

# Lashkar-e-Islam

## AT A GLANCE

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## HOW TO CITE

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## SUMMARY

**Formed:** 2004

**Disbanded:** Group is active

**First Attack:** UCDP reported fighting between Lashkar-e-Islam and Ansar-ul-Islam in 2006.<sup>1</sup>

**Last Attack:** An attack in the Khyber District in 2018 orchestrated by Lashkar-e-Islam left one civilian dead.<sup>2</sup>

**Updated:** August 2019

## OVERVIEW

Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI) is an Islamic militant group founded in the Khyber District of Pakistan. It promotes a strict Deobandi form of Islam and started off as a sectarian group with anti-Barelvi leanings. LeI's primary goal is to gain territorial control and establish governance over the Khyber District. From 2008 to 2014, LeI was successful in setting up a parallel government in varying regions of the Khyber District. During this time, LeI established a close relationship and conducted attacks with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In 2014, a major Pakistani military offensive forced LeI to relocate to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. While there, LeI has continued to launch attacks in the Khyber District and has come in conflict with the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP).

## NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI) is a militant group which operates in Pakistan's the Khyber District. LeI was founded in 2004 by Mufti Munir Shakir, an extremist religious leader who advocated for a strict Deobandi form of Islam.

Before forming Lashkar-e-Islam, Shakir was a radio preacher for Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi Anil Munkir (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, AMNAM), a fundamentalist religious organization founded by Haji Namdar near the Khyber District in 2003.<sup>3</sup> Namdar's group controlled many sectors of life in the

Khyber District, enforcing required prayer times, banning media and music outlets, and setting up private prisons. In his radio sermons, Shakir advocated for a strict interpretation of Islam and professed extreme views against Shia Muslims. Shakir ultimately left AMNAM, though the reason for his departure is unclear. Because of Shakir's strong and fiery persona, many AMNAM cadres defected to follow Shakir.<sup>4</sup> Most reports suggest that Shakir had established a new group, Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI), by 2004.

In 2004, Shakir had headquartered LeI in the town of Bara.<sup>5</sup> From 2004-2006, LeI fought for control of Bara the greater Khyber District against Ansar-ul-Islam, a Barelvi Sufi group led by Afghanistan-born Pir Saif ur-Rahman.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear whether Shakir established LeI before his encounter with Rahman or as a response to Rahman's more moderate application of Barelvi Islam. Both groups used radio broadcasts to denounce each other and issued fatwas ordering the other group to abandon Khyber.<sup>7</sup> In 2006, fierce clashes erupted between the groups, resulting in the deaths of many civilians. As a result, both Shakir and Rahman were expelled from the region in February 2006 by local tribal councils.<sup>8</sup> At the time LeI was based in Bara while Ansar-ul-Islam set up headquarter in the remote Tirah valley of the Khyber District.<sup>9</sup>

With Shakir expelled from the group's main area of operation, his former student Mangal Bagh Afridi took over as leader of LeI in 2007.<sup>10</sup> Under his leadership, Lashkar-e-Islam became the most consequential group in Khyber, while AI and AMNAM were marginalized. LeI launched a campaign to impose Sharia law in the Khyber District. The group also initiated patrols, set up a system of courts, and appointed local commanders in different areas.<sup>11</sup> In a widely reported incident signifying the extent of their control, LeI executed two men and a woman on charges of adultery.<sup>12</sup> By early 2008, LeI operated an effective parallel government in the Khyber District.<sup>13</sup> Lashkar-e-Islam also regularly blocked the Peshawar-Torkham road, one of two critical supply routes to Afghanistan from Pakistan.

The Pakistan Army attempted to remove LeI from the Khyber District through a series of offensives between 2008 and 2010. However, LeI successfully resisted any military actions taken against it. In June 2008, the Pakistan Army launched an offensive against LeI in the Bara subdivision of the Khyber District.<sup>14</sup> Despite these efforts, local media reported that LeI was back in control in the Bara region by October 2008.<sup>15</sup> By September 2009, LeI controlled almost all of the Khyber District.<sup>16</sup>

Until 2008, LeI primarily operated as a reformist organization, enforcing a strict interpretation of Islam and fighting against gamblers, thieves, drug traffickers, and other criminals in the Bara area. The group had yet to engage in suicide attacks or direct attacks against the state.<sup>17</sup> This dynamic changed as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the largest and deadliest militant umbrella group in Pakistan, established a foothold in the Khyber District. LeI leader Mangal Bagh had previously declined several offers from the TTP to merge groups before 2008.<sup>18</sup> To gain influence in the Khyber District, the TTP conducted a suicide attack that killed more than 40 tribal chiefs.<sup>19</sup> Soon after, the group also assassinated Haji Namdar, the leader of AMNAM. While Namdar's assassination initially infuriated LeI, the group soon formed a close relationship with TTP. LeI began to give TTP militants access to the region and used TTP suicide trainers to instruct its militants.<sup>20</sup> After 2008, LeI began to regularly engage in suicide bombings and attacks on the state. In 2010, LeI assisted the TTP in bombings against the American Consulate in Peshawar, which killed 50 people and wounded over 100.<sup>21</sup> LeI and the TTP also began to regularly attack NATO convoys attempting to reach Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass.<sup>22</sup>

In 2011, LeI militants beheaded a religious scholar of the Zakakhel tribe. The incident set off a wave of violence in the region. Zakakhel tribesmen allied with Ansar-ul-Islam militants to wage a campaign against LeI in the Khyber District. Hundreds of people were displaced and killed from the violent clashes. The Zakakhel militants were able to weaken LeI's militia in parts of the Tirah Valley.<sup>23</sup>

In May 2015, Lashkar-e-Islam announced that it had merged with the TTP.<sup>24</sup> Despite this announcement, LeI and the TTP continue to take independent ownership of attacks and bombings. The extent to which

the groups have truly merged is unknown. It is likely that the groups collaborate on military objectives and large attacks, such as the 2014 Peshawar School Massacre, but maintain independent leadership structures.

From 2014-2015, Pakistan's Army military campaign launched operations 'Khyber 1' and 'Zarb-e-Azab' to dislodge LeI from the Khyber District.<sup>25</sup> The operation successfully crippled LeI's operational capabilities. Afterwards, many LeI militants and their families relocated from the Khyber District to Naryn district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan. According to some reports, LeI members were welcomed by Afghan tribal leaders and financed by the Afghan government, both of which desired to use LeI against Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> After relocating to Nangarhar, LeI continued to launch attacks across the border in Pakistan. For example, Lashkar-e-Islam accepted responsibility for carrying out a suicide attack on the Punjab Home Minister Shuja Khanzada in August 2015.<sup>27</sup> LeI carried out a total of 18 attacks in 2016 and 21 attacks in 2017.<sup>28</sup> LeI desired to regain control of the Khyber District, and, consequently, the vast majority of these attacks were launched against civilians and government officials in that geographic area.

After relocating to Afghanistan, Lashkar-e-Islam formed a loose alliance with the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP). The groups engaged in a power sharing agreement and some operational-level cooperation, which allowed IS-KP to embed itself in Nangarhar province.<sup>29</sup> From 2014-2016, LeI continued to conduct independent attacks in Pakistan while collaborating with IS-KP to mount suicide attacks in Afghanistan. However, the relationship between the two groups quickly collapsed. Serious clashes between LeI and IS-KP militants erupted in 2017 and 2018.<sup>30</sup> Local officials claim that the violence was fueled by conflict over natural resources, such as competition for logging rights in local forests.<sup>31</sup>

In 2016, LeI leader Mangal Baagh was reportedly killed in a U.S. drone strike in Nangarhar.<sup>32</sup> However, the accuracy of these reports is unclear, as false claims of Baagh's death have surfaced before.<sup>33</sup> In 2018, the U.S. State Department offered \$3 million for information on Mangal Baagh's location.<sup>34</sup> As of July 2019, it is unclear whether Baagh still leads LeI in Afghanistan.

Since 2017, LeI's operational capabilities have severely diminished. In 2018, the group conducted only 10 attacks in Pakistan, compared with 21 the year before.<sup>35</sup> Since 2015, many LeI commanders have been killed by U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> LeI's 2014 displacement from Pakistan, its nebulous leadership, and its recent clashes with IS-KP have limited the group's ability to conduct attacks and regain territory. However, LeI militants are still active and primarily reside in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### A. LEADERSHIP

**Mufti Shakir** (2004 to 2007): Mufti Shakir was a Deobandi cleric from the Karbogha village in the district of Hangu. Before moving to the Khyber District in 2004, he was a leader in the hardline religious movement, Harkat-ul-Islam. On behalf of Haji Namdaar and the militant group AMNAM, Shakir gave sermons on a FM radio station denouncing Barelvi clerics and groups in the area. Shakir's sermons made him popular in the region, and he soon developed a following of militants. Shakir left AMNAM in 2004 and founded Lashkar-e-Islam with his followers. From 2004-2006, Shakir helped his group enforce strict Sharia law in territory throughout the Khyber District. However, Shakir found himself in constant conflict with Pir Saif-ur-Rehman, the leader of the Barelvi Sufi group Ansar-ul-Islam. In 2006, a local tribal council of the Khyber District expelled both Mufti Shakir and Pir Saif-ur-Rehman from the Khyber District because of repeated violent conflict.<sup>37</sup>

**Mangal Bagh** (2007 to unknown): In 2007, Mangal Bagh Afridi became the head of Lashkar-e-Islam after Mufti Shakir's expulsion from the region. Before entering LeI, Bagh was a bus driver and Shakir's former student.<sup>38</sup> After assuming leadership, Shakir launched a campaign for the implementation of Sharia in the Khyber District. He initiated patrols in the region, setup a system of courts, and appointed sub commanders in different areas. The courts gave out judgements and implemented punishments. From 2007-2011, Bagh also helped LeI expand its territorial holdings in the Khyber District. In 2014, Bagh relocated with other LeI militants to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. Bagh facilitated LeI's cooperation with both TTP and IS-KP militants. In 2016, several outlets reported that Bagh was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan. However, because of previous false reports of Bagh's death, the validity of these reports is dubious. In 2018, the U.S. State Department offered \$3 million for information on Bagh's whereabouts. As of July 2019, it is unclear whether Bagh still leads LeI in Afghanistan.

## **B. NAME CHANGES**

Mufti Shakir and his group of followers adopted the name 'Lashkar-e-Islam' sometime between 2004 and 2006. During its lifetime, the group has not undergone any major name changes. In 2008, LeI chief Wali Rehman announced the group had changed its name to Jaish-e-Islami, or the "army of Islam." Even after the announcement, however, the group continued to take credit for attacks under the name Lashkar-e-Islam. As of 2019, the group still operates under the name Lashkar-e-Islam.

## **C. SIZE ESTIMATES**

2008: 10,000 (Global Security)<sup>39</sup>

2016: 500+ (Afghanistan Analysts Network)<sup>40</sup>

## **D. RESOURCES**

Over time, Lashkar-e-Islam has engaged in a variety of activities to finance itself. When operating in the Khyber District, the group generated revenue from kidnappings, drug trafficking, smuggling, and looting.<sup>41</sup> LeI also regularly levied taxes and extorted money from vehicles passing through Khyber.<sup>42</sup> LeI militants attacked and looted trucks carrying goods and fuel through the Khyber passage to NATO forces in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

LeI also collected tribute and taxes from local tribes in the region. Before entering into conflict with the group in 2011, the Zakahel tribe of Khyber was regularly taxed by LeI.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, LeI imposed religious fines on areas under its command to raise funds. For instance, during the peak of its control of the Bara region, LeI fined men not wearing a head covering 100 Pakistani Rupees (an amount equal to just under one U.S. dollar in 2009). The group also imposed jazia, or a protection tax, on the non-Muslim communities of the Khyber District. The tax required all non-Muslims to pay 1,000 Pakistani Rupees annually (an amount equal to just over eight U.S. dollars in 2009) directly to the group. Exceptions to this tax were made for women, children and the handicapped.<sup>45</sup>

After relocating to Afghanistan, LeI militants raised funds by taking advantage of the Nangarhar province's valuable natural resources. Since 2017, LeI has engaged in illegal logging activities near the Achin district. LeI uses revenue earned from selling trees to fund its fighting.<sup>46</sup>

## **E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS**

**Disclaimer:** This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Lashkar-e-Islam originated in the Bara subdivision of the Khyber District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. the Khyber District is one of 132 districts in Pakistan with a population of around one million people.<sup>47</sup> the Khyber District borders Afghanistan's Nangarhar province and contains the Khyber Pass, a strategic mountain pass that connects Pakistan and Afghanistan. Until 2018, the Khyber District was part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a semi-autonomous tribal region in Pakistan. In 2018, the president of Pakistan signed an amendment that officially merged FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, ensuring more federal control over the region.<sup>48</sup>

Between 2004-2006, LeI's operations were primarily confined to the Bara subdivision. LeI levied taxes, set up jails, and introduced strict Islamic law in the areas under its control.<sup>49</sup> From 2007-2011, Lashkar-e-Islam expanded its control to other areas in the Khyber District. LeI levied taxes, set up jails, and introduced strict Islamic law in the areas under its control.<sup>50</sup>

In 2014, Pakistani military operations forced LeI militants to relocate to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. In 2017, it was reported that LeI had taken control of the Nazian district in Nangarhar. While LeI has continued to conduct attacks in the Khyber District, it no longer holds territory there.<sup>51</sup>

## **STRATEGY**

### **A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS**

Lashkar-e-Islam is Deoband Sunni in its sectarian orientation. LeI's hardline Deobandi school of Islam opposes the history of mysticism and saints that commonly dominated Islamic belief in parts of Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> LeI has strived to implement strict Islamic law in areas under its control. In the Khyber District, LeI leader Mangal Bagh enforced a ban on television, music, liquor and drug sales, and other acts deemed unholy.<sup>53</sup> LeI also imposed restrictions on women's activities; Mangal Bagh threatened to use violence against women who participated in elections.<sup>54</sup>

LeI's goals are threefold. First, LeI seeks to target Sunni Barelvi and Shia groups in the region. LeI's first leader, Mufti Shakir, believed that LeI's primary duty was to rid the region of false versions of Islam. Shakir gained his originally fame preaching against Shi'ite and Barelvi Muslims to large groups of followers on the radio. Second, LeI seeks to implement Sharia law in Pakistan's Khyber District.<sup>55</sup> In areas under its control, LeI has required prayer attendance at mosques, strict Islamic dress, and other obligations.<sup>56</sup> Finally, LeI seeks to gain significant political control over the Khyber District. Before 2008, LeI was primarily a religious reformist organization. After Mangal Bagh assumed leadership, LeI sought to gain extensive control over the Khyber District and the Khyber Pass. During this period, LeI began conducting more suicide and violent attacks against members of the Pakistani state. Since 2014, this goal has largely been compromised because of LeI's relocation to Afghanistan. However, LeI still launches attacks and raises funds from Afghanistan with the hope of returning to the Khyber District.

### **B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES**

Lashkar-e-Islam does not actively participate in local or national level elections. LeI only accepts Sharia law and does not recognize many nationally elected Pakistani officials as legitimate. However, before moving to Afghanistan, the group dictated the conduct of elections, voting, and candidate behavior in the Pakistani districts under its control.

In 2007, LeI issued a "code of conduct" for candidates contesting elections in Bara region of the Khyber District.<sup>57</sup> These rules barred candidates from holding public meetings and prohibited this display of flags of any political party on cars and buildings. Finally, LeI militants required candidates to swear on a Koran "not to sign any un-Islamic bill" while in office.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, Lashkar-e-Islam does not believe women should engage in politics. LeI has threatened to use violence against women who participated in elections. In 2008, LeI leader Mangal Bagh warned that “those who would allow their women to cast their votes in NA-45 and NA-46 [two National Assembly constituencies] would face dire consequences.”<sup>59</sup>

### C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

Lashkar-e-Islam has traditionally targeted religious minorities, other militant groups, and representatives of the Pakistani state. From 2004-2008, LeI was primarily a reformist organization that sought to spread the Deobandi school of Islam throughout the Khyber District. LeI has mounted attacks against Barelvī Sunni Muslims, Zakakhel tribesmen, Shia Muslims, and Christians. For example, LeI militants beheaded a Zakakhel religious leader for preaching against LeI’s extreme Deobandi interpretation of Islam.<sup>60</sup> In 2008, LeI famously kidnapped 16 Christians in Peshawar, Pakistan, though the group later set them free.<sup>61</sup> LeI has also targeted civilians who deviate from Sharia law. Under LeI leader Mangal Bagh, the group initiated Islamic patrols and set up a system of courts that issued judgements and implemented punishments. In 2007, Lashkar-e-Islam executed two men and a woman on charges of adultery.<sup>62</sup>

LeI has also targeted members of other militant groups, the details of which are included in the ‘Relations With Other Groups’ section below.

In 2008, LeI began to transform from a religious reformist organization to an insurgent group targeting the Pakistani government. LeI associated itself with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the largest and deadliest militant umbrella group in Pakistan. As this relationship developed, LeI began targeting members of the Pakistani state, including members of the Pakistani armed forces, policemen, and elected officials.<sup>63</sup> LeI has also conducted suicide attacks in civilian-populated areas. Until 2017, dozens of civilians died in the Khyber District from LeI attacks each year.<sup>64</sup>

LeI has used a wide range of tactics to achieve its objectives, including kidnapping, looting, beheading, bombing, suicide attacks, and firearm military assault. LeI has primarily relied on kidnapping and looting to help finance its operations. For example, the militants regularly loot NATO trucks carrying goods and fuel through the Khyber passage.<sup>65</sup> It is critical to note that LeI did not engage in suicide attacks until after 2008. LeI’s first major suicide attack took place at the U.S. consulate in Peshawar in 2010. The attack killed six people.<sup>66</sup> Over the last decade, LeI has participated in suicide attack training with both TTP and Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) militants.<sup>67</sup>

### MAJOR ATTACKS

**Disclaimer:** These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

**March 2009:** LeI was suspected of bombing of the shrine of famous Pashto poet Rehman Baba in Hazarkhwani, near the city of Peshawar. Militants reportedly destroyed the shrine because it was frequently visited by women (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>68</sup>

**April 5, 2010:** LeI militants participated in a suicide attack against the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar. According to local Peshawar officials, LeI cooperated with TTP militants to carry out the attack (6 killed, 20+ wounded).<sup>69</sup>

**June 7, 2010:** LeI engaged in a shoot out with TTP fighters in Tabai Area, the Khyber District. The clash between the two groups left 25 dead militants dead (25 killed, unknown wounded).<sup>70</sup>

**December 13, 2011:** LeI militants fired at least 30 mortar shells at Bara city, Pakistan. The group targeted the homes that belonged to members of a local peace council (6 killed, 4 wounded).<sup>71</sup>

**February 18, 2013:** Two suicide bombers disguised in police uniforms attacked the political office of Khyber representative Mutahir Zeb in Peshawar city, Pakistan. At least seven policemen and civilians were killed. Though LeI did not claim responsibility for the attack, sources suggest that the group was behind it (7+ killed, 6+ wounded).<sup>72</sup>

**March 21, 2013:** LeI was suspected of detonating car bomb in an Afghan refugee camp near a U.N. World Food Programme distribution point in Jalozi area, Pakistan (17 killed, 30+ wounded).<sup>73</sup>

**November 1, 2014:** Militants attacked a security check post in Orakzai district, FATA, Pakistan. Twenty militants and eight soldiers were killed in fight. At least 11 militants and five soldiers were wounded. Though LeI did not claim responsibility, it is believed to have carried out the attack (28 killed, 16+ wounded).<sup>74</sup>

**August 16, 2015:** LeI carried out a suicide attack in Attock, Punjab province, Pakistan in an attempt to assassinate the Home Minister of Punjab, Shuja Khanzada. Khanzada died along with 8 others (9 killed, unknown wounded).<sup>75</sup>

**March 16, 2016:** A bomb exploded on a bus transporting government employees in Peshawar, Pakistan. LeI claimed responsibility for the attack, making known that it was “carried out in retaliation for death sentences given to armed group members.” It should be noted that another little-known actor, Majlis-e-Lashkari, also claimed credit for the attack (16+ killed, 50+ wounded).<sup>76</sup>

**May 22, 2017:** LeI militants planted an IED roadside bomb targeting members of a local peace committee. The bomb detonated underneath a bus transferring committee members. The attack killed five people, including the head of the peace committee Zar Wali Khan (5 killed, unknown wounded).<sup>77</sup>

**November 24, 2017:** In a high profile attack, an LeI suicide bomber rammed his motorcycle into a car transferring the second-in-command of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province police. The attack killed the general and injured several others (1 killed, 6+ injured).<sup>78</sup>

**April 2018:** IS-KP and LeI militants clash over claims to forest and logging territory in Nangarhar, Afghanistan (25 killed, 5 wounded).<sup>79</sup>

**October 2018:** LeI claimed to have killed 19 IS-KP militants near Nazyan and Achin, Afghanistan (19 killed, unknown wounded).<sup>80</sup>

## INTERACTIONS

### A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- Government of Pakistan: 2010 to Present<sup>81</sup>

### B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Lashkar-e-Islam draws recruits from different clans of Afridi tribesmen in the Khyber District.<sup>82</sup> LeI leader Mangal Bagh was a poor member of a minor Afridi tribe, and his local ties attracted support from Afridi tribesmen.<sup>83</sup> LeI's strict Islamic regulations and implementation of Sharia law also appealed to

many impoverished communities in the Khyber District. LeI pays its militants a monthly salary and offers free meals to convince men to join the group.<sup>84</sup>

While based in Pakistan, LeI came in conflict with many of the communities residing in the land it controlled. In 2011, LeI militants beheaded a religious scholar of the Zakakhel tribe, a sub-tribe of the Afridis. The incident set off a wave of violence in the region. Zakakhel tribesmen allied with Ansar-ul-Islam militants to counter LeI in the Khyber District. Hundreds of people were displaced or killed in the fighting. The Zakakhel militants were able to weaken LeI's militia in parts of the Tirah Valley.<sup>85</sup> In 2014, LeI militants gave Zakakhel tribesmen an ultimatum: support Lashkar-e-Islam or leave the Bara subregion of Khyber District. As a result, scores of Zakakhel and other minority tribesmen were forced to emigrate from the Khyber District.<sup>86</sup>

Efforts by the Pakistani military to exert pressure on LeI forced the group to relocate to Afghanistan in 2014. According to several reports, Mangal Bagh and his fellow militants were welcomed by tribal leaders on the Afghan border.<sup>87</sup> LeI members initially resided in the houses of Shinwari tribal elders and were venerated by the community. In the summer of 2014, LeI black flags were seen flying over houses in the Mamand Valley, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. It is unclear whether tribal leaders in Afghanistan are still amiable toward LeI militants, as the group's presence and ongoing conflict with IS-KP has recently brought violence to the region.<sup>88</sup>

### **C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS**

Lashkar-e-Islam began as a splinter group of the Deoband Sunni organization Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi Anil Munkir (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, or AMNAM). LeI founder Mufti Shakir served and gained a large following as a radio preacher for AMNAM. Though Shakir left AMNAM to form LeI in 2004, he retained a close relationship with AMNAM. LeI maintained favorable relations with its parent group even after Shakir was replaced by Mangal Bagh in 2007. According to one report, Haji Namdar – AMNAM's founder- and Mangal Bagh “admitted having a close affinity.” The two groups coordinated attacks and shared resources for several years until AMNAM slowly dissolved.<sup>89</sup>

Though LeI maintained friendly relations with AMNAM, it developed decidedly more hostile relationships with other groups operating in the region. LeI has repeatedly clashed with Ansar-ul-Islam (AI), a Barelvi Sunni group in the Khyber District. In his early years as LeI leader, Mufti Shakir regularly denounced the Barelvi sect of Islam during weekly FM radio sermons.<sup>90</sup> Although AI classified itself as a militant organization, AI was less inclined toward violence because of its Barelvi ideology, which was more moderate than the brand of Deobandism advocated by Shakir.<sup>91</sup> Shakir and Pir Saif ur Rehman – the leader of AI – continually fought over control of the Khyber District until both of them were expelled from the region in 2006.<sup>92</sup> Though the groups' two leaders were now gone, the rivalry between LeI and AI continued for several years. In 2010, LeI conducted a suicide attack at the headquarters of Ansar-ul-Islam, killing five people and wounding twelve others.<sup>93</sup> As AI slowly lost power and territorial control over the region in 2010, LeI has put fewer resources towards combatting AI.

Lashkar-e-Islam has also had a complicated relationship with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Before 2008, the groups lacked any concrete relationship. In April 2008, reports emerged of increasing conflict and tension between the groups.<sup>94</sup> The underlying source of the animosity between LeI and the TTP is unclear. According to one report, Mangal Bagh's refusal to join the TTP in fighting Pakistani security forces set off tensions between LeI and the TTP.<sup>95</sup> To gain influence in the Khyber District, the TTP murdered Haji Namdar for his alleged ties with the Pakistan Army and the CIA. Given Lashkar-e-Islam's history of cooperation with Namdar, the murder infuriated LeI leadership and triggered conflict with the TTP.<sup>96</sup> Another report suggested that the rivalry between the TTP and LeI resulted from a dispute over the main supply routes passing through the Khyber District.<sup>97</sup> The Khyber Pass serves as the



primary land route to Afghanistan and the Central Asian states, and it was a highly valuable supply line to U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. Control of the Khyber District was, therefore, important for both the TTP and Pakistani government.<sup>98</sup> TTP leaders tried to formalize cooperation with LeI on several occasions, but Mangal Bagh initially refused to approve a merger with the TTP.

In the latter half of 2008, this position changed. Mangal Bagh began to move closer to the TTP and allowed LeI to cooperate with its former rival. The rationale behind Bagh's change in position is unknown; the Pakistani government's 2008 campaign against LeI may have encouraged the group to ally with more radical, revolutionary groups. LeI allowed the TTP to establish a presence in the Khyber District and to position local commanders in the area.<sup>99</sup>

Since 2008, LeI has had a symbiotic relationship with the TTP. The two groups train together, conduct attacks, and share common objectives of terrorizing military and government officials. Major joint attacks between the two groups include the 2010 bombing of the U.S. Peshawar Consulate and the 2014 Peshawar school massacre. In 2014, TTP volunteered militants to defend LeI in Khyber-I, the Pakistani military campaign against LeI in the Khyber District.<sup>100</sup> In May 2015, Lashkar-e-Islam publicly declared that it would merge with the TTP.<sup>101</sup> Despite this announcement, LeI and the TTP continue to take independent ownership of attacks and bombings. The extent to which the groups have truly merged is unknown. It is likely that the groups collaborate on military objectives and large attacks but maintain independent leadership structures.

After relocating to Afghanistan in 2014, Lashkar-e-Islam formed a loose alliance with the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP). LeI never pledged allegiance to IS-KP. Instead, it engaged in logistical-level cooperation with the group. The groups engaged in a power sharing agreement in Afghanistan, which allowed IS-KP to embed itself in Nangarhar province.<sup>102</sup> Some reports indicate that IS-KP desired an alliance with LeI because it controlled strategically-valuable smuggling networks. LeI networks enabled linkages between IS-KP bases in Orakzai, Pakistan and Nangarhar, Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> From 2014-2016, LeI continued to conduct independent attacks in Pakistan while also collaborating with IS-KP to mount suicide attacks in Afghanistan.

Despite these initial years of cooperation, the relationship between IS-KP and LeI quickly collapsed. Serious clashes between LeI and IS-KP militants erupted in 2017 and 2018, reportedly over control of natural resources.<sup>104</sup> Specifically, LeI and IS-KP both claimed ownership over the logging rights of local forests, and disagreements soon escalate to violence.<sup>105</sup> In October 2018, LeI claimed to have killed 19 IS-KP militants near Nazyan and Achin, Afghanistan.<sup>106</sup>

#### **D. STATE SPONSORS/ EXTERNAL INFLUENCES**

LeI's relationship with the Pakistani government is unclear. The U.N. Refugee Agency claims that LeI is supported by the Pakistani military, which views LeI as a counter to the TTP in the Khyber District.<sup>107</sup> Some regional experts support this conjecture and suggest that the ISI funds LeI to engage in terror-related activities in Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> However, other sources dispute this claim, including Shaukatulla Khan, the former governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> Given LeI's history of attacking Pakistani officials and military establishments, many in the Khyber District doubt the veracity of ISI's alleged connection to LeI.

A 2016 report by the Afghanistan Analysts Network claims that Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security, has financed members of TTP and LeI since 2014. Fighters belonging to LeI and TTP are allowed free movement across provinces and provided treatment in Afghan hospitals.

The Afghan government may be using these groups against Pakistan in retaliation for Pakistan's longtime support of the Afghan Taliban.<sup>110</sup>

## MAPS

- Pakistan
- Pakistan-All

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