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Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Pakistan

Overview: In 2023, Pakistani authorities took steps to counter terrorism financing and completed an updated National Risk Assessment (NRA) that included terrorist financing components. Pakistani authorities extradited a dual U.S.-Pakistani citizen to the United States in December to face prosecution for terrorism-related crimes. Pakistan took some steps to curtail the activities of terrorist groups.

The number of terrorist attacks and casualties in Pakistan was more than 50 percent higher than in 2022, according to statistics from several Pakistan-based security research institutions. Attacks were concentrated primarily in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces, along the border with Afghanistan, with both civilian populations and Pakistani security forces as the most common targets. Major terrorist groups that conducted attacks in the country included the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Balochistan Liberation Army, and local ISIS branches. Terrorist groups continued to use small-arms attacks and explosives as their primary tactics.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: Pakistan faced a significant increase in the number of terrorist attacks in 2023, compared with 2022. The following examples are among the more-destructive and higher-profile incidents and show a variety of methods, targets, and perpetrators:

- On January 30 a suicide bombing on a police mosque, claimed by TTP offshoot TTP-Mohmand, killed 95 people, mostly police, and injured more than 157 others.
- ISIS-Khorasan claimed responsibility for a July 3 suicide attack on a political rally of Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (or JUI-F) in Bajaur, KP, that killed more than 50 people.
- On September 7, TTP launched coordinated, large-scale attacks on military checkpoints in Chitral, KP, reportedly killing four soldiers.
- On September 29 a suicide attack on a religious procession in Mastung, Balochistan, during celebrations of the Prophet's birthday killed at least 60 people. A separate September 29 attack on a mosque adjacent to a police station in Hangu, KP, killed five persons. No terrorist group issued definitive claims for either attack.
- On December 12 a suicide attack on a military post in Dera Ismail Khan district, KP, killed 23 Pakistani soldiers and wounded at least 30 people. An Islamist militant group claimed responsibility.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There were no changes in 2023. The Pakistani government continued to implement the Antiterrorism Act of 1997, the National Counterterrorism Authority Act, the 2014 Investigation for Fair Trial Act, and major 2014 and 2020 amendments to the Antiterrorism Act, all of which give law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts enhanced powers in terrorism cases.

Military, paramilitary, and civilian security forces conducted CT operations throughout Pakistan against anti-state militants in 2023. Pakistani law allows for preventive detention, permits the death penalty for terrorism offenses, and creates specialized courts to try expedited terrorism cases. Authorities sometimes have used antiterrorism courts to try cases unrelated to terrorism, such as blasphemy cases.

Pakistan collects biometric information at land crossings through its International Border Management Security System. The Customs Service attempted to enforce anti-money laundering laws and foreign exchange regulations at all major airports, in coordination with other agencies. Customs managed the entry of dual-use chemicals for legitimate purposes through end-use verification, while also attempting to prevent their diversion for use in IEDs.

Consistent with UNSCR 2178, returning FTFs may be prosecuted under Pakistani law. There were about 100 Pakistani nationals in northeast Syria. To date, Pakistan has declined to repatriate any of its nationals.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Pakistan is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, and its Financial Intelligence Unit is the Financial Monitoring Unit Pakistan.

In 2023, Pakistan continued to face significant money-laundering and terrorist financing risks. Pakistan completed its updated NRA for money laundering and terrorist financing, which assessed 87 terrorist organizations and conducted a sectoral vulnerability assessment. The assessment noted that 41 terrorist organizations have been active in Pakistan with varying degrees of operations. The assessment also identified donations and extortion as key sources for terrorist financing, with cash/cash couriers and illegal money or value transfer services as the most common channels, noting that Pakistan's porous border with Afghanistan was an important contextual challenge.

Pakistan disseminated the assessment to relevant law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders, directing them to implement policy and operational priorities.

Countering Violent Extremism: The government in 2023 continued to operate “deradicalization” camps offering “corrective religious education,” vocational training, and counseling. Additional “deradicalization” centers operate in KP province. The KP provincial government’s Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism held several conferences and dialogues in 2023 on CVE. Some madrassas taught doctrines that could lead to greater acceptance of violent extremist ideology. Some madrassas failed to register with the government, provide documentation of their sources of funding, or comply with laws governing acceptance of foreign students.

The Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) Office within Pakistan’s National Counterterrorism Authority (NACTA) increased its staffing in 2023, including by adding new subject-matter experts. NACTA signed an MOU with Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission in 2023 to cooperate on P/CVE efforts at universities nationwide.

International and Regional Cooperation: Pakistan participated in several formal and informal multilateral fora where CT cooperation was discussed, including, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. The Pakistani cities of Karachi, Larkana, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, and Quetta are members of the Strong Cities Network.