



Af/Pak Militants



Homebase: Afghanistan & Pakistan

Key Leaders/Members

Mullah Mohammed Omar
Founder/Leader of Taliban

Mohammed Ajmal
Co-Founder/Leader of HUJI

Hakimullah Mehsud*
Emir of TTP
**Reportedly killed in drone strike 11/1/13*

Farooq Kashmiri
Secretary-General of HuM

Hafiz Muhammad Saeed
Emir of LeT

Usman Ghazi
Emir of IMU

Abdul Rauf Asghar
Supreme Commander of JeM

Akram Lahori
Commander of LeJ

History, Intent, and Capability

Afghanistan and Pakistan (sometimes abbreviated as Af/Pak) have long been home to a variety of jihadist organizations, the numbers of which ballooned following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. While much of the focus in Western media remains on al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, there are a host of groups operating in the Af/Pak region with varying connections to al-Qa'ida and its brand of global jihad. Today there are three major types of jihadist groups operating in the region:

1) Local and Regional Jihadist Organizations: This category is by far the most numerous and diverse, and contains the groups with the closest ties to al-Qa'ida. Foremost amongst these groups are the Afghan Taliban, which provided safe haven for al-Qa'ida prior to the 9/11 attacks. This group combines Pashtun nationalism with Deobandi Islamic fundamentalism (a strict form of revivalist Sunni Islam which views Shia Muslims as apostates) and is active in Eastern Afghanistan, with some spillover to Northwest Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Pakistani militant group responsible for numerous attacks against India—including the 2008 Mumbai attacks – is active across Pakistan, but especially on the Kashmir border. Multiple groups in this category reportedly maintain or previously had close ties with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, and were used as proxies to fight India, particularly in Kashmir. Other groups in this category include Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Most of these groups have members that have participated in the insurgency against coalition forces in Afghanistan, but currently lack the clear intent, demonstrated capability, or both to strike the US Homeland.

2) Anti-Pakistani Militant Organizations: The primary organization here is the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, which is itself an umbrella organization of various Islamist militant groups based in the northwestern Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border in Pakistan. TTP views the Pakistani government as a traitor to jihadist cause due to its increased counterterrorism efforts and cooperation with the US-led "War on Terror." TTP is primarily locally focused on Pakistani targets, although Faisal Shahzad—who attempted to detonate a VBIED in Times Square in 2010—trained on explosives in a TTP camp. While this may signal TTP intent to strike the US Homeland, its capabilities outside of the Af/Pak region are limited.

3) Anti-Shia Sectarian Organizations: Prime examples in this category include Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its splinter group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which has been particularly active recently and has reportedly increased its cooperation with TTP. These groups follow Deobandi traditions (like the Taliban groups). Sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims has become increasingly common not only in Pakistan, but across the Muslim world in places like Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Currently both SSP and LeJ likely lack both the clear intent and demonstrated capability to strike the US Homeland.

Future Outlook

The ongoing US military drawdown in Afghanistan will allow many of these groups to operate more freely and allow them to build capabilities; however the question remains whether the lack of a US presence - that could increase their capability to attack US interests (in the region or in the homeland) - might also influence their intent to target US interests. These organizations, at least the ones with continued interest in attacking US and Western interests, are likely to switch from military targets in the region to diplomatic and business targets as the drawdown continues.