

# Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

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## HOW TO CITE

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## SUMMARY

**Formed:** December 14, 2007

**Disbanded:** Group is active.

**First Attack** December 23, 2007: The TTP conducted a suicide attack on a military convoy in Mingora (13 killed, 25 wounded).<sup>1</sup>

**Last Attack:** February 6, 2022: The TTP attacked Pakistani soldiers from across the border in Afghanistan (5 killed).<sup>2</sup>

## OVERVIEW

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the largest and deadliest militant umbrella organization in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> The TTP formed under Baitullah Mehsud in 2007.<sup>4</sup> It is a subset of the Pakistani Taliban, which includes most, but not all, of the Pakistani Taliban groups.<sup>5</sup> The organization is closely linked to Al Qaeda, and is also associated with the Afghan Taliban.<sup>6</sup> However, unlike the Afghan Taliban, which focuses on combatting U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, the TTP focuses on combatting Pakistani security forces. The TTP is based in South Waziristan and has three central goals: to enforce Shariah law in Pakistan; to support the Afghan Taliban’s control in Kabul after the U.S. withdrawal of forces; and to conduct defensive jihad against Pakistani security forces. Ultimately, the group also seeks to overthrow the Pakistani government and establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Since 2014, internal splits and Pakistani counterterrorism operations have weakened the TTP.<sup>8</sup> The death of Maulana Fazlullah, the group’s longest standing leader, in 2018 provided a threat to the group’s future as it struggled to remain united, however the organization has seen increased support and stability stemming from the Afghan Taliban’s takeover of Kabul in August 2021.

## NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the largest and deadliest militant umbrella organization in Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> The organization was formed under Baitullah Mehsud in 2007.<sup>10</sup> It is a subset of the Pakistani Taliban, which includes most, but not all, of the Pakistani Taliban groups.<sup>11</sup> Approximately half of all Pakistani Taliban factions coalesce under the umbrella of the TTP. Of the other half of Pakistani Taliban factions, some are only loosely affiliated with the TTP, while others have little to no association with the organization. Two notable examples include the Nazir Group and Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which are part of the Pakistani Taliban, but not the TTP.<sup>12</sup> The TTP is closely linked to Al Qaeda, and is also associated with the Afghan Taliban.<sup>13</sup> However, unlike the Afghan Taliban, which focuses on combating U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, the TTP focuses on combating Pakistani security forces and all symbols of the Pakistani state. For this reason, the TTP is considered to be one of the most significant threats to the security of Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> The TTP is based in South Waziristan and has three central goals: to enforce Shariah law in Pakistan; to establish a unified front to maintain Afghan Taliban control in Afghanistan; and to conduct defensive jihad against Pakistani security forces. Ultimately, the group also seeks to overthrow the Pakistani government and establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

However, the TTP is not a monolithic entity. Rather, it is an agglomerate of more than 40 Islamist and Pashtun tribal factions from Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).<sup>16</sup> The TTP is also ethnically diverse, composed of Arab, Uzbek, Afghan, Chechen and Punjabi militants, in addition to its Pashtun majority. The most powerful factions within the TTP are the Mehsud Group and the Punjabi Taliban. The Mehsud Group forms the core of the TTP, and is mainly committed to waging jihad against the Pakistani government. The Punjabi Taliban is comprised of various sectarian groups, which are focused on the Kashmiri jihad. In addition to these main factions, there exist various small groups within the TTP with separate objectives from the shared goals of the overarching TTP.<sup>17</sup>

In 2001, before the TTP's official formation, many of its current member groups operated independently in the FATA. These groups supported the Afghan Taliban's fight against U.S.-led coalition operations in Afghanistan by providing additional soldiers, training, and logistical backing.<sup>18</sup> They operated as auxiliary groups for the Afghan Taliban until 2002, when the Pakistani military began to conduct operations in the FATA against militant groups fleeing the war in Afghanistan. Because Pakistani security forces typically did not enter the FATA, these incursions led groups in the region to respond defensively. Specifically, the groups began to coordinate with one another in order to counter the Pakistani military, pooling resources and manpower.<sup>19</sup> This resulting network of militants did not merge with the Afghan Taliban, but rather developed its own identity as the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>20</sup> The Pakistani Taliban garnered attention in Pakistan because it simultaneously fought and negotiated with the Pakistani state. It also killed approximately 200 tribal elders in order to consolidate control over the region and establish itself as a de facto alternative to the leadership of the traditional tribal elders.<sup>21</sup>

On July 10, 2007, the Pakistani government launched a commando operation against the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad after failed negotiations, killing more than 100 militants. This attack prompted the Pakistani Taliban to declare war on the Pakistani state. The Pakistani Taliban subsequently began carrying out suicide bombings and ambushes against Pakistani security forces.<sup>22</sup> On December 14, 2007, a shura of 40 senior Taliban leaders from throughout Pakistan established the TTP as an umbrella organization for various factions of the Pakistani Taliban, in order to strengthen its collective defense capabilities.<sup>23</sup> Many, but not all, Pakistani Taliban groups united under this new coalition, which called itself the TTP. The shura appointed Baitullah Mehsud as the emir of the TTP, along with Maulana Hafiz Gul Bahadur as the deputy and Maulana Faqir Muhammad as the third in command.<sup>24</sup> The shura established the TTP in order to carry out three central missions: to enforce Shariah law in Pakistan; to establish a unified front to combat U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan; and to conduct defensive jihad against Pakistani security forces.<sup>25</sup> The Pakistani government officially recognized and banned the TTP on August 25, 2008. It subsequently froze all accounts and assets associated with the TTP, banned the organization from making media appearances, and placed bounties on the heads of prominent TTP leaders.<sup>26</sup>

In late December 2008 and early January 2009, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar met with the three dominant TTP commanders—Baitullah Mehsud, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, and Maulvi Nazir. They encouraged the leaders to put their differences aside and reduce their operations in Pakistan in order to help the Afghan Taliban counter the impending increase of U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> The three commanders agreed, and formed a temporary alliance, known as the Shura Ittihad al-Mujahedeen (Allied Mujahedeen Council) in February 2008.<sup>28</sup> However, the council disbanded in August 2009, due to fighting between the three leaders. Bahadur and Nazir subsequently split from the TTP and resumed operations as independent groups within the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>29</sup> Shortly thereafter, Baitullah Mehsud was killed in a U.S. drone strike. Baitullah Mehsud's death ignited controversy and a brief power struggle within the ranks of the TTP, until Hakimullah Mehsud assumed the head leadership role for the organization.<sup>30</sup>

Although the TTP primarily conducts attacks in Pakistan, the United States' increased targeting of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban officials in 2008 and 2009 spurred the organization to broaden its scope of operations.<sup>31</sup> For example, in late December 2009, the TTP conducted a suicide bombing attack on a U.S. base in Afghanistan, as an act of revenge for Baitullah Mehsud's death.<sup>32</sup> Then, in April 2010, the TTP indicated in a video recording that it would begin targeting cities in the United States in response to U.S. drone strikes on TTP leaders.<sup>33</sup> This threat was followed by an attempted bombing attack on Times Square in May 2010.<sup>34</sup> Although the U.S. government did not officially confirm the TTP as the perpetrator of the attempted attack, officials assert that the organization likely played a direct role in facilitating, directing, and financing the plot.<sup>35</sup> Despite these threats, the TTP reported that Hakimullah Mehsud was prepared to take part in peace talks with the Pakistani government. However, Hakimullah Mehsud was killed by a U.S. drone strike in November 2013, before any such talks took place.<sup>36</sup>

After the death of Hakimullah Mehsud, a shura appointed Maulana Fazlullah as the new leader of the TTP.<sup>37</sup> This leadership change sparked a bitter succession dispute between TTP member groups, which facilitated splintering and a change in the group's operational capabilities.<sup>38</sup> Because Fazlullah is not a member of the dominant Mehsud tribe, he was unable to maintain the union of the original coalition of militant groups that joined in 2007. Instead, in 2014, the TTP experienced significant fragmentation, due to disagreements over key strategic decisions, such as if the TTP should engage in peace talks with the Pakistani government, or if civilians qualify as acceptable targets for attacks.<sup>39</sup> Among the groups that splintered from the TTP was the Mehsud division—one of the largest and most powerful factions of the organization.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to these splits, a Pakistan Armed Forces joint operation known as “Operation Zarb-e-Azb” put further pressure on the TTP.<sup>41</sup> The government launched the operation against militant groups in North Waziristan on June 15, 2014, in response to the TTP's increased number of attacks on military and civilian targets.<sup>42</sup> This was the Pakistani government's first major, well-coordinated operation against the TTP. The effects of Zarb-e-Azb, combined with the effects of U.S. drone strikes and internal financial struggles, caused a large number of TTP militants, including key leaders, to abandon the FATA.<sup>43</sup> Pakistani security forces were subsequently able to clear most of the TTP's hubs, and dismantle about 70 percent of the TTP's infrastructure in the FATA. As a result, the number of suicide bombings in Pakistan declined by 2015.<sup>44</sup> However, despite these losses, the TTP was still able to launch major attacks in Pakistan. This was partially due to the lack of coordination between the Pakistani and Afghan governments on Zarb-e-Azb, which allowed militants fleeing North Waziristan to find safe havens in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>

In February 2017, the Pakistan Army launched “Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad” in order to eliminate the residual threat of terrorism from Pakistan.<sup>46</sup> Strikes on TTP commanders and allied groups have handicapped the ability of the TTP to plan and execute attacks on soft and hard targets alike.<sup>47</sup> The rise of the Islamic State (IS) has also undermined the authority of the TTP, causing several factions to defect from the TTP and pledge allegiance to IS.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the Pakistani government's psychological campaign against the extremist ideology of the TTP has led to an increase in leadership defection.<sup>49</sup> For example, in April 2017, prominent TTP leader, Ehsanullah Ehsan, surrendered himself to Pakistani security forces after admitting that the TTP had maligned Islam.<sup>50</sup> Despite the physical and ideological deterioration of the TTP, Fazlullah continually reaffirmed the TTP's intent to reunify its member groups, practice Jihad, and ultimately implement Shariah law throughout Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> However, his death in 2018 threatened to disrupt the group's unity and success even further. One week after Fazlullah's death in June of 2018, the group named Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud as the new leader.

Over the course of 2019 and 2020, the TTP expanded its base through the reincorporation of several factions that held affiliations to other organizations. This expansion indicated potential resurgences that were observed by the increase of attacks since the leadership change in 2018, many of which were directed towards Pakistani security personnel.<sup>52</sup> The

Pakistani government entered negotiations for a ceasefire in November 2021 in response to the uptick in fatal attacks and the expansion of the TTP as new factions were incorporated. The negotiations were mediated by the Afghan Taliban and resulted in a month-long ceasefire. The ceasefire ended when the TTP accused the government of breaching their agreement to release TTP prisoners and since it ended, the TTP has claimed responsibility for several attacks across northwest Pakistan.<sup>53</sup>

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### A. LEADERSHIP

**Baitullah Mehsud (2007-2009):** Baitullah Mehsud was the original leader of the TTP. In December 2007, 40 council members representing different tribal agencies and districts throughout Pakistan appointed Mehsud as the leader of the TTP. At the time of his appointment, Mehsud had an estimated 20,000 fighters under his control.<sup>54</sup> While in power, Mehsud used his newfound resources to orchestrate a number of attacks across Pakistan, killing hundreds of civilians, soldiers, police, and intelligence officials. The Pakistani Army claimed that Mehsud was involved in virtually every terror attack in Pakistan, while the United Nations accused him for involvement in approximately 80 percent of suicide bombings in Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup> Most notably, Mehsud was accused of conducting the assassination of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2008.<sup>56</sup> He was also instrumental in facilitating a close, symbiotic relationship between the TTP and Al Qaeda.<sup>57</sup> Mehsud was killed in a U.S. drone strike on August 5, 2009.<sup>58</sup>

**Hakimullah Mehsud (2009-2013):** Hakimullah Mehsud was the second leader of the TTP. He first came to prominence in the TTP by participating in a series of raids on the Pakistan Army in 2007, during which he captured 300 Pakistani soldiers.<sup>59</sup> Mehsud emerged as the TTP's new leader in August 2009, three weeks after the death of Baitullah Mehsud. Mehsud quickly became one of the most wanted militants in Pakistan, after the U.S. charged him with involvement in the 2009 suicide bombing attack on a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency base in Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> During his time as leader of the TTP, Mehsud was thought to have been responsible for the deaths of thousands of people.<sup>61</sup> In October 2013, he claimed in a BBC interview that he was open to peace talks with the Pakistani government, but stipulated that drone strikes must first be discontinued.<sup>62</sup> Mehsud was killed in a U.S. drone strike on November 1, 2013.<sup>63</sup>

**Maulana Fazlullah (2013-2018):** Maulana Fazlullah was the third leader of the TTP. Before his appointment, Fazlullah was known as a particularly influential and powerful figure in Swat Valley, Pakistan. Fazlullah, nicknamed "Mullah Radio," was known for broadcasting his hardline views of Islam on an illegal FM radio station.<sup>64</sup> Fazlullah advocated for the imposition of Shariah law in Swat, preached anti-Americanism, espoused the evils of female education. Most notably, Fazlullah claimed responsibility for the assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai in 2012.<sup>65</sup> After a bitter succession dispute following the death of Hakimullah Mehsud, the

TTP's central shura appointed Fazlullah as the new and current leader of the TTP in November 2013.<sup>66</sup> However, because Fazlullah is not a member of the dominant Mehsud tribe, he was unable to maintain the union of the original coalition of militant groups that joined in 2007. Under Fazlullah's leadership, the TTP struggled to maintain strength and unity, weakened by infighting and splits.<sup>67</sup> Fazlullah was killed by a U.S. drone strike in June of 2018.<sup>68</sup>

**Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud (2018-Present):** Mehsud was named as the new leader of the TTP a week after the group's previous leader, Fazlullah, was killed in a U.S. drone strike. Mehsud previously fought with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance after 9/11. In addition, he served as a deputy to Baitullah Mehsud in early 2002-2003. Mehsud differs from the previous leader, Fazlullah in that he is originally from the Mehsud tribe; the original two leaders of TTP also originated from this tribe.<sup>69</sup> In September 2019, the U.S. designated Mehsud as a Global Terrorist due to his direct involvement in fatal attacks within Pakistan.<sup>70</sup> Under his leadership, Mehsud facilitated the merging of new factions into the TTP and increased the prominence of the group since its fragmentation under Fazlullah's leadership.

## **B. NAME CHANGES**

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

## **C. SIZE ESTIMATES**

- July 2009: 16,000 (Foreign Policy)<sup>71</sup>
- August 2009: 20,000 (BBC)<sup>72</sup>
- September 2009: 10,000 (DIIS Report)<sup>73</sup>
- March 2012: 20,000-25,000 (The Military Balance)<sup>74</sup>
- No date: 30,000-35,000 (SATP)<sup>75</sup>
- 2018: 2,000 (RUSI)<sup>76</sup>
- September 2021: 3,000-6,000 (Congressional Research Service)<sup>77</sup>
- December 2021: 5,000-10,000 within Afghanistan (The Washington Post)<sup>78</sup>

## **D. RESOURCES**

Although each TTP faction is independently financed, the TTP funds its operations through four primary means. First, the TTP conducts kidnappings—usually of wealthy businessmen, aid workers, journalists, soldiers, and government employees—in order to gain money through ransom.<sup>79</sup> The TTP, which claims to condemn kidnapping for ransom, argues that abductions intended to “advance Islamic agenda” are acceptable.<sup>80</sup>

Second, the TTP smuggles valuable natural resources, such as gems and timber, in order to secure a large portion of its income. It has raised over \$100 million from timber from the Swat Valley alone.<sup>81</sup> The TTP also receives a financial boost by participating in the heroin trade, commandeering Pakistani mines and quarries, and looting archaeological sites in Swat.<sup>82</sup>

Third, the TTP participates in extortion in the FATA, imposing taxes on the local population, charging fees to pass safely through the area, and imposing protection taxes for shipments from local mines.<sup>83</sup> In particular, the TTP utilizes the Pashtun community in Karachi to secure revenue. Specifically, businessmen in Karachi, who currently hold a monopoly on the transport business, pay the TTP to protect their transactions and deliveries.<sup>84</sup> The TTP also extorts money from non-Muslim minorities through a protection tax known as *jiziya*. Those who violate Shariah law are subject to further economic penalties.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the TTP receives large sums of money through donations and gifts from both Pakistani and international benefactors.<sup>86</sup> Allied groups can also transfer money to the TTP in this way. For example, in September of 2009, Pakistan's Criminal Investigation Department discovered that Al Qaeda contributed \$15 million to the TTP through the Saudi-based charity, al-Hara-main Foundation.<sup>87</sup> Smaller groups, such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, offer the TTP money and gifts in exchange for sanctuary and training. In the past, the Afghan Taliban reportedly financed the TTP and the Pakistani Taliban. Specifically, in March 2006, Mullah Omar allegedly provided Baitullah Mehsud with \$70,000 in exchange for the Pakistani Taliban's willingness to target the diplomats of countries involved in the publication of cartoons disgracing the Prophet Mohammad. However, it is unclear if the Afghan Taliban has continued to support the TTP since its formation.<sup>88</sup>

The TTP is responsible for collecting and distributing revenue among the various Pakistani Taliban groups in Waziristan. Each tribal agency in Waziristan first submits the revenue it has collected to a central authority. This central authority then distributes money monthly to the tribal agencies, with the TTP receiving the majority of the share.<sup>89</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.

The TTP is headquartered in the South Waziristan Agency of the FATA. The TTP has spread its network into all four provinces of Pakistan by establishing various chapters of the organization. These chapters are led by local commanders who report to the overarching leadership of the TTP.<sup>90</sup> Although the TTP operates primarily within Pakistan, it also has a presence in Afghanistan. In 2014, many TTP militants fled across the Pakistani border into Afghanistan in order to escape Operation Zarb-e-Azb.<sup>91</sup>

## STRATEGY

## **A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS**

The TTP is Deobandi-Wahabi in its sectarian orientation.<sup>92</sup> The founding goals of the TTP are threefold. First, the TTP seeks to implement and enforce a strict interpretation of Shariah law throughout Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> In accordance with this belief, the TTP is strictly opposed to female education, as was evidenced by the 2012 assassination attempt on girls' rights activist Malala Yousafzai.<sup>94</sup> The TTP believes the existing Pakistani constitution should be replaced with Shariah law, in order to realize Pakistan's true identity as an Islamic state.<sup>95</sup> Previously, one of the TTP's goals was to combat and expel U.S.-led coalition forces from Afghanistan. After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the TTP now focuses on supporting the Afghan Taliban's control in Kabul.<sup>96</sup> Finally, the TTP is committed to expelling Pakistani security forces from the FATA, and conducting defensive jihad against the Pakistani government.<sup>97</sup> The TTP claims that its jihad against the Pakistani government is an act of self-defense against an apostate and puppet regime of the United States.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, the group intends to overthrow the Pakistani government and establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan.<sup>99</sup>

Because the TTP is comprised of various groups with different sectarian backgrounds, individual TTP commanders may differ in their prioritization of the organization's aforementioned goals.<sup>100</sup> Certain TTP leaders, such as Baitullah Mehsud, have also referenced global jihad as a means to rescue fellow Muslims from occupation, spread Shariah law, and avenge the growing U.S. presence and drone strikes in Pakistan.<sup>101</sup>

## **B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES**

Although the TTP does not participate in the formal political process in Pakistan, it attempted to influence the 2013 general elections. Specifically, the TTP worked to create an atmosphere in which liberal and progressive parties could not go out to campaign safely. The organization targeted judges, lawyers, journalists, and all others who attempted to speak out against the TTP. For example, during the 2013 election cycle, TTP militants opened fire on a court complex while another militant detonated a suicide bomb. This attack killed 4 people and injured at least 30, one of whom was a judge.<sup>102</sup> Although the winning party was not a pro-Taliban religious extremist group, the TTP considered the success of a center-right conservative party (the Pakistan Muslim League (N)) to be a victory for its own goals.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to these informal interactions with Pakistani politics, the TTP has also recently begun to negotiate openly with the Pakistani government. In the initial years of its formation, the organization was starkly opposed to any negotiations with the Pakistani government. Although the Pakistani government had attempted to negotiate peace treaties with other militant groups since 2004, the government did not hold direct talks with the leadership of the TTP until ten years later.<sup>104</sup> In January 2014, the TTP entered into peace talks with the Pakistani government. The organization's main goals were to negotiate an end to U.S. drone strikes and implement Shariah law throughout Pakistan. The talks were suspended two weeks later, when the TTP killed 23 soldiers that it had previously taken hostage.<sup>105</sup> Although a brief ceasefire revived the talks in March, the government



permanently dissolved the negotiations following the TTP's attack on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi in June 2014.<sup>106</sup> With the increase of violent attacks in northwest Pakistan, the Pakistani government entered negotiations with the TTP that resulted in a month-long ceasefire from November to December 2021.<sup>107</sup>

### **C. TARGETS AND TACTICS**

The TTP's most common form of attack is bombings, including suicide attacks.<sup>108</sup> The preferred targets for these attacks are Pakistani security forces and other symbols of the "un-Islamic" authority of the Pakistani government.<sup>109</sup> For example, the TTP has targeted schools, particularly those that educate girls or the children of Pakistani servicemen, in order to strike psychologically at its enemies. The TTP promotes its mission by disseminating pro-TTP messages through illegal FM radio channels, CDs, DVDs, newspapers, and websites. The organization places a significant effort in recruiting children and young adults through youth-targeted propaganda.<sup>110</sup> In particular, the TTP romanticizes and idolizes the concept of child martyrdom in its propaganda messages and training.<sup>111</sup> The TTP then indoctrinates masses of teenage boys to serve as suicide bombers.<sup>112</sup> The organization sends new recruits to training facilities in the FATA to learn how to conduct guerilla warfare and make bombs. Suicide bombers receive an additional four months of training in South Waziristan to prepare themselves for their missions.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to suicide bombings, the TTP also conducts hit-and-run raids against Pakistani security forces. The TTP usually chooses low-level targets, such as remote check-posts, supply lines, and mobile patrols for such attacks. The raids are designed to wear down the morale of soldiers, because they must maintain a constant vigil in order to protect themselves from the attacks. Hit-and-run operations are relatively easy for the TTP to conduct, because they require only a few armed men in order to disrupt and inflict destruction on the target.<sup>114</sup> Both Western and Pakistani officials consider the TTP to be particularly dangerous, given its ability to effectively target the Pakistani military.<sup>115</sup>

In major Pakistani cities, such as Karachi, the TTP manifests itself as a mafia-like presence. For example, militants often threaten business owners with death or the death of family members, unless they agree to pay the TTP. As a result, the TTP has been able to exercise a large degree of control over cities, to the point that police forces are often hesitant to enter certain districts.<sup>116</sup> Security analysts have cited the TTP's presence in Karachi as particularly concerning, as it threatens the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. This concern was confirmed in August 2014, when TTP militants attacked a naval base in Karachi suspected to house part of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.<sup>117</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.

**December 23, 2007:** The TTP conducted a suicide attack on a military convoy in Mingora (13 killed, 25 wounded).<sup>118</sup>

**December 27, 2007:** The Pakistani government alleges that the TTP was behind the assassination of the then-Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. However, the TTP denies this claim (1 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>119</sup>

**August 21, 2008:** The TTP conducted twin suicide bombings at Pakistan's largest weapons factory (66 killed, 70 wounded).<sup>120</sup>

**October 10, 2008:** The TTP conducted a suicide bombing at a meeting of over 500 Ali Zai tribal leaders who had gathered to discuss the formation of a militia to secure the region and oppose the Taliban (85 killed, 200 wounded).<sup>121</sup>

**March 30, 2009:** The TTP conducted an attack on a police training academy in Lahore. Baitullah Mehsud claimed that the attack was in retaliation for the Pakistani government's cooperation in continued U.S. drone strikes (10 killed, 95 wounded).<sup>122</sup>

**October 9, 2009:** A car bomb exploded in a market in Peshawar. Although the TTP did not officially claim responsibility for the attack, the Pakistani government suspected the bombing to be part of a TTP campaign in retaliation for the Pakistani military's offensive on the TTP's main base in South Waziristan (125 killed, 100+ wounded).<sup>123</sup>

**December 30, 2009:** TTP conducted a suicide bombing attack on a U.S. base in Afghanistan as an act of revenge for Baitullah Mehsud's death (7 killed, 6 wounded).<sup>124</sup>

**January 1, 2010:** A TTP suicide bomber detonated a vehicle packed with explosives in the district of Lakki Marwat, where over 400 people had gathered to watch a volleyball match (105 killed, 100+ wounded).<sup>125</sup>

**April 3, 2011:** Two TTP suicide bombers attacked a Sufi shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan, where thousands of devotees had gathered to celebrate. (50 killed, 120 wounded).<sup>126</sup>

**May 13, 2011:** The TTP conducted a dual suicide bombing on a police cadet training center in Charsadda. A TTP spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, claimed that the attacks were carried out in revenge for the killing of Osama bin Laden (98 killed, 115 wounded).<sup>127</sup>

**October 9, 2012:** A TTP gunman stormed a school bus and attempted to assassinate a young advocate for female education, Malala Yousafzai. Yousafzai survived the

gunshot wound to the head and became an icon for girls' rights. The incident sparked international sympathy and outrage and inspired widespread support for children's and women's rights. (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>128</sup>

**July 26, 2013:** The TTP conducted two coordinated suicide attacks against a Shiite community at a market in the Kurram Agency. The TTP asserted that the attack was an act of revenge for the alleged brutalities of Shiite Muslims on Sunni Muslims in Iraq and Syria (60 killed, 180 wounded).<sup>129</sup>

**September 22, 2013:** The TTP conducted a dual suicide bombing during a service at Christian church in Peshawar. The TTP claimed that such attacks against foreigners and non-Muslims would continue until there is an end to drone strikes (81 killed, 145 wounded).<sup>130</sup>

**June 8, 2014:** Ten TTP-led militants conducted a five-hour long siege on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi. The incident was a joint attack between the TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (18 killed, 26 wounded).<sup>131</sup>

**December 16, 2014:** TTP militants conducted a massacre in an Pakistan Army-run school in Peshawar. The majority of those killed in the attack were children (150 killed, 114 wounded).<sup>132</sup>

**March 27, 2016:** The Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction of the TTP conducted a suicide bombing at a park in Lahore, where Christians had gathered to celebrate Easter (74 killed, 300 wounded).<sup>133</sup>

**August 8, 2016:** The TTP conducted a suicide bombing at the emergency ward of Quetta's Civil Hospital, where scores of people were gathered to mourn the death of Balochistan Bar president, Bilal Anwar Kasi, in a shooting earlier that day (74 killed, 100 wounded).<sup>134</sup>

**June 4, 2018:** A TTP militant opened fire on a Pakistani Pashtun gathering led by activist Ali Wazir. The group had gathered for a PTM (Pashtun Protection Movement) rights rally (10 killed, 30 wounded).<sup>135</sup>

**July 21, 2019:** A TTP militant conducted a suicide bombing in a hospital in Dera Ismaill Khan. The TTP stated that this attack and one other than occurred in the region on the same day were in retaliation of the death of a TTP militant a month prior (8 killed, 30 wounded).<sup>136</sup>

**July 14, 2021:** A car filled with explosives drove into a bus carrying workers to a dam construction site in northern Pakistan, many of whom were Chinese workers. While the TTP denied responsibility for this attack, the Pakistani government announced their investigation proved the TTP's involvement in the suicide bombing (13 killed, 25+ wounded).<sup>137</sup>

**December 11, 2021:** Two TTP militants shot a police officer who was guarding a polio vaccination team in Tank. This attack happened two days after the TTP ended a month-long ceasefire with the Pakistani government (1 killed, 1 wounded).<sup>138</sup>

## **INTERACTIONS**

### **A. DESIGNATED/LISTED**

- United States: U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations from September 1, 2010 to present<sup>139</sup>
- Canada: Listed Terrorist Entities from July 5, 2011 to present<sup>140</sup>
- Britain: Designated as a terrorist group under the Terrorism Act 2000 in September 2011
- UAE: Designated by the UAE Cabinet in November 2014<sup>141</sup>

### **B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

Although the TTP frequently terrorizes the local Pakistani population, the organization relies on tribal loyalties and local affiliations for its recruitment. The TTP preys heavily on young men in madrassas and mosques, manipulating religious teachings to fit its tactical agenda. Specifically, the TTP claims that, in order to be a faithful Muslim, young men are morally obligated to fight all enemies of Islam, including the Pakistan Army. The TTP also recruits Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in refugee camps. Many of these individuals have either been affected by collateral damage from heavily military action by the Pakistani military or forced to move by the Pakistani government. As a result, individuals often harbor grudges toward the Pakistani state, and are vulnerable to indoctrination by the TTP.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to drawing recruits from local communities, the TTP also receives support from more conservative and hardline religious Pakistanis. For example, in Karachi, the TTP's efforts to rid the city of immoral activities such as drugs and prostitution have made the organization more popular.<sup>143</sup>

Although there exists a base of local support for the TTP, particularly among strict religious communities in Waziristan and Karachi, the organization's repeated and increasingly indiscriminate terror attacks have sparked widespread outrage among many Pakistanis. By the onset of Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, citizens were demanding justice against terror organizations. Many were willing to support any military measures necessary to protect their towns from the brutal violence of the TTP and other militant groups. Pakistani security forces work to minimize collateral damage during aggressive counter-terror offensives in order to minimize the chance of alienating the local population and creating a new class of potential terrorist recruits. This potential retaliation for collateral damage is intensified by the Pashtun ethical code of conduct, Pakhtunwali, which stipulates that a man must avenge the death of a friend or brother.<sup>144</sup>

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

Approximately half of all Pakistani Taliban factions coalesce under the umbrella of the TTP. Of the other half of Pakistani Taliban factions, some are only loosely affiliated with the TTP, while others have little to no association with the organization. Two notable examples include the Nazir Group and Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which, as of their 2008 split, are part of the Pakistani Taliban, but not the TTP.<sup>145</sup> These two groups are focused on fighting U.S.-led Coalition forces in Afghanistan and have made peace agreements with the Pakistani government. However, fragmentation and disputes exist both between disparate Pakistani Taliban groups and within the official umbrella of the TTP. For example, TTP member groups often hold independent goals and regularly disagree over territorial control, leadership positions, and negotiations with the Pakistani government. Despite these inter-group conflicts, Pakistani Taliban groups (including the TTP and non-TTP groups) generally refrain from fighting one another. This is due primarily to their common struggle for survival in the face of Pakistani military operations and U.S. drone strikes.<sup>146</sup>

As its name suggests, the TTP is also associated with the Afghan Taliban. While the TTP and Afghan Taliban share tactics their emphasis on Islamic extremist ideology, the two organizations are distinct. Unlike the Afghan Taliban, which focuses on combatting U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, the TTP's main target is the Pakistani state.<sup>147</sup> The Afghan Taliban has even condemned some of the TTP's operations, such as its 2014 attack against a Pakistan Army school in Peshawar, which it deemed "un-Islamic."<sup>148</sup> Despite their differing goals, the two organizations cooperate in order to maintain control over the tribal regions on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, although the Afghan Taliban does not condone the TTP's attacks in Pakistan, all TTP militants pledge their support for the Afghan Taliban and Afghan jihad. By pledging allegiance to the Afghan Taliban, the TTP is able to capitalize on the widespread support for the Afghan jihad which exists among Pashtun tribesmen. This helps to attract the maximum number of recruits to the TTP.<sup>150</sup> Maintaining a working relationship with the TTP is also beneficial to the Afghan Taliban, for it allows the organization to maintain safe havens and sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to recruit Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen to fight in Afghanistan.<sup>151</sup>

One of the TTP's most powerful allies is Al Qaeda. Many of the tribal factions within the TTP are closely linked to Al Qaeda and have provided shelter to wanted Al Qaeda leaders since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>152</sup> Baitullah Mehsud was particularly instrumental in facilitating a close, symbiotic relationship between the TTP and Al Qaeda since the TTP's formation in 2007. Specifically, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden sent militants to aid in the TTP's attacks against Pakistani, Afghan, and U.S.-led coalition forces, in exchange for the TTP's willingness to allow Al Qaeda to operate in South Waziristan. In March 2008, Mehsud reflected common Al Qaeda rhetoric when he threatened to attack the Washington, D.C.<sup>153</sup> The TTP continues to provide Al Qaeda members with safe haven in areas of Pakistan under TTP, while Al Qaeda provides the TTP with logistical guidance.

The relationship between the Haqqani Network and the TTP dates back to 2007, when the two groups agreed to begin abducting hostages for ransom. Although the TTP and the Haqqani Network generally operate independent of one another, they cooperate smoothly in hostage scenarios involving high-value captives.<sup>154</sup> In 2012, the two groups allegedly clashed in North Waziristan, leaving 8 dead.<sup>155</sup> However, despite this incident, the Haqqani Network allegedly provides groups within the Pakistani Taliban with tens of thousands of soldiers. The TTP also relies on the Haqqani network for access into Afghanistan.<sup>156</sup>

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has been an ally of the TTP since 2007, when Baitullah Mehsud provided shelter to IMU militants retreating from the Nazir Group.<sup>157</sup> In late January 2013, the TTP and IMU formed the Ansar al Aseer, a joint unit dedicated to freeing imprisoned jihadis and supporting their families.<sup>158</sup> The two groups often carry out joint attacks on the Pakistani state and U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan.<sup>159</sup> For example, in April 2012, approximately 150 IMU and TTP militants launched a successful raid on Bannu Prison in Pakistan, freeing nearly 400 prisoners.<sup>160</sup> Another notable joint attack occurred in June 2014, when the TTP and IMU conducted a five-hour long siege on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi.<sup>161</sup>

Although Jundullah is sometimes referenced as a splinter group of the TTP, the true nature of the relationship between the two groups is unclear.<sup>162</sup> The group was absorbed into the TTP sometime between 2009 and 2013, as Jundullah's leader, Hakimullah Mehsud, was also the leader of the TTP.<sup>163</sup> However, the group allegedly splintered from the TTP after Mehsud's death, and has now vowed allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.<sup>164</sup>

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is a suspected ally of the TTP, as the two groups have occasionally collaborated. However, the TTP has conducted violent attacks against LeT fronts, such as Jammat-ud-Dawa, LeT's social welfare wing, and killed at least 15 Jammat-ud-Dawa officials between 2008 and 2009.<sup>165</sup> Due to these previous attacks, the relationship between LeT and the TTP is difficult to corroborate. LeT has also acted as a network through which the TTP can train and coordinate with other militant groups.<sup>166</sup> LeT has also reportedly attempted to influence the TTP to restrain its attacks on the Pakistan Army and instead intensify violence against Afghanistan, the U.S. and India.<sup>167</sup>

Other militant groups that are allied with the TTP include Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), Harkatul Jihad-E-Islami (HUJI), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and the Indian Mujahideen (IM).<sup>168</sup> As part of these alliances, the TTP often facilitates suicide operations and provides other organizations with suicide bombers.<sup>169</sup>

In 2014, the TTP experienced significant fragmentation, primarily due to disagreements over key strategic decisions, such as if the TTP should engage in peace talks with the Pakistani government, or if civilians qualify as acceptable targets for attacks.<sup>170</sup> The TTP's second major split, after the 2008 departure of the Nazir Group and the Hafiz Ful Bahadur Group, occurred in February 2014, when a member group known as Ahrar-ul-Hind left the organization in opposition to talks between the TTP and the Pakistani

government.<sup>171</sup> Then, in May 2014, the Mehsud division (also known as the TTP South Waziristan or TTP Sanja faction) broke away from the organization over certain practices, which it considered to be immoral and “un-Islamic,” such as extortion, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians.<sup>172</sup> Later that year, several other factions and individual commanders split with the TTP, including Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JA), the TTP Shehryar Mehsud faction, the Punjabi Taliban, and Jundullah.<sup>173</sup> Some of these latter splits were influenced by the rise of the Islamic State. For example, Jundullah and six other TTP commanders, including Shahidullah Shahid, defected from the TTP after pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>174</sup>

In March 2015, a spokesman for JA announced that it had rejoined the TTP, and that Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI) had also united under the TTP banner.<sup>175</sup> Two months later, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and two other jihadi groups lead by Quari Ehsanul Haq and Muhammad Shamil, merged with the TTP.<sup>176</sup> On February 2, 2017, the TTP announced that the Mehsud division had rejoined the organization.<sup>177</sup> Despite the fact that many of the groups that split with the TTP in 2014 ultimately rejoined its ranks, some groups, such as the Shehryar Mehsud faction and Jundullah, remain estranged from the organization.<sup>178</sup>

In 2020, the TTP competed with the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (IS-KP) for influence over the Kashmiri jihad in efforts to increase its transnational network. The TTP reintegrated JA and Hizbul Ahrar, a group that split from JA in 2017, after both groups had previously aligned themselves with IS-KP for several years.<sup>179</sup> The TTP also merged with the Hakimullah Mehsud group and the Amjad Farouqi group who was previously affiliated with Al Qaeda. When the Biden administration pulled U.S. troops out of Afghanistan in August 2021, Mehsud reiterated the TTP’s allegiance to the Afghan Taliban and pledged to fully support the restored regime.<sup>180</sup> The Pakistani government implied that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan would restrict the TTP’s strength but were proved wrong as the Afghan Taliban reinforced connections with the TTP.<sup>181</sup> The Afghan Taliban released TTP prisoners who had been imprisoned by the Afghan government in addition to ensuring free movement between Pakistan and Afghanistan. By December 2021, between 5,000 and 10,000 TTP militants moved into Afghanistan to help the Afghan Taliban maintain stability as it exerted control over Kabul.<sup>182</sup> Friction between the Pakistani government and the Afghan Taliban-backed TTP is expected to increase in 2022, with potential areas of concern along the border as the Pakistani government continues to construct border fences.<sup>183</sup>

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

In April 2017, a former spokesman for the TTP, Ehsanullah Ehsan, claimed that Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies allegedly provide the TTP with funds and other assistance to combat the Pakistani government. The TTP’s relationship with the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) and India’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) theoretically developed in 2014, when TTP militants fled across the border to Afghanistan as a result of Operation Zarb-e-Azb.<sup>184</sup> Ehsan claims that both the NDS and RAW supported the TTP by providing financial assistance. Additionally, Ehsan alleged

that the NDS issued TTP militants special identify cards for free movement in Afghanistan, while the RAW offered payment for the TTP's willingness to conduct attacks on certain targets.<sup>185</sup>

Both the Afghan and Indian governments strongly denied Ehsan's allegations, asserting that there is no credibility to the claims.<sup>186</sup> An Afghan security official dismissed Ehsan's claims as an attempt by the Pakistani government to further the narrative that it is a victim of terrorism, while, in actuality, it is a sponsor of terrorism in Afghanistan and India.<sup>187</sup>

## MAPS

- Pakistan
- Global Islamic State
- Global Al Qaeda

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