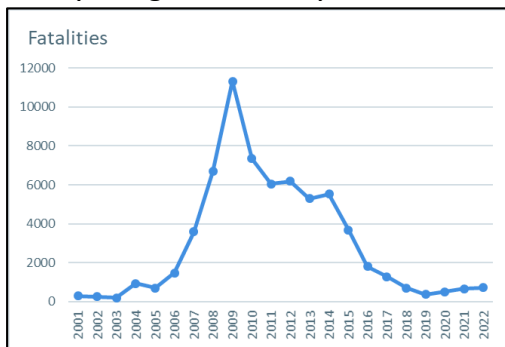


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Terrorist and Other Militant Groups in Pakistan

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 (see **Figure 1**). Many observers predicted a resurgence of regional terrorism and militancy in the wake of the Afghan Taliban’s August 2021 takeover. Since 2019, after five consecutive years of declining fatality rates, the number of annual terrorism deaths in Pakistan is again on the rise, though remaining well below 2007-2015 levels.

Figure 1. Terrorism-Related Fatalities in Pakistan, 2001-2022 (through October 20)



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (New Delhi).

According to the U.S. State Department’s *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020* (released in December 2021), “Pakistan took steps in 2020 to counter terror financing and to restrain India-focused militant groups,” and its government “made limited progress on the most difficult aspects of its 2015 National Action Plan to counter terrorism....” The report notes the criminal conviction of several high-profile terrorists, while conveying that Pakistan did not “take steps under its domestic authorities to prosecute other terrorist leaders residing in Pakistan.” It continues: “Although Pakistan’s national action plan calls to ‘ensure that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country,’ several UN- and U.S.-designated terrorist groups that focus on attacks outside the country continued to operate from Pakistani soil in 2020.... The government and military acted inconsistently with respect to terrorist safe havens throughout the country. Authorities did not take sufficient action to dismantle certain terrorist groups.”

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 (FATF’s “black list” designates “high-risk and non-cooperative jurisdictions”). Observers saw successful completion of the FATF action plan as critical to Pakistan’s economic reform efforts and attractiveness to foreign investors, as well as for demonstrating sustained action against all militant groups based in Pakistan. In mid-2021, FATF reported that Pakistan had completed all but one of 34 recommended “action plan items.” In October 2022, FATF assessed that Pakistan had successfully addressed technical deficiencies and completed all action items, and it removed the country from the “gray list.”

Globally Oriented Militants

Al Qaeda (AQ) “core” was established in 1988 in Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden and designated by the United States as an FTO in 1999. U.S.-led forces expelled AQ from Afghanistan following the group’s commission of the 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**) and in the megacity of Karachi, as well as in Afghanistan. Bin Laden was killed in a May 2011 raid by U.S. special forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and was succeeded by Ayman al-Zawahiri. In July 2022, Zawahiri was killed in a U.S.-launched airstrike on Kabul, Afghanistan; a successor has yet to be named. While AQ currently lacks an operational capability in Afghanistan, U.S. officials assess that the group intends to reconstitute its ability to conduct external attacks from Afghan territory.

Figure 2. Map of Pakistan



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

Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was established in 2014 under the leadership of Asim Umar—a now-deceased Indian national and former member of a Kashmiri terrorist group—and was designated as an FTO in 2016. With an estimated several hundred members, AQIS has been implicated in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, 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 1,500-4,000 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 both Pakistan's Punjab province and in Pakistan-administered (Azad) Kashmir, it is more recently fronted as the ostensibly charitable Jamaat-ud-Dawa. LET was responsible for major November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India, as well as numerous other high-profile attacks.

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) was founded in 2000 by Kashmiri militant leader Masood Azhar and was 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 also 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 composed largely of ethnic Pashtun militants who unified under the leadership of now-deceased Baitullah Mehsud, then based in the former South Waziristan FATA agency, 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 suspected links to Al Qaeda, the TTP's estimated 3,000-5,000 members seek to defeat Pakistan's government and establish Sharia law in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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 operating mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of Pakistan.

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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