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International Terrorism in South Asia

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Summary

This report reviews the international terrorist environment in South Asia, concentrating on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.¹ With U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts focused especially on Southwest Asia, the existence of international terrorist groups and their supporters in South Asia is identified as a threat to both regional stability and to the attainment of key U.S. policy goals. Al Qaeda forces that fled from Afghanistan with their Taliban supporters remain active on Pakistani territory, and Al Qaeda is believed to have links with indigenous Pakistani terrorist groups that have conducted anti-Western attacks and that support separatist militancy in Indian Kashmir. A significant portion of Pakistan's ethnic Pashtun population is reported to sympathize with the Taliban and even Al Qaeda. This report will be updated periodically.

In the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, President Bush launched major military operations in South and Southwest Asia as part of the global U.S.-led anti-terrorism effort. Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan has seen substantive success with the vital assistance of neighboring Pakistan. Yet the United States increasingly is concerned that members of Al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters have found haven and been able to at least partially regroup in Pakistani cities and in the rugged Pakistan-Afghanistan border region inhabited by ethnic Pashtuns who express solidarity with anti-U.S. forces. Al Qaeda also reportedly has made alliances with indigenous Pakistani terrorist groups that have been implicated in both anti-Western attacks in Pakistan and terrorism in Indian Kashmir, while also seeking to oust the government of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Along with these concerns, the United States expresses an interest in the cessation of "cross-border infiltration" by separatist militants based in Pakistani-controlled areas who cross the Kashmiri Line of Control (LOC) to engage in terrorist activities in Indian Kashmir and in Indian cities.

¹ The report excludes discussion of Sri Lanka and Nepal, where the activities of groups identified by the United States as engaging in terrorism have only minor international dimensions. See also CRS Report RL31624, *Pakistan-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation*, by K. Alan Kronstadt, and CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Pakistani Terrorist Groups

The Al Qaeda-Taliban Nexus. Among the central goals of Operation Enduring Freedom were the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.² Most, but not all, of these goals have been achieved. However, since the Taliban's ouster from power in Kabul and subsequent retreat to the rugged mountain region near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, what the U.S. military calls its "remnant forces" have been able to regroup and to conduct "hit-and-run" attacks against U.S.-led coalition forces, possibly in tandem with suspected Al Qaeda fugitives. These forces are then able to find haven on the Pakistani side of the border.³ Al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden may himself be in a remote area of Pakistan near Afghanistan. The frequency of these attacks has increased throughout 2003 and, in October, U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad reportedly warned that resurgent Taliban and Al Qaeda forces are presenting a serious threat to Afghani reconstruction efforts.⁴

Indigenous Pakistani Terrorist Groups. In January 2002, Pakistan banned five extremist organizations, including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). The United States designates LET and JEM as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs); SSP appears on the State Department's terrorism "watch list." Following Al Qaeda's 2001-2002 expulsion from Afghanistan and ensuing relocation of some core elements to Pakistani cities such as Karachi and Peshawar, some Al Qaeda activists are believed to have joined forces with indigenous Pakistani Sunni militant groups, including LET, JEM, SSP, and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, an FTO-designated offshoot of the SSP.⁵ Al Qaeda reportedly was linked to anti-U.S. and anti-Western terrorist attacks in Pakistan during 2002, although the primary suspects in such attacks have been from indigenous Pakistani groups.⁶ During 2003, Pakistan's

² Al Qaeda members are most readily identified as being Arabs or other non-Afghanis who are fighting an international jihad, while Taliban members are ethnic Pashtun Afghans who are fighting for Islamic rule in Kabul.

³ Pakistan's western regions are populated by conservative ethnic Pashtuns who share intimate religious and tribal linkages with their counterparts in Afghanistan and who are seen to sympathize with Taliban and sometimes Al Qaeda forces while holding vehement anti-Western and anti-American sentiments (see, for example, Eliza Griswold, "Where the Taliban Roam," *Harper's*, September 2003; Owais Tohid, "Tribes Inflamed By Qaeda Hunt," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 20, 2003).

⁴ Carlotta Gall, "Taliban May Be Planning Larger Attacks, U.S. Envoy Says," *New York Times*, October 7, 2003.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism - 2002*, April 30, 2003; Hasan Mansoor, "Karachi Killings Reveal Sectarian-Jihadi Nexus," *Friday Times* (Lahore), October 10, 2003.

⁶ The most notable of these attacks were the January 2002 kidnapping and ensuing murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl; a March grenade attack on a Protestant church in Islamabad that killed five, including a U.S. Embassy employee and her daughter; a May car bombing that killed 14 outside a Karachi hotel, including 11 French defense technicians; and a June car bombing outside the U.S. consulate in Karachi that killed 12 Pakistani nationals. Arrests and some convictions have resulted in each of these cases.

domestic terrorism mostly has involved Sunni-Shia conflict.⁷ Some analysts believe that, by redirecting Pakistan's internal security resources, this increase in sectarian violence may ease pressure on Al Qaeda and so allow that group to operate more freely.⁸

In a landmark January 2002 speech, President Musharraf vowed to end Pakistan's use as a base for terrorism, and he criticized religious extremism and intolerance in the country. In the wake of the speech, about 3,300 extremists were arrested and detained, though perhaps half of these have since been released. These releases included the founders of both Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad. Though officially banned, these groups continue to operate under new names: LET is now Jamaat al-Dawat; JEM is now Khudam-ul Islam; and Harakat-ul Mujahideen is now Jamiat-ul Ansar.⁹

Pakistan-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation

According to the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, Pakistan has afforded the United States unprecedented levels of cooperation by allowing the U.S. military to use bases within the country, helping to identify and detain extremists, and deploying tens of thousands of its own security forces to secure the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Top U.S. officials regularly praise Pakistani anti-terrorism efforts. In the spring of 2002, U.S. military and law enforcement personnel reportedly began engaging in direct, low-profile efforts to assist Pakistani security forces in tracking and apprehending fugitive Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters on Pakistani territory. The State Department reports that Islamabad has facilitated the transfer of more than 400 captured alleged terrorists to U.S. custody, including several top suspected Al Qaeda leaders.¹⁰ Pakistan also ranks fourth in the world in seizing terrorist assets.¹¹

Despite Pakistan's "crucial" cooperation, there remain doubts about Islamabad's commitment to core U.S. concerns in the vast "lawless zones" of the Afghani-Pakistani border region where Islamic extremists find shelter.¹² Especially worrisome are indications that the Taliban receive significant logistical and other support inside Pakistan. Senator Richard Lugar and Senator Joseph Biden reportedly have voiced such worries, including concern that elements of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency

⁷ About three-quarters of Pakistan's Muslims are Sunnis. Major sectarian violence in 2003 included a July strike on a Quetta mosque that killed more than 50 Shiite worshipers (blamed on the SSP), and the October assassination of Maulana Azam Tariq, leader of the militant Sunni SSP and member of the Pakistani parliament, who was gunned down with four others in Islamabad.

⁸ "Pakistan: A New Wave of Sunni-Shiite Violence?," Stratfor.com, October 7, 2003.

⁹ Paul Watson, "Revolving Doors for Pakistan's Militants," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 2002; "Musharraf Says Heads of Two Extremist Groups Did Nothing Illegal," Agence France-Presse, March 2, 2003; "Militant Suspects Freed in Pakistan," BBC News, January 31, 2003. On FTO issues, see CRS Report RL32120, *The 'FTO List' and Congress*, by Audrey Kurth Cronin.

¹⁰ Among those captured are Abu Zubaydah (March 2002), believed to be Al Qaeda's field commander; Ramzi bin al-Shibh (September 2002), said to be a key figure in the planning of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States; and Khalid Mohammed (March 2003), alleged mastermind of the September 2001 attacks and close associate of Osama bin Laden.

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism - 2002*, April 30, 2003.

¹² Statement of George Tenet Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Worldwide Threats to National Security," February 6, 2002.

(ISI) might be helping members of the Taliban and perhaps even Al Qaeda.¹³ In August 2003, at least three Pakistani army officers, including a lieutenant colonel, were arrested on suspicion of having ties to Islamic extremists. In late September, Deputy Secretary of State Armitage was quoted as saying he does “not think that affection for working with us extends up and down the rank and file of the Pakistani security community.” In October testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Peter Rodman said, “There are elements in the Pakistani government who we suspect are sympathetic to the old policy of before 9/11,” adding that there still exists in northwestern Pakistan a radical Islamic infrastructure that “spews out fighters that go into Kashmir as well as into Afghanistan.”¹⁴

Military Operations. In an effort to block infiltration along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, Islamabad had by the end of 2002 deployed some 70,000 troops to the region. In June 2003, in what may have been a response to increased U.S. pressure, Islamabad for the first time sent its armed forces into the traditionally autonomous western Federally Administered Tribal Areas in search of renegade Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters who have eluded the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan. By September, Islamabad had up to 25,000 troops in the tribal areas, and a major border operation reportedly took place in coordination with U.S.-led forces on the Afghani side of the border. In early October, Pakistani security forces engaged suspected Al Qaeda fugitives in the South Waziristan district, killing 8 and capturing 18 others.¹⁵ Pakistan has lost at least 12 of its own security personnel in gun battles with Al Qaeda fighters. The October operations have encouraged U.S. officials, who see in them a positive trend in Islamabad’s commitment to tracking and capturing wanted extremists on Pakistani territory. Still, these officials admit that the Pakistani government finds it more difficult politically to pursue Taliban members who enjoy ethnic and familial ties with Pakistani Pashtuns.¹⁶

Madrassas and Pakistan Islamists. A notable development in September 2003 was the arrest by Pakistani security forces of 19 Indonesian and Malaysian nationals at a Karachi madrassa (Islamic school). The men are suspected of running a sleeper cell of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist network in what would be the first indication that JI,

¹³ James Dao, “Terror Aid From Pakistan Concerns Senators,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2003. See also, Testimony of Timothy Hoyt Before the Joint Hearing of the Subcommittees on Asia and the Pacific and International Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Human Rights, October 29, 2003.

¹⁴ Zaffar Abbas, “Pakistan Arrests Army Officers,” BBC News, August 31, 2003; “Armitage - Some Pakistanis Reluctant to Work With US,” Reuters News, September 30, 2003; “Transcript: Senate Foreign Relations Committee Holds Hearing on Security and Democracy in Afghanistan,” Federal Documents Clearing House, October 16, 2003.

¹⁵ John Lancaster, “Pakistan Touts Control of Border,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 2003; “Pakistan Army Launches Border Operation,” BBC News, September 4, 2003; “Pakistan’s Army Kills 12 in Attacks Against Qaeda,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2003.

¹⁶ See the testimony of both William Taylor and Brig. Gen. Gary North in “Transcript: Senate Foreign Relations Committee Holds Hearing on Security and Democracy in Afghanistan,” Federal Documents Clearing House, October 16, 2003.

a group linked to Al Qaeda, is operating in Pakistan.¹⁷ Among the approximately 10,000 madrassas in Pakistan are some that have been implicated in teaching militant anti-Western, anti-American, and anti-Hindu values. Many of these madrassas are financed and operated by Pakistani Islamist political parties such as Jamaat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI, closely linked to the Taliban), as well as by multiple unknown foreign entities. While President Musharraf has in the past pledged to crack down on the more extremist madrassas in his country, there is little concrete evidence that he has done so.¹⁸

The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) — a coalition of six Islamist opposition parties — holds about 20% of Pakistan’s National Assembly seats, while also controlling the provincial assembly in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and leading a coalition in the provincial assembly of Baluchistan. Pakistan’s Islamists, including the leadership of some of their legal political parties, are notable for their virulent expressions of anti-American sentiment; they have at times called for “jihad” against what they view as the existential threat to Pakistani sovereignty that alliance with Washington entails. In addition to decrying President Musharraf’s cooperation with the United States, many also are viewed as opposing the U.S.-supported Kabul government. In September 2003, Afghani President Karzai called on Pakistani clerics to stop supporting Taliban members who seek to destabilize Afghanistan.¹⁹

Terrorism in Kashmir and India

Separatist violence in the Indian Jammu and Kashmir state has surged in recent months. New Delhi consistently blames Pakistan-based militant groups for lethal attacks on Indian civilians, as well as on government security forces, in both Kashmir and in major Indian cities. India holds Pakistan responsible for providing material support and training facilities to Kashmiri militants. Most often blamed for terrorism in India are FTO-designates Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Harakat ul-Mujahideen, and Hizbul Mujahideen, the latter identified on the State Department’s terrorism watch list. According to the U.S. government, several anti-India militant groups fighting in Kashmir are based in Pakistan and are closely linked to Islamist groups there:

- Harakat ul-Mujahideen, based mainly in Muzaffarabad (Azad Kashmir) and Rawalpindi, is aligned with the Jamiat-i Ulema-i Islam Fazlur Rehman party (JUI-F), itself a constituent of the MMA Islamist coalition in Pakistan’s National Assembly;
- Hizbul Mujahideen, believed to have bases in Pakistan, is the militant wing of Pakistan’s largest Islamic political party and MMA member, the Jamaat-i-Islami;
- Jaish-e-Mohammed, based in both Peshawar and Muzaffarabad, also is aligned with JUI-F; and

¹⁷ O. Tohid, “Pakistan Widens Terror Dragnet,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 2003.

¹⁸ Ahmed Rashid, “Afghanistan and Pakistan - Safe Haven for the Taliban,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 16, 2003; “Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military,” International Crisis Group Report 49, March 20, 2003. See also CRS Report RS21654, *Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas*, by Febe Armanios.

¹⁹ See “MMA Calls for Change in Foreign Policy,” *Dawn* (Karachi), September 10, 2003. JUI leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman reportedly said he considers Americans to be “criminals” and the Taliban “innocent” (“MMA Opposes Pak-US Military Drive,” *News* (Karachi), June 24, 2003). “Karzai Tells Pakistan Clerics - Don’t Back Taliban,” Reuters News, September 12, 2003.

- Lashkar-i-Taiba, based in Muzaffarabad and near Lahore, is the armed wing of a Pakistan-based, anti-U.S. Sunni religious organization formed in 1989.²⁰

Pakistan's powerful and largely autonomous ISI is widely believed to have provided significant support for militant Kashmiri separatists over the past decade in what is perceived as a proxy war against India.²¹ In March 2003, the chief of India's Defense Intelligence Agency reported providing the United States with "solid documentary proof" that 70 Islamic militant camps are operating in Pakistani Kashmir. In May, the Indian Defense Minister claimed that about 3,000 "terrorists" were being trained in camps on the Pakistani side of the LOC. Some Indian officials have suggested that Al Qaeda may be active in Kashmir.²² Deputy Secretary of State Armitage reportedly received a June 2002 pledge from Pakistani President Musharraf that all "cross-border terrorism" would cease, followed by a May 2003 pledge that any terrorist training camps in Pakistani-controlled areas would be closed. Yet, in September, Indian PM Vajpayee reportedly told President Bush that continued cross-border terrorism from Pakistan was making it difficult for India to maintain its peace initiative, and current infiltration rates are widely believed to be on the rise.²³ Musharraf adamantly insists that his government is doing all it can to stem infiltration at the LOC and calls for a joint Pakistan-India monitoring effort there.

In signs that the United States may be increasing its pressure on Islamabad to further stem terrorist activities, the Treasury Department in October 2003 designated the Pakistan-based Al Akhtar Trust as a terrorist support organization under Executive Order 13224. Al Akhtar is said to be carrying on support for Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorist activities funded by the previously-designated Al Rashid Trust. The United States also in October identified Indian crime figure Dawood Ibrahim as a "global terrorist" with links to both Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Ibrahim, wanted by the Indian government for 1993 Bombay bombings that killed some 300 and injured thousands more, is believed to be in Pakistan.²⁴ These moves by the U.S. government were welcomed in New Delhi, where officials continuously are urging greater U.S. attention to anti-India terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

²⁰ See U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism - 2002*, April 30, 2003.

²¹ "Although Pakistan did not begin the [1989] uprising in Kashmir, the temptation to fan the flames was too great for Islamabad to resist. Using guerrilla-warfare expertise gained during the Afghan war, Pakistan's ISI began to provide active backing for Kashmiri Muslim insurgents" Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 2001, p. 305.

²² "India Says It Has Given Proof of 70 Islamic Militant Camps in Pakistan-Controlled Kashmir," Associated Press Newswires, March 14, 2003; "3,000 'Terrorists' Being Trained in Pakistani Kashmir: India," Agence France-Presse, July 30, 2003. In October, the Indian Chief of Army Staff raised the possibility of an Al Qaeda presence, as "most of the terrorists killed in [Jammu and Kashmir] are foreign nationals these days" ("Al Qaeda Presence Not Ruled Out in J&K," *Hindu* (Madras), October 12, 2003).

²³ Chidanand Rajghatta, "Cross-Border Terror Continues, Vajpayee Tells Bush," *Times of India* (Delhi), September 25, 2003; Scott Baldauf, "Insurgents Push Into Kashmir," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 7, 2003.

²⁴ "U.S. Designates Al Akhtar," U.S. Treasury Department Press Release, October 14, 2003; "U.S. Designates Dawood Ibrahim," U.S. Treasury Department Press Release, October 16, 2003.