

Pakistan's Terror Network One Year After Pahalgam



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One year ago, on April 22, gunmen emerged from the pine forests near Pahalgam's Baisaran meadow and executed 26 Hindu tourists after asking them to identify their religion. The attack bore the hallmarks of a professionally organized operation, the equipment, the handlers traced to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and the claim of responsibility issued twice on Telegram by The Resistance Front. Pahalgam was not an isolated incident. It was evidence of a functioning, state sponsored terror enterprise operating from Pakistani soil.

Twelve months later, the debate over whether Pakistan harbors transnational terrorist infrastructure is effectively settled. Court indictments in the United States, arrests of Pakistani nationals on South Korean soil, and formal designations by Washington itself have closed that argument. What remains open and urgent is why this infrastructure continues to grow despite diplomatic exposure, operational setbacks, and India's military response through Operation Sindoor in May 2025.

TRF, established in 2019 as a proxy of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was formally designated a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US State Department in July 2025, explicitly described as an LeT front responsible for the deadliest civilian attack on Indian soil since the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Rather than prompting a retreat, the designation appears to have coincided with an expansion of jihadist activity inside Pakistan.

In October 2025, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) announced the formation of its first women's wing at its Bahawalpur compound, enrolling over 5,000 women within weeks through an online religious curriculum. LeT, meanwhile, has established a 135 member maritime unit training at sites across Pakistan including Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, and Muzaffarabad with drills modeled on the tactics used in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Senior commanders have been filmed supervising scuba and high speed boat exercises. Separately, LeT's political front held a public conference in Lahore in May 2025 alongside Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, with a designated terrorist sharing the stage.

Financing has adapted alongside operations. Following Operation Sindoor, JeM launched a campaign to raise roughly PKR 3.91 billion to construct 313 mosques, with funds routed through mobile payment platforms and family accounts linked to JeM leader Masood Azhar. Investigators monitoring these networks have documented a broader shift from traditional banking to fragmented digital transfers and cryptocurrency, including Tether and Bitcoin transactions on peer to peer exchanges. Pakistan's establishment of a national crypto council in early 2025, followed by a financial partnership with a US based firm, has introduced new layers of opacity into these flows.

The consequences extend well beyond South Asia. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 ranks Pakistan as the world's most terrorism affected country for the first time, recording over 1,100 terrorism related fatalities in 2025. A Congressional Research Service brief from March 2026 identifies at least fifteen active terrorist groups operating from Pakistani territory, twelve of them US designated foreign terrorist organizations, nearly all of which have survived every major Pakistani counter-terrorism initiative since 2014.

The network's global reach is no longer theoretical. In March 2026, a federal jury in Brooklyn convicted a Pakistani national on terrorism and murder for hire charges tied to a plot targeting senior US political figures. In April, a 21 year old Pakistani citizen pleaded guilty in Manhattan to planning a mass shooting at a Jewish center in Brooklyn, inspired by ISIS. Last August, South Korean police arrested a Pakistani national in Seoul who had been inducted into LeT following weapons training, the first arrest of a member of a UN designated terrorist organization on Korean soil.

These cases collectively dismantle Pakistan's self-presentation as merely a victim of terrorism. The reality is more complicated: Pakistan is simultaneously a host and a target, and the two conditions reinforce each other. The proxies cultivated against India do not stay confined to the subcontinent. They recruit in Bahawalpur, train in Mangla, transfer funds through Karachi mobile wallets, and surface as defendants in American courtrooms.

One year after Pahalgam, the relevant policy question for Western governments is not whether Pakistan can theoretically be pressured to act. It is whether international institutions like the FATF, the UN sanctions committee, and bilateral partners are willing to impose real costs given the documented evidence. Without that, the implicit message to Pakistan's military is that exporting terrorism carries no meaningful price. The victims of Pahalgam deserve better than that signal.

(CA based Zutshi is from Kashmir and chairman of the Kashmir Task Force.) [Tourist Destinations](#)

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