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Country Report on Terrorism 2017 - Chapter 1 - Pakistan

Overview: Pakistan continued to experience significant terrorist threats in 2017, although the number of attacks and casualties has decreased from previous years. Major terrorist groups focused on conducting attacks in Pakistan included the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and the sectarian group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi al-Alami (LJA). Islamic State’s Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) claimed several major attacks against Pakistani targets, some of which may have been conducted in collaboration with other terrorist groups. Groups located in Pakistan, but focused on conducting attacks outside the country, included the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network (HQN), Lashkar e-Tayyiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Terrorists used a range of tactics – stationary and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, and rocket-propelled grenades – to attack individuals, schools, markets, government institutions, and places of worship.

The Pakistani government and military continued high-profile efforts to disrupt terrorist attacks and eliminate anti-state militants. Progress, however, remained slow on the government’s efforts to implement UN sanctions related to designated entities and enforce anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) controls.

The Pakistani government pledged support to political reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban but did not restrict the Afghan Taliban and HQN from operating in Pakistan-based safe havens and threatening U.S. and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. The government failed to significantly limit LeT and JeM from openly raising money, recruiting, and training in Pakistan – although Pakistan’s Elections Commission refused to allow a LeT-affiliated group register as a political party.

In November, a Pakistani court ordered the release of Hafiz Saeed, the alleged mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

2017 Terrorist Incidents: Pakistan suffered numerous terrorist attacks throughout 2017. The following examples include some of the more destructive and high-profile attacks and show a variety of methods, targets, and perpetrators.

- On February 16, a suicide bomber killed at least 88 people at the Sufi shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sindh Province and injured more than 300. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.
- One June 24, twin explosions in Parachinar in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) killed at least 67. LJA claimed responsibility for the attacks. The heavily Shia area suffered several other large attacks in 2017, including a January 21 bombing and a March 31 suicide attack. Each of these two attacks killed at least 25 people and injured many others.
- On July 24, a suicide bomber killed at least 26, including nine policemen, in downtown Lahore, the provincial capital of Punjab. TTP claimed responsibility for the attack.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Government of Pakistan continued to implement the Antiterrorism Act (ATA) of 1997, the National Counterterrorism Authority Act (NACTA), the 2014 Investigation for Fair Trial Act, and 2014 amendments to the ATA, all of which allow enhanced law enforcement and prosecutorial powers for terrorism cases. The law allows for preventive detention, permits the death penalty for terrorism offenses, and creates special Anti-Terrorism Courts. On March 31, however, the government renewed for two more years a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians on terrorism charges. Critics argued the military courts were not transparent and were being used to silence civil society activists.

Military, paramilitary, and civilian security forces conducted counterterrorism operations throughout Pakistan. The Intelligence Bureau has nationwide jurisdiction and is empowered to coordinate with provincial counterterrorism departments. The Ministry of Interior has more than 10 law enforcement-related entities under its administration. The National Counter Terrorism Authority acts as a coordinating body.

Pakistan collects biometric information at land crossings with its International Border Management Security System. Authorities had limited ability to detect smuggling via air travel. The Customs Service attempted to enforce anti-money laundering laws and foreign exchange regulations at all major airports, in coordination with other agencies. Customs’ end-use verification managed the entry of dual-use chemicals for legitimate purposes, while attempting to prevent their diversion for use in improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In keeping with UNSCR 2178 (2014), returning foreign terrorist fighters may be prosecuted under Pakistani law. NACTA compiles and verifies data on returning fighters.

In February, Pakistan’s military announced the nationwide Radd-ul-Fasaad or “Elimination of Strife” operation to prevent cross-border terrorist attacks and limit militants’ access to explosives and weapons. Government and military sources reported scores of military and police operations to disrupt, kill, and apprehend terrorists. Military courts sentenced at least 15 convicted terrorists to death in 2017.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Pakistan is a member of the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. Pakistan criminalizes terrorist financing through the ATA, but implementation remains uneven.

FATF continued to note concern that Pakistan’s outstanding gaps in the implementation of the UN Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and al-Qa’ida sanctions regime have not been resolved, and that UN-listed entities – including LeT and its affiliates – were not effectively prohibited from raising funds in Pakistan, nor being denied financial services. Although Pakistan’s laws technically comply with international anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism standards, authorities failed to uniformly implement UN sanctions related to designated entities and individuals such as LeT and its affiliates, which continued to make use of economic resources and raise funds. In November, the Lahore High Court refused to extend the detention of LeT founder Hafiz Saeed as it judged the government had not provided sufficient evidence against him nor had it charged Saeed with a crime.

Pakistan’s National Action Plan to combat terrorism includes efforts to prevent and counter terrorist financing, including by enhancing interagency coordination on CFT. The law designates the use of unlicensed *hundi* and *hawala* systems as predicate offences to terrorism and also requires banks to report suspicious transactions to Pakistan’s financial intelligence unit, the State Bank’s Financial Monitoring Unit. These unlicensed money transfer systems persisted throughout the country and were open to abuse by terrorist financiers operating in the cross-border area.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2018 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): In November, NACTA finalized a National Narrative to Counter Violent Extremism, which will serve as the basis of the government’s future efforts in this area. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the military’s public relations wing shaped media messages to build support for the military’s counterterrorism initiatives. The government operated some de-radicalization camps offering “corrective religious education,” vocational training, counseling, and therapy. A Pakistani non-governmental organization administered the widely praised Sabaoon Rehabilitation Center in Swat Valley, which was founded in partnership with the Pakistani military and focused on juvenile terrorists. The Pakistani cities of Nowshera, Peshawar, and Quetta are members of the Strong Cities Network.

There were continued reports that some madrassahs taught extremist doctrine. Increasing government supervision of madrassahs is a component of the National Action Plan, and there was evidence of continued government efforts to increase regulation of the sector. Security analysts and madrassah reform proponents observed, however, that many madrassahs failed to register with the government, to provide to

the government documentation of their sources of funding, or to only accept foreign students with valid visas, a background check, and the consent of their governments, as required by law.

International and Regional Cooperation: Pakistan participated in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation meetings on counterterrorism and in other multilateral fora where counterterrorism cooperation was discussed, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (as an observer), the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, and the Global Counterterrorism Forum, of which it is a founding member.

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