

Lashkar-e-Taiba

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1990

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: 1990: The first known LeT operation in India was the ambush of a small group of Indian Air Force personnel in 1990.¹

Last Attack: December 04, 2017: LeT claimed responsibility for an attack on a military convoy near Bonigam, Jammu, and Kashmir, India. (3 killed, 1 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is a Pakistan-based group formed in 1990 that primarily fights Indian control over Jammu and Kashmir. The group subscribes to a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in South Asia. It has declared the U.S., Israel, and India as existential enemies of Islam. LeT has conducted numerous deadly attacks against Indian officials, troops, and civilians in the disputed area of Kashmir as well as throughout India and Afghanistan. The group maintains training camps, facilities, schools, and medical clinics in Pakistan. It runs its own charitable organization, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), and has supported humanitarian relief missions in Pakistan. In 2002, Pakistan officially banned Lashkar-e-Taiba. In 2008, both the U.S. and the UN placed sanctions on several senior LeT leaders.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), also known as Army of the Pure or Army of the Righteous, is an Islamic militant organization based in Pakistan. It was founded in 1990 by Hafiz Mohammed Saeed as the military wing of Pakistani Islamist organization Markaz-ad-

Dawa-wal-Irshad (MDI), which promoted the Ahl-e-Hadith (AeH) interpretation of Islam, until it ostensibly split from the group in 2002.³ LeT was first active in the fight against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan but changed its focus to the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir when the state rebelled against Indian control in the early 1990s. LeT has reportedly been supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) since the early 1990s as one of many paramilitary groups used by Pakistan as proxy forces to create instability in India.⁴ LeT sees the fight against Indian control over Jammu and Kashmir as part of a global struggle against the oppression of Muslims, and ultimately seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in the Indian subcontinent.⁵

The first known LeT operation in India was the ambush of a small group of Indian Air Force personnel in 1990. The group proved its strength in 1993 in a successful attack on a heavily guarded Indian army base in Poonch.⁶ Until the mid 1990's, LeT exclusively targeted Indian military presence in Jammu and Kashmir. On January 5, 1996, however, the group gained notoriety for the first of many massacres targeting minorities in Kashmir, killing 16 Hindus in Barshalla, Doda.⁷ The most notable massacre, known as the Chattisinghpura attack, occurred on March 20, 2000 when LeT terrorists killed 35 Sikhs in Anantnag on the eve of President Bill Clinton's official state visit to India.⁸

Despite LeT's operational focus on Jammu and Kashmir, eliminating Indian power in the entire region has always been the larger goal. Hafez Saeed exploited Hindu-Muslim tensions to recruit Indian Muslims to carry out LeT attacks across India.⁹ One of the first of these attacks was the Red Fort attack in New Delhi on December 22, 2000. The attack is considered symbolic, as the Red Fort was the palace of the last Muslim rulers of the Indian sub-continent.¹⁰ Although not one of LeT's most destructive attacks, it established the group as a militant threat to India.

On December 13, 2001, gunmen attacked India's parliament, killing seven. Although LeT denied responsibility, the attack sparked renewed confrontation between India and Pakistan and led to the United States listing LeT as an official Foreign Terrorist Organization.¹¹ Pakistan followed suit shortly after and formally banned the group on January 13, 2002. In response, Hafez Saeed announced a split between LeT and MDI, and that he was no longer affiliated with LeT. MDI changed its name to Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), but the split and rebranding were superficial. JuD and LeT continued to operate together throughout Pakistan, even retaining most of their joint offices, after the announced split. FBI reports indicate overlap between the two groups as late as 2009.^{12,13}

While violence in Kashmir peaked in the mid-2000s and has since decreased, LeT remains active. The group's most notorious large-scale attack took place in Mumbai in November 2008, known as the 26/11 attacks. The attack employed common LeT tactics but on a much larger scale than any previous incident. Ten attackers killed 166 people over 60 hours at five landmarks and establishments popular with foreigners across the city. The focus on Westerners in this attack - Jews and Israelis in particular- evidenced LeT's global agenda. Hafez Saeed once again denied his organization was responsible for the attack, but investigations and intelligence confirmed that it was an LeT operation. Testimony of a surviving attacker and another arrested LeT operative underscored the

depth of Pakistani ISI involvement in both the 26/11 attacks as well as general LeT operations.¹⁴

In addition to direct attacks, LeT supports proxy Islamist groups inside India with training, weapons, and funding. The Indian Mujahideen (IM), founded by Mohammed Sadiq Israr Sheikh, is LeT's primary ally in the country.¹⁵ Analysts disagree on the strength of the relationship between LeT and IM; some argue that IM is an independent organization, while others suggest that it is a direct product of LeT and ISI cooperation. If the latter argument holds that IM was established when Pakistan, facing international pressure to reduce its support for armed operations in Kashmir, redirected that support to groups operating inside India.^{16,17}

Since 2003, it has often been difficult for investigators to determine whether an attack was a LeT operation supported by IM or an IM operation supported by LeT. In November 2007, however, IM declared its status as an independent organization. The group sought revenge for violence against Indian Muslims and carried out an attack in the Indian province of Uttar Pradesh shortly thereafter. Then in February 2010, IM and LeT launched a joint attack deliberately targeting foreigners at a German Bakery in Pune. This attack was the start of renewed operational cooperation between the groups. IM and LeT have since killed more than 50 people in India.^{18,19}

LeT has significant ties to global militant Islamist organizations. LeT has assisted with training, transport, and protection of many notable Al Qaeda (AQ) figures including Ramzi Yusuf, mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.²⁰ Several Pakistani raids of LeT safe houses and schools have led to the arrests of AQ and AQ-affiliated operatives. Many high-profile militants have reportedly trained with LeT including Richard Reid, the terrorist who attempted to detonate his shoes on an airplane in December 2001, and two of the 2005 London subway bombers.²¹

Despite a focus on India for most of its existence, LeT has become increasingly involved in the fight against NATO and the United States in Afghanistan. At first, these attacks were in support of the Afghan Taliban. Beginning in 2008, however, attacks in Afghanistan have targeted Indian interests in the country, demonstrating Pakistan's alleged use of LeT as a proxy force.^{22,23}

Lashkar-e-Taiba continues to be loyal to the Pakistani state, but government support for the group and other proxy militant groups is dwindling. The Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008 brought international notoriety to the group but also increased vigilance. Saudi Arabia and India have increasingly cooperated on counterterrorism efforts, leading to the arrests of several high-profile LeT members.²⁴ Despite international scrutiny, LeT continues to operate openly in Pakistan. The group actively holds rallies to protest political issues, such as U.S. military cooperation with Pakistan, Indian water policies, and NATO agreements. In 2011, LeT founded *Difa-e-Pakistan Council*, a coalition of Islamist groups opposed to these political issues.²⁵

In 2015, analysts considered LeT to be in a period of restraint but a September 2016 attack on military headquarters in India, along with political activity in the Pakistani

elections in 2018 suggest that the group is still active on many fronts.^{26,27} LeT remains ideologically committed to violence and is still a well-resourced and well-networked organization capable of carrying out major terror attacks.²⁸

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Hafiz Muhammad Saeed (1990 - Present): Saeed is a co-founder and leader of LeT and its charitable wing, JuD. In 2012, the U.S. put a \$10 million bounty on the head of Saeed.²⁹ In January 2017, Saeed was put under house arrest by the Pakistani government for collecting funds for the JuD charity in violation of UN sanctions.³⁰ Saeed was released in November 2017 after courts rejected the government's request to extend his time in house arrest due to a lack of evidence.³¹

Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi (1990 – Present): Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi is a co-founder and the Chief of Operations of LeT. He was named as one of the masterminds of the 26/11 Mumbai attack by Indian officials in December 2008 and was arrested shortly thereafter by Pakistani authorities. An anti-terrorism court trying him for the attack ordered his release on bail in April 2015.³²

Abdul Rehman Makki (1990- Present): Abdul Rehman Makki is the brother-in-law of LeT founder Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and is second-in-command of the group. The U.S. has a \$2 million bounty on his head due to his close relationship with the late Taliban leader Mullah Omar and Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.³³

B. NAME CHANGES

LeT changed its name to Tehreek-e- Azadi-e Kashmir (TAK) in 2017. The group adopted this alternative name to avoid sanctions.³⁴

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2011: Several thousand (U.S. National Counterterrorism Center)³⁵
- 2018: Several thousand (Commonwealth of Australia)³⁶

D. RESOURCES

Lashkar-e-Taiba is diverse and systematic in its fundraising efforts. Donation boxes for the group are common in Pakistani markets throughout the country. LeT publications include calls for donations. LeT also has benefactors in the Arabian Peninsula and from the Pakistani expatriates around the world. Some donations come from international Islamist charities, like the International Islamic Relief Organization. A fundraising method unique to LeT is collecting animal skins from religious sacrifices and selling them to tanneries. In 2010, JuD reportedly collected \$1.2 million by selling these skins.³⁷

In addition to ISI support, LeT also receives funds from the Pakistani civilian government. This money is usually directed through LeT-run schools and hospitals.³⁸ LeT's international draw has allowed it to open fundraising and recruitment offices in Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, and the Gulf region. There is evidence that LeT has fundraising and recruitment campaigns in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Europe as well.³⁹

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-Taiba is based near Lahore, Pakistan and targets India-controlled Kashmir. LeT maintains several facilities such as training camps, medical clinics, and schools in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Pakistan's Sindh province.⁴⁰ LeT's international draw has allowed it to open fundraising and recruitment offices in Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, and the Gulf region. There is evidence that LeT has fundraising and recruitment campaigns in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Europe as well.⁴¹

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

Lashkar-e-Taiba is a Sunni group, which follows the Ahle-Haith interpretation of Islam. The Ahle-Hadith interpretation is similar to Salafism and Wahhabism and has roots in both the Middle East and Indian Subcontinent. LeT's declared goals include conducting jihad in the way of Allah, preaching the true religion, and training a new generation along true Islamic lines.⁴² Unlike Deoband groups operating in Pakistan, LeT aligns its ideological goals with the interests of the Pakistani state. It seeks to liberate Kashmir, the main source of conflict with India, and merge it with Pakistan using any means necessary. In January of 2009, however, LeT announced that it would consider accepting a peaceful resolution to the Kashmir conflict.⁴³

The group does not believe in attacking Muslims in its struggle against aggression and oppression. It aims to change the regional and geopolitical dynamic of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India by attacking non-Muslim civilian and government targets.⁴⁴ LeT is unique among the Ahle-Hadith groups because, unlike other groups, it holds da'wa (preaching) and jihad (fighting) as equal and essential components of Islam.⁴⁵

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The Milli Muslim League (MML) is an LeT political front, created by Hafiz Saeed in 2017 in order to put forth candidates for the 2018 Pakistani general elections.⁴⁶ However, the party was denied registration as a political party and entered its candidates under the

latent Allaha-u-Akbar Tehreek (AAT) political party that was already approved by the Election Commission of Pakistan.⁴⁷ The AAT was unsuccessful in gaining any seats in the Pakistani National Assembly during the 2018 elections in July.⁴⁸

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

Until the mid-2000s, Lashkar-e-Taiba primarily targeted Indian security forces with bombings and shootings. Attacks started becoming deadlier and less discriminatory around 2006 when LeT adopted tactics including serial bombings, marketplace attacks, hostage holding and train bombings.⁴⁹ Before being outlawed by Pakistan in 2002, LeT readily accepted credit for its attacks, but the group has since denied responsibility for its actions, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

A tactic unique to LeT is known as fidayeen (translated as “those who sacrifice themselves in order to redeem themselves”), which involve heavily armed small squads of gunmen or bombers who strike symbolic targets in an attempt to cause mass casualties. These attacks are distinct from suicide bombings, which LeT has refrained from using, since the attacker can survive a successful attack. This type of attack is an important recruiting tool for LeT, as many Islamic scholars argue that the deliberate taking of one’s own life is not permitted under Islam.⁵⁰

In 2018, LeT launched an online propaganda magazine called “Wyeth.” The first issue included a list of attacks in 2017 involving LeT militants, along with a warning for the occupational forces in Kashmir that 2018 will be a difficult year.⁵¹

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.

December 13, 2001: A high-profile shoot-out in the Parliament House building in New Delhi was attributed to LeT (12 killed, 0 wounded).⁵²

May 14, 2002: Three LeT operatives attacked a bus coming from an Indian Army base in Kaluchak (36 killed, 48 wounded).⁵³

September 24, 2002: LeT operatives raided Akshardam Temple in the Indian state of Gujarat using guns and hand grenades (33 killed, 70 wounded).⁵⁴

August 25, 2003: India blamed LeT for a twin car bombing in Mumbai (52 killed, 150 wounded).⁵⁵

October 29, 2005: LeT was responsible for three coordinated bombings in New Delhi markets and on a bus. This was the deadliest terrorist attack in India in 2005 (63 killed, 200 wounded).⁵⁶

July 11, 2006: Seven coordinated pressure cooker bombs were detonated on Mumbai commuter trains (180 killed, 800 wounded).⁵⁷

November 26, 2008: Ten gunmen carried out a coordinated attack of shootings and bombings against a railway station, a popular restaurant, a hospital, two hotels, and a Jewish Center in Mumbai. The attack lasted 60 hours and became known as 26/11 (164 killed, 308 wounded).⁵⁸

February 13, 2010: Indian authorities speculate that LeT may have contributed surveillance and planning for the bombing of a German bakery in Pune (9 killed).⁵⁹

February 21, 2013: LeT and claimed responsibility for an explosive device that detonated in a crowd in Hyderabad city, India (16 killed, 100+ wounded).⁶⁰

December 14, 2014: Approximately 2,000 assailants believed to be compromised of Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Taiba fighters attacked security outposts in Kunar province, Afghanistan (18 killed, 22 wounded).⁶¹

September 18, 2016: LeT claimed responsibility for an attack on a military headquarters in Uri, Jammu, and Kashmir, India (24 killed, 17 wounded).⁶²

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

In 2001, the U.S. Department of State designated Lashkar-e-Taiba as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The Government of Pakistan banned LeT in 2002. In 2008 the U.S. Department of Treasury imposed sanctions on four LeT leaders. In April 2012 two senior LeT leaders were placed on the U.S. Department of State's Rewards for Justice list.⁶³ In 2014, the U.S. amended LeT's designations to include Jama'at-ud-Dawa as an alias organization.⁶⁴ The U.S. amended the group's designations again in 2018 to include the alias organizations Milli Muslim League (MML) and Tehreek-e- Azadi-e Kashmir (TAJK).⁶⁵

Designations for LeT:

- U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations: 2001 to Present
- Pakistan List of Terrorist Organizations: 2002 to Present
- United Nations: 2005 to Present⁶⁶
- U.S. Department of Treasury: 2008 to Present

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In addition to its militant activities, LeT provides extensive social services in Pakistan. LeT organizes its charitable activities through its front organization, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). JuD runs 173 schools across Pakistan, serving more than 18,000 students. JuD also runs three hospitals in Punjab and operates 66 ambulances.⁶⁷ Over

2,000 doctors volunteer their services for the group. In many areas, the services LeT provides are not available or affordable by other means.⁶⁸ These services target impoverished communities that state services do not reach, fostering support for LeT among Pakistanis.⁶⁹ The hospitals, schools, and community services provided are used as a method for proselytization of LeT's Ahl-e-Hadith interpretation of Islam and to counter the influence of Christian NGOs and missionaries.

LeT also consistently responds to humanitarian disasters like the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the 2010 floods.⁷⁰ JuD took an active part in providing humanitarian relief to the victims of the October 2005 earthquake in Kashmir.⁷¹ According to Steve Coll, "With its hospitals, universities, and social-service wings, Lashkar is akin to Hezbollah or Hamas; it is a three-dimensional political and social movement with an armed wing, not merely a terrorist or paramilitary outfit."⁷²

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Lashkar-e-Taiba has significant ties to global militant Islamist organizations. LeT has assisted with the training, transport, and protection of many notable Al Qaeda (AQ) figures including Ramzi Yusuf, the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.⁷³ Several Pakistani raids of LeT safe houses and schools have led to the arrest of AQ and AQ-affiliated operatives. Many high-profile militants have reportedly trained with LeT including Richard Reid, the terrorist who attempted to detonate his shoes on an airplane in December of 2001, and two of the 2005 London subway bombers.⁷⁴ Lashkar-e-Taiba's links to Al Qaeda date back to LeT's predecessor organization, MDI. Osama bin Laden is believed to have provided funding for MDI and even attended some of LeT's first conferences.⁷⁵

LeT became part of the United Jihad Council in 1993, an umbrella group for militant Islamist organizations operating in Kashmir. As part of the organization, it formed alliances with Harkatul Mujhaideen (HM), Hizb ul Mujhaideen (HuM), Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) and Harkat-ul-Jihadi-Islami (HuJI) against Indian military assets in India controlled Kashmir. HuJI and JeM broke ties with LeT in 2004 when ISI launched a crackdown against the members of their groups because of suspicions that they were involved in attacks on then President General Pervez Musharraf.⁷⁶

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

While LeT's goals are based on its interpretation of Islam and global events, the group's actions are heavily influenced by Pakistani ISI and aligned with the Pakistani state's interests. There is little direct evidence of official Pakistani direction or support of LeT, but analysts, intelligence services, and international organizations regularly make links between the two.⁷⁷

MAPS

- Global Al Qaeda
- Pakistan – All

- Pakistan

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