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# Terrorist and Other Militant Groups in Pakistan

U.S. officials have identified Pakistan as a base of operations and/or target for numerous armed, nonstate militant groups, some of which have existed since the 1980s. Notable terrorist and other groups operating in and/or launching attacks on Pakistan are of five broad, but not exclusive types: (1) globally oriented; (2) Afghanistan-oriented; (3) India- and Kashmir-oriented; (4) domestically oriented; and (5) sectarian (anti-Shia). Twelve of the 15 groups listed below are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under U.S. law and most, but not all, are animated by Islamist extremist ideology. Pakistan has suffered considerably from domestic terrorism since 2003, and related fatalities peaked in 2009. Many observers predicted a resurgence of regional terrorism and militancy in the wake of the Afghan Taliban’s 2021 takeover, and data show this has occurred: After five consecutive years of declining fatality rates down to 365 in 2019, the number of terrorism deaths in Pakistan is up every year since, quadrupling to at least 1,438 in 2023 (see **Figure 1**). In November 2023, Pakistan’s prime minister claimed that, since August 2021, there has been a 60% rise in militant attacks in Pakistan and a 500% rise in suicide bombings in which more than 2,200 Pakistanis were killed.

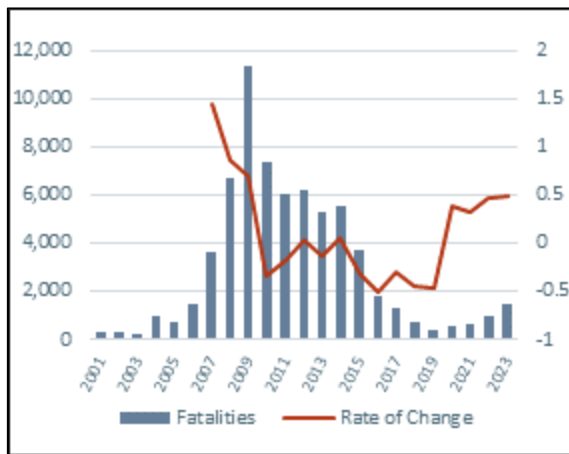
that some madrassas (religious schools) continue to teach extremism. Although Pakistan’s 2014 National Action Plan to counter terrorism seeks to ensure that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country, several United Nations- and U.S.-designated terrorist groups continue to operate from Pakistani soil.

**Figure 2. Map of Pakistan**



**Sources:** CRS. Boundaries from U.S. Department of State and ESRI.

**Figure 1. Terrorism-Related Fatalities in Pakistan and Rate of Change over Time, 2001-2023**



**Source:** South Asia Terrorism Portal (New Delhi). Data through November 2023.

According to the U.S. State Department’s *Country Reports on Terrorism 2022* (released in November 2023), “In 2022, Pakistan took steps to counter terrorism financing and restrain some India-focused terrorist groups.” However, it “has yet to complete its pledge to dismantle all terrorist organizations without delay or discrimination.” The report notes Pakistan’s successful May 2022 prosecution and sentencing of a senior Lashkar-e-Taiba leader (see below), as well as counterterrorism operations conducted by military, paramilitary, and civilian security forces. It reports

In 2018, the Paris-based intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) returned Pakistan to its “gray list” of countries found to have “strategic deficiencies” in countering money laundering and terrorist financing. In late 2022, FATF assessed that Pakistan had addressed technical deficiencies and completed all action items, and it removed the country from the gray list. Also in 2018, the U.S. President designated Pakistan a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. It has been redesignated annually four times.

## Globally Oriented Militants

**Al Qaeda (AQ)** “core” was formed in 1988 in Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden and designated as an FTO in 1999. U.S.-led forces expelled AQ from Afghanistan after its September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. AQ subsequently operated primarily from the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, now incorporated into Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; see **Figure 2**). U.S. special forces killed Bin Laden in a May 2011 raid in Pakistan; he was succeeded by Ayman al-Zawahiri, himself killed by a U.S.-launched airstrike on Afghanistan in July 2022. A successor has yet to be named. AQ core has been seriously degraded, but maintains ties to numerous other Pakistan-based FTOs.

**Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)** was established in 2014 under the leadership of Asim Umar—a Indian national subsequently killed in a joint U.S.-Afghan

military operation. It was designated as an FTO in 2016. With an estimated 200-400 members, AQIS has been implicated in terrorist attacks in Pakistan (and Bangladesh), including a 2014 attempt to hijack a Pakistan Navy frigate.

**Islamic State-Khorasan Province** (ISKP or IS-K) is a regional affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, ISIL, or the Arabic acronym *Da'esh*) that made inroads in Afghanistan in 2015 and was designated as an FTO in 2016. Its estimated 3,000-5,000 fighters are mostly former members of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who are based in Afghanistan but also operate in Pakistan, along with disaffected Afghan Taliban fighters.

## Afghanistan-Oriented Militants

**The Afghan Taliban** emerged in southeastern Afghanistan in the early 1990s, ruled most of that country from 1996-2001, and were named as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2002. Long led by Mullah Omar (who died in 2013) and now led by Haibatullah Akhundzada, during the period 2001 to 2021 its leadership was believed to operate mainly from the Balochistan provincial capital of Quetta, as well as in Karachi and Peshawar. It gained strength as U.S. force levels in Afghanistan decreased significantly after 2014, and retook power in Afghanistan in August 2021.

**The Haqqani Network** (HQN) was founded in the late 1980s by Jalaluddin Haqqani and designated as an FTO in 2012. Jalaluddin retreated to Pakistan after 2001 and his son Sirajuddin later became the group's leader. Sirajuddin Haqqani also became a deputy chief of the Afghan Taliban in 2015 and Afghanistan's acting interior minister in 2021. HQN reportedly has several hundred core members and an estimated 3,000-5,000 armed militants with varying degrees of affiliation, many of whom reportedly operate near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and have undertaken numerous kidnappings and attacks in Afghanistan. Some U.S. officials have linked HQN to Pakistan's main intelligence service, a charge Pakistan denies.

## India- and Kashmir-Oriented Militants

**Lashkar-e-Taiba** (LET) was formed in the late 1980s in Pakistan and designated as an FTO in 2001. Led by now-incarcerated Hafiz Saeed and based in Pakistan's Punjab province and in Pakistan-administered (Azad) Kashmir, it has changed its name to Jamaat-ud-Dawa and launched humanitarian projects to circumvent sanctions. LET was responsible for the November 2008 terrorist assault on Mumbai, India, as well as several other high-profile attacks.

**Jaish-e-Mohammed** (JEM) was founded in 2000 by Kashmiri militant leader Masood Azhar and designated as an FTO in 2001. Along with LET, it was responsible for a 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, among numerous others. Based in both Punjab and in Azad Kashmir, JEM's several hundred armed supporters operate in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while seeking annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. JEM has openly declared war on the United States.

**Harakat-ul Jihad Islami** (HUJI) was formed in 1980 in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet army. After 1989, HUJI redirected its efforts toward India, although it did supply

fighters to the Afghan Taliban, and it was designated as an FTO in 2010. With an unknown strength, HUJI operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, and seeks annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan.

**Harakat ul-Mujahidin** (HUM) was designated as an FTO in 1997 and operates mainly from Azad Kashmir and from some Pakistani cities. It was responsible for the 1999 hijacking of an Indian airliner that led to the release from an Indian prison of JEM's future founder; most HUM cadres subsequently defected to that group.

**Hizbul Mujahideen** (HM) was formed in 1989—reportedly as the militant wing of Pakistan's largest Islamist political party—and designated as an FTO in 2017. It is one of the largest and oldest militant groups operating in Indian-administered Kashmir. HM's cadre of unknown size is composed primarily of ethnic Kashmiris who seek independence for Kashmir or annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. Although Kashmir-based, HM reportedly has key funding sources in Pakistan.

## Domestically Oriented Militants

**Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan** (TTP) was formed in 2007 and designated as an FTO in 2010. It is widely regarded as the deadliest terrorist group operating in Pakistan and has undertaken numerous mass-casualty attacks on Pakistani security forces and their families. TTP is composed largely of ethnic Pashtun militants who unified under the leadership of now-deceased Baitullah Mehsud, then based in the former FATA, with representatives from each of Pakistan's seven former tribal agencies. TTP leadership reportedly fled into the border areas of eastern Afghanistan in response to Pakistani military operations in 2014. Resurgent since 2021, led by Noor Wali Mehsud, and with ties to Al Qaeda, the TTP's estimated 3,000-6,000 cadre seek to defeat Pakistan's government and establish Sharia law in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In late 2023, Pakistan government officials accused the Afghan Taliban of directly controlling the TTP.

**Balochistan Liberation Army** (BLA), which the State Department named as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2019, is an ethnic-based separatist group of up to 1,000 armed militants. The group has targeted People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals and PRC-funded investment projects in Balochistan.

**Jaysh al-Adl** (aka Jundallah), designated as an FTO in 2010, is an ethnic Baloch separatist group operating in and from Pakistan's Balochistan province, oriented primarily toward Iran and its ethnic Baloch regions.

## Sectarian (Anti-Shia) Militants

**Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan** (SSP, aka Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat) is an anti-Shia group established in Punjab in the mid-1980s. Its 3,000-6,000 members operate mainly in the former FATA, Punjab, and Karachi.

**Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** (LEJ) is an SSP offshoot designated as an FTO in 2013. With membership in the low hundreds, LEJ operates mainly in the former FATA, Punjab, Balochistan, and Karachi, as well as in Afghanistan. It reportedly has close ties with both Al Qaeda and the TTP.

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