

# Terrorism in South Asia: Main Pakistani Militant Groups Operating In and From Pakistan

By some estimates, Pakistan has trained one-two hundred thousand different militants over the course of its history. What's perhaps less appreciated is that there's actually a very rich variation of the different militant organizations that are both based in and supported by Pakistan.

Now one of the ways in which you can sort of divide up these groups is by the objective of the group. And perhaps one of the most important set of these organizations are the so-called Kashmiri tanzeems. Tanzeem simply means organization, but in the context of Pakistan it means those militant groups that are fighting for Kashmir.

I often call them so-called Kashmiri groups because very rarely are they ethnically Kashmiri, and moreover, very few of them these days actually operate in Kashmir. But this is a reflection of the very reason why these groups were founded in the first place.

Now within these groups that ostensibly are fighting for Kashmir, there's another way that we can define them or break them out further, and that's by their ideology. Islam, like Christianity, like Judaism, has many different ideological strands or sects.

One of the most important sects for militant groups in Pakistan, the region, is referred to Deoband or Deobandism. In Pakistan, Deobandism tends to be associated with the vast majority of militant groups operating in and from Pakistan.

Some of these Deobandi groups you may have heard of. They include Harakat-ul-Ansar, Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, Harakat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, Jaisha-e-Mohammed.

Another major ideological grouping of organizations that are fighting in Kashmir are run under the auspices of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Jamaat-e-Islami is an organization that's related to the Muslim Brotherhood. It's a supra-sectarian organization, and the two organizations that it has primarily been associated with is the Hizbul Mujahideen and the Al-Badr. And of course, like all militant groups, they've been known to break up into different factions.

Now Hizbul Mujahideen and Al-Badr are perhaps different from the other groups fighting allegedly in Kashmir because many of them are, in fact, ethnically Kashmiri. And for the most part, those organizations are still confined to their fighting in Kashmir itself, as opposed to the rest of India.

The third important grouping is perhaps the most dangerous, and that is Ahl-e Hadith. The

primary militant organization that represents this ideological tradition is Lashkar-e-Taiba. You may have heard of Lashkar-e-Taiba because they perpetrated, for example, the November 2008 multiple-site attack in the large city of Mumbai in India, in addition to which LeT has conducted numerous attacks throughout India in Delhi, in Hyderabad, and in recent years LeT has even attacked American targets in Afghanistan, reflecting the fact that these groups are not solely focused upon the liberation of Kashmir.

The second major militant group of an Islamist variety that is based in and from Pakistan is the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan Taliban, again, is a Deobandi organization. The Afghan Taliban aims to liberate Afghanistan from NATO and American occupation and to restore itself as the rightful ruler of Afghanistan.

But the problematic thing is that much of its leadership actually lives within Pakistan. And I might add, they don't live in Pakistan's tribal areas where it's difficult for Pakistanis to go in and get them. In fact, the Pakistani government actively supports them. They're ensconced in Pakistan's major cities such as Quetta, Karachi, and even in the capital city of Islamabad.

This is reflecting that Pakistan is not only not interested in acting against them, but in fact Pakistan sees the Afghan Taliban as their closest partner to achieve its state goals in Afghanistan.

Now a third major grouping of militants operating in and from Pakistan is a set of organizations called the Pakistani Taliban. Now, in some sense this label's misleading, because the Pakistan Taliban is actually an umbrella organization for several different militant commanders. And sometimes these militant commanders work together. Sometimes they work against one another.

But what the Pakistan Taliban have in common is they're all Deobandi, and they see as their primary objective the establishment of different kinds of Sharia in Pakistan.

In recent years the Pakistani Taliban has more or less decided that they're not opposed to any one particular party or any one particular leader, be it civilian or in fact military, but rather what they would like to do is have Pakistan become an Islamist state.

So in recent years they've attacked civilians, they've attacked military, they've attacked police, they've attacked intelligence organizations. And most importantly, they have waged a sustained battle against Pakistan's own civilians, especially those Pakistanis who practice variants of Islam with which they have serious objections.

To give you some context of the gravity of the deaths that Pakistanis have experienced, there's anywhere between 40,000 and 50,000 Pakistanis that have died in the last decade alone.

Now the other major organization that is primarily Pakistani, again based in Pakistan, is what we call sectarian tanzeems, sectarian organizations. Now this is in some sense also a misnomer,

just like the word Kashmiri tanzeems.

When we talk about sectarian militant groups, we're really talking about Deobandis attacking mostly Shia, but in recent years they've also been attacking Sufis. Sufis are the majority of Pakistanis. But they've also been attacking Ahmadiyyas. Ahmadiyyas are problematic in Pakistan, and elsewhere, I might add, for example, like Bangladesh and Afghanistan, because Ahmadiyyas do not accept the finality of the Prophet. So for many Pakistanis they're considered to be apostates.

So there's a whole series of Pakistanis that have become victim to these different sectarian organizations. It's also really important to understand that the sectarian tanzeems have a lot of overlapping membership with the Pakistani Taliban and the Afghan Taliban, as well the different organizations operating in Kashmir, all of whom have one thing in common-- they are Deobandi.

Finally, there's one more incredibly important group that has sanctuary in Pakistan even though many of its cadres are not necessarily Pakistani, and that is Al Qaeda.

After the Americans invaded Afghanistan, many of the Al Qaeda operatives, along with the Taliban, moved into Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas. We know that bin Laden entered Pakistan late in 2001 or early in 2002.

Many of the key Al Qaeda operatives have been captured with Pakistani help in Pakistani cities. This is important because many people think that terrorism and insurgency is only a problem in Pakistan's somewhat feral and difficult to manage federally administered tribal areas. Yet all of these operatives have been caught in Pakistan's major cities.

Most importantly, Osama bin Laden was identified and his compound was raided, and in this raid Osama bin Laden was killed in May of 2011 in the cantonment town of Abbottabad.

Now this is absolutely profound. The compound where bin Laden was ensconced was about one mile from the Pakistan Military Academy, which is the equivalent of-- basically it's Pakistan's West Point. Curiously, to date, Pakistan has not arrested anyone who's been associated with harboring bin Laden. Instead, and I think this reflects the priorities of the state, the only person it's arrested is the sole physician that worked with the CIA to identify the bin Laden compound.