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PAKISTAN: A guide to main militant groups



Photo: [Abdul Majeed Goraya/IRIN](#)

Bombings have allowed the militants' presence to be felt across the country

ISLAMABAD, 13 October 2010 (IRIN) - There are at least nine major militant groups in northern Pakistan and the Punjab, battling the Pakistan army, US forces, and each other. Bombings of Sufi shrines in the cities of Karachi and Lahore this year - the hardliners' response to that more moderate tradition within Islam - has added to the toll of violence.

Most of the armed groups operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Area and neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province are splinter groups from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). They have varying degrees of loyalty to leaders of the Afghan Taliban - notably Mullah Omar - but all share the same broad goal of Islamic Shariah rule for Pakistan, and the expulsion of US forces from the region.

An estimated 1.23 million people remain [displaced](#) as a result of the fighting between militants and the Pakistani army in the tribal territories that border Afghanistan. With the military's focus shifting to flood relief, there is concern of a

resurgence in violence.

IRIN provides a Who's Who? guide to Pakistan's main militant groups:

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

Area of operations: Traditionally, the Mehsud group of the TTP, which operates from bases in the tribal territory of South Waziristan; has spearheaded militant operations across the north. This changed after the death of leader Baitullah Mehsud in a US drone strike in August 2009. The TTP has since splintered, with new leader Hakimullah Mehsud operating mainly from his native Orakzai Agency. Other Taliban factions are based in the Khyber Agency and, according to media reports, in southern Punjab.

Targets: Pakistani military personnel and civilians - typically suicide bombings of markets.

Support base: The Mehsud tribe and other tribes loyal to it assisted by foreign militants.

Mullah Nazir Group

Area of operations: South Waziristan

Targets: The Pakistani military and civilians, as well as US forces in Afghanistan.

Base of support: The Wazir tribe near the town of Wana. The group maintains good relations with the Haqqani Network (see below) and has ties to Mullah Omar.

Turkistan Bhattani Group

Area of operations: South Waziristan

Targets: Mainly engaged in a battle with the TTP after splitting from its former ally Baitullah Mehsud in 2007. It is believed to have occasionally targeted US forces in Afghanistan but not Pakistani military personnel or civilians.

Base of support: The Bhattani tribe is the main source of support for leader Turkistan Bhattani. There have been suggestions the group may be backed by Pakistani forces against the TTP.

Haqqani Network

Area of operations: North Waziristan

Targets: Almost exclusively US forces in Afghanistan.

Base of support: The Zadran tribe in Afghanistan's Khost Province.

Widely respected as powerful Mujahedin by tribes across the north since the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces. Support from al-Qaeda and foreign militants; has ties with Mullah Omar, but plans strategy independently.

Gul Bahadur Group

Area of operations: North Waziristan

Targets: Pakistani forces in North Waziristan and US troops in Afghanistan

Base of support: The Wazir and Daur tribes in North Waziristan, especially near the town of Miram Shah.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (North)

Area of operations: All tribal territories, but especially Kurram and Orakzai where there is a Shia population - a minority Muslim sect.

Targets: Pakistani civilians, especially Shias, and military personnel. Attacks on Western nationals in Pakistan.

Base of support: Mainly anti-Shia militant groups from Punjab.

Lashkar-e-Islam

Area of operations: Khyber Agency

Targets: Pakistani civilians

Base of support: The hard-line Deobandi Muslim sect; locked in a battle against militant rivals for control in Khyber.

Ansar-ul-Islam

Area of operations: Khyber Agency

Targets: US forces in Afghanistan

Base of support: The Deobandi and Barelvi sects - especially less hard-line factions. Engaged in battles in Khyber with rival militants.

Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Mohammadi

Area of operations: Swat Valley, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province; attempts to assert influence in Dir.

Targets: Pakistani civilians - especially government figures, including teachers - and military personnel.

Social roots and base of support: Disillusioned members of Pakistani religious and political parties. The group was set up in 1992. Its involvement in more widespread militancy began after 2002, when key leaders were imprisoned after participating in 'jihad' in Afghanistan. It has split into various factions since then.

Groups in Punjab

The southern Punjab is a poverty-stricken, orthodox region - much like the north - but the rise of militant groups has followed a slightly different trajectory. Fierce anti-Shia sectarianism, and 'jihad' aimed at Indian-administered Kashmir, is high on the agenda of these groups.

The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Punjab)

Area of operations: Countrywide

Targets: Shia Muslims, non-Muslims, foreign nationals, state security forces

Base of support: Sectarian groups in Punjab. It first emerged in the Punjab in the 1990s.

Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan

Area of operations: Countrywide with a concentration in the Punjab

Targets: Non-Muslims and the Shia minority

Base of support: Other sectarian groups and hard-line Muslim factions.

Jaish-e-Mohammad

Area of operations: Mainly Indian-held Kashmir and Afghanistan; some role in fighting in north. Headquartered in the southern Punjab

Targets: Indian forces, Western nationals, non-Muslim Pakistanis

Base of support: Backing from hard-line Muslim factions involved in violence in northwest Pakistan and across the border in Afghanistan.

Lashkar-e-Taiba

Area of operations: Based in Punjab. Operates in Indian-held Kashmir and possibly Afghanistan

Targets: Mainly Indian targets

Base of support: Pro-'jihad' and hard-line Muslim groups. Allegations of links to Pakistani intelligence agencies by media. Heavily involved in post-flood relief work and other charitable work.

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