

The Menace That Is Lashkar-e-Taiba

Executive Summary

The Paper in a Nutshell

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is a formidable and highly adaptable adversary with genuinely global reach. After al-Qaeda, it is the most dangerous terrorist group operating in South Asia today. Given its growing capabilities and relatively robust sanctuary in Pakistan, the group poses a serious threat to American national security. The United States should seek LeT's permanent destruction—with Pakistani cooperation if possible, but without it if necessary.

Key Themes

International ambitions: Though India and Kashmir have been LeT's primary area of operations so far, the group's recruitment, fundraising, and operations extend to Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia, Europe, Africa, and Australia.

Collaboration with other terrorist groups: LeT has demonstrated a remarkable ability to forge coalitions with like-minded groups including al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, and the Haqqani network.

State sponsorship: Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate has maintained strong—albeit underground—links with LeT for decades, providing over the years everything from funding to specialized weapons, combat training, safe havens, and intelligence on targets and threats.

Diversified funding network: LeT raises money from a range of private financiers, Islamic charities, and regional and international businesses, both licit and illicit.

Social welfare programs: LeT maintains extensive charitable operations—including madrassas, mosques, offices, health centers, and blood banks—making it difficult for the Pakistani state to target the organization, even if it were so inclined.

Cohesive organizational structure: Unlike many terrorist groups in South Asia whose command and control structures are casual and often disorganized, LeT's organization is hierarchic, precise, and remarkably efficient.

Tactical sophistication: As evidenced by its 2008 attack on Mumbai, LeT is adept at planning highly complex operations exploiting technology, extra-national social links, and state vulnerabilities to inflict extremely high casualties.

Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers

Treat LeT as more than just an Indian problem: While India has absorbed most of LeT's blows, Washington must recognize the group exhibits all the ideological animus, financial and material capabilities, motivation, and ruthlessness required to launch attacks against the U.S. homeland.

Destroy the organization: Left unchecked, LeT will evolve into a truly formidable threat. Together with its allies, the United States should use all available means to eviscerate LeT—with or without Pakistan's help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ashley J. Tellis is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. An expert on South Asia, he previously served on the National Security Council staff, as well as at the U.S. Department of State, where he was intimately involved in negotiating the civil nuclear agreement with India.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

A full-length version of this study is available on the web at: CarnegieEndowment.org/tellis. For more information or to speak with one of our scholars, please do not hesitate to contact our government affairs manager, Scott Toussaint, at (202) 939-2307 or stoussaint@ceip.org.

ABOUT THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE:

Founded in 1910, the Carnegie Endowment is a leading, nonpartisan think tank specializing in foreign affairs. It is also the world's first truly global think tank with operations in Washington, D.C., Moscow, Beijing, Beirut, and Brussels.