khan by Rangers personnel from the premises of the Islamabad High Court, exploded in the form of unprecedented, widespread violence by PTI supporters. BUT, in return, thousands were targeted in reprisals by the state, and the events of the day accelerated the expansion of unelected forces influence in the state's legislative and administrative set-ups.

The state, too, was not without blame. Rather than acting with restraint and demonstrating that it was only interested in getting justice for the wrong that it had been caused, it responded with extreme measures taking guidance from the playbooks of past dictatorships. In seeking 'justice' for PTI supporters' defacement of various installations, the homes of countless civilian suspects were raided & vandalised and their residents harassed by state-personnel. Even women prisoners, who otherwise enjoy special protections and concessions under Pakistan's legal system, were repeatedly denied their right to bail and kept imprisoned without trial in countless suspicious cases.

After that unfortunate day of 2023, the PTI-military stand-off became the root cause of Pakistan's political instability. Since neither side was interested in a resolution, perhaps the government could have stepped in. It could offer its best resources to prosecute the 'actual' 9th May cases in respective courts, ensuring a transparent judicial process. If done fairly, that could prevent the two sides from engaging directly with each other directly. That chapter should have been closed much earlier to keep the nation moving upwards.

- **On 9th May 2024**, the first anniversary of the above said riots, President Asif Ali Zardari called the occasion a '**dark day**' in Pakistan's history. Defense Minister Khawaja Asif said that the events of 9th May were part of a well thought-out conspiracy; claiming that the attack on military installations and properties was carried out as part of a planned conspiracy by a political party. PTI observed these events as a '**False Flag Operation**' aimed at crushing both the party and its leadership. PTI also condemned what it described as the unlawful detentions and brutal use of state power against its workers, who were peacefully protesting in observance of the alleged 9th May 'false flag operation' across the whole Pakistan; daily **thenews.com.pk** dated 10th May 2024 is referred.

In short, the first anniversary of the 9th May riots was marked with various events and ceremonies. A **Black Day** was observed on the anniversary of the incidents in schools and other educational institutions across Rawalpindi; the district administration of Rawalpindi announced the observance of *Black Day* with an official notification. A ceremony was organized in Jinnah Convention Centre, Islamabad in honor of the martyrs.

PTI also held public gatherings and processions on the first anniversary demanding the release of the party's founding chairman, Imran Khan, and other arrested leaders and workers. It was held that the government had used and were 'using excessive force against PTI under the pretext of a false flag operation on 9th May 2023, to crush the party'.

