

# Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab

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## *Executive Summary*

Southern Punjab must be central to any sustainable effort to counter jihadist violence within and beyond Pakistan's borders, given the presence of militant groups with local, regional and transnational links and an endless source of recruits, including through large madrasa and mosque networks. The region hosts two of Pakistan's most radical Deobandi groups, Jaish-e-Mohammed, held responsible by India for the 2 January 2016 attack on its Pathankot airbase; and the sectarian Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which was at least complicit in, if not solely responsible for, the 27 March Easter Sunday attack that killed more than 70 in Lahore. To reverse the jihadist tide, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s federal and Punjab province governments will have to both end the climate of impunity that allows these groups to operate freely and address political alienation resulting from other governance failures these groups tap into.

Southern Punjab was once known for a tolerant society, but over the past few decades, state support for jihadist proxies, financial support from foreign, particularly Saudi and other Gulf countries, combined with an explosive mix of political, socio-economic, and geostrategic factors, has enabled jihadist expansion there. Bordering on insurgency-hit and lawless regions of the country and also sharing a border with India, it has long provided a convenient base where these outfits can recruit, train and plan and conduct terror attacks. Although jihadist groups still harbour a fringe minority in a region where the vast majority follows a more tolerant, syncretic form of Islam, their ability to operate freely is largely the result of the state's policy choices, particularly long reliance on jihadist proxies to promote perceived national security interests. The absence of rule-of-law, combined with political dysfunction and inept governance, also allows these organisations to exercise influence disproportionate to their size and social roots.

With state sponsorship and a pervasive climate of impunity enhancing jihadist groups' recruitment potential, the risks of joining are far lower than potential gains that include employment and other financial rewards, social status and sense of purpose. These are all the more compelling in Punjab's largely rural and relatively poorly developed southern regions, where perceptions of exploitation by the industrialised central and north Punjab, referred to by southern Punjabis as *Takht Lahore* (throne of Lahore), are high, the result of political marginalisation, weak governance, economic neglect and glaring income inequity.

After the December 2014 attack on the Peshawar Army Public School by a Pakistani Taliban faction that killed over 150, mostly children, the civilian and military leadership vowed to eliminate all extremist groups. Yet, the core goal of the counter-terrorism National Action Plan (NAP) it developed – to end distinctions between “good” jihadists, those perceived to promote strategic objectives in India and Afghanistan, and “bad” jihadists, those that target the security forces and other Pakistanis – appears to have fallen by the wayside.

A highly selective approach still characterises the ongoing crackdown on militant outfits in southern Punjab and undermines broader counter-terrorism objectives. While the anti-India Jaish continues to operate freely, paramilitary units use indiscriminate force against local criminal groups, and the Punjab government resorts to

extrajudicial killings to eliminate the LeJ leadership and foot soldiers. Overreliance on a militarised counter-terrorism approach based on blunt force might yield short-term benefits but, by undermining rule-of-law and fuelling alienation, will prove counterproductive in the long term.

The lack of progress on other major NAP goals, particularly reform and regulation of the madrasa sector, has especially adverse implications for southern Punjab, with its many Deobandi madrasas. The children of the poor are exposed to sectarian and other radical ideological discourse. The state's unwillingness to clamp down on it in sectarian madrasas and mosques so as to counter hate speech and prevent dissemination of hate literature increases the potential for radicalisation in the region.

In the poorest region of the country's richest and most populous province, where economic hardships are compounded by periodic natural disasters, including droughts and floods that destroy homes and livelihoods, jihadist groups, often with state support, their access being facilitated by the bureaucracy, are given opportunities to win hearts and minds through their charity wings. At the same time, civil society organisations capable of filling the gaps in the state's delivery of services are often subjected to restrictions and intimidation.

Despite jihadist inroads, the vast majority in southern Punjab still adhere to more moderate syncretic forms of Islam: Sufism, and Barelvism, with practices and rituals that Deobandis and Wahhabi/Salafis portray as heretic. Yet, a general climate of impunity is encouraging extreme religious, sectarian and gender discrimination and exclusion. If left unchecked, these groups' influence will likely spread within and beyond the region.

Lahore and Islamabad should enforce the law against all jihadist organisations, without exception. If they do not, many in southern Punjab may continue to see the rewards of joining such organisations as far outweighing the costs.

## *Recommendations*

### *To end the climate of impunity*

#### **To the federal and Punjab governments:**

1. Replace selective counter-terrorism with an approach that targets all jihadist groups that use violence within or from Pakistani territory, including by thoroughly investigating the alleged role of Pakistan-based jihadists in the Pathankot attack, extending beyond individual operatives to the organisations that sustain them.
2. Focus counter-terrorism efforts on reforming and strengthening the criminal justice system, with a properly resourced, authorised and accountable provincial police force at its heart, so as to moderate reliance on lethal force.
3. Investigate and monitor under the Anti-Terrorism Act or UN Security Council Resolution 1267 and its blacklist all madrasas, mosques and charities with known or suspected links to banned groups, as well as those that maintain armed militias, or whose administrators and/or members incite violence and other criminal acts within or from the country; and act first against those madrasas in southern Punjab already identified as actively training militants and having direct or indirect links with jihadist outfits.
4. Prevent circulation of hate literature and enforce laws against hate speech in madrasas, mosques and other forums, including by following through on all current cases against hard-line preachers and others accused of violating them.

### *To redress policy that favours a jihadist fringe over a moderate and diverse civil society*

5. Remove arbitrary official and unofficial restrictions on NGOs and other civil society organisations in southern Punjab and assume responsibility for protecting against jihadist threats.
6. Repeal all legislation that discriminates on the basis of religion, sect and gender and refrain from backtracking on provincial pro-women legislation or yielding to Islamist party pressure to dilute its provisions.
7. Protect southern Punjab's religious minorities, in particular Christians and Hindus, and take action against perpetrators of violence against women by acting through the legal system on reports of intimidation and abuse.

### *To redress the political, social and economic alienation in southern Punjab that contributes to recruitment opportunities for jihadist groups*

#### **To the federal and Punjab governments:**

8. Reform and expand the public school network, including by removing intolerant religious discourse and distorted narratives glorifying jihadist violence from the classroom; and accompany education reform with assistance along the lines of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) to help poor families afford to send their children to school.

9. Increase southern Punjab's development budget, accompanied by meaningful consultations with communities on development programs; and establish and implement requirements to hire a significant proportion of local labour for such programs and provide it related training.

**To the ruling and opposition parties:**

10. Respond to the political alienation in southern Punjab by including local leaders within party decision-making processes and structures, and giving them a voice at the local, provincial and national levels.
11. Redress local grievances by addressing them in the provincial and federal parliaments, including through appropriate legislation.

**Islamabad/Brussels, 30 May 2016**

# Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab

## I. Introduction

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On 27 March 2016, Easter Sunday, a suicide attack targeting Christians in Lahore's Gulshan-i-Iqbal park killed over 70 and injured hundreds, dramatising the continued threat that jihadist organisations pose to Pakistan's state and citizens.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, on 2 January, Pakistan-based jihadists allegedly attacked India's Pathankot airbase, killing several security personnel and undermining efforts between Islamabad and New Delhi to improve bilateral relations.<sup>2</sup> Each attack was reportedly linked to one or another of Pakistan's two most dangerous jihadist organisations, based in the south of its richest and most populous province, Punjab.<sup>3</sup>

Southern Punjab is home base of the radical Sunni Deobandi Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which was at least complicit in, if not mainly responsible for, the Easter Sunday attack; and of the anti-India oriented Deobandi Jaish-e-Mohammed (also known as Jaish), which New Delhi held responsible for the Pathankot attack.<sup>4</sup> Despite counter-terrorism operations against radical Islamist organisations since the National Action Plan (NAP) was launched following the December 2014 attack by a Pakistani Taliban faction on the Peshawar Army Public School, southern Punjab's jihadist networks have yet to be dismantled.<sup>5</sup> While no single factor explains their expansion and clout, a mix of poor rule-of-law and other governance failures and flawed state policies to promote perceived national security interests is largely responsible for the ability of these groups to operate freely, radicalise and recruit, including via a large mosque and madrasa network.

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<sup>1</sup> For Crisis Group analysis of jihadist groups and violent extremism, see Asia Reports N°s 271, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls*, 22 July 2015; 255, *Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan*, 23 January 2014; 242, *Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA*, 15 January 2013; 216, *Islamic Parties in Pakistan*, 12 December 2011; 196, *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System*, 6 December 2010; 178, *Pakistan: Countering Militancy in FATA*, 21 October 2009; 164, *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, 13 March 2009; 157, *Reforming Pakistan's Police*, 14 July 2008; 95, *The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan*, 18 April 2005; 36, *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, 29 July 2002.

<sup>2</sup> "At least 72 killed in suicide blast as terror revisits Lahore", *Dawn*, 29 March 2016; "Pathankot attack: 'All terrorists dead'", *The Hindu*, 5 January 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Southern Punjab includes the districts of Multan, Muzaffargarh, Lodhran, Vehari, Khanewal, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Rahimyar Khan, Layyah and Dera Ghazi Khan as well as Jhang, on the cusp of southern and central Punjab.

<sup>4</sup> Deobandis form one of the four broad Sunni sub-sects, which also include Barelvis, Ahle Hadith and revivalist movements. While Barelvis espouse religious interpretations based on oral orthodoxy and devotional practices and rituals, Deobandism calls for strict adherence to classical texts of Islam. Radical Deobandi groups appropriate the term Sunni for themselves; what is commonly referred to as Sunni-Shia conflict is more specifically Deobandi-Shia conflict. See Crisis Group Reports, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*; *State of Sectarianism*; and *Madrasas, Extremism, and the Military*, all op. cit.; "Special Report: Pakistan's threat within – the Sunni-Shia divide", Reuters, 24 October 2015; "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi", Mapping Militant Organisations, Stanford University, no date.

<sup>5</sup> On the National Action Plan (NAP), see Crisis Group Report, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies*, op. cit.

This report analyses how jihadist organisations with sectarian, regional and global agendas exploit state policies and fill political, social and economic vacuums in southern Punjab, the province's least developed region. It explores measures to raise the costs of joining such groups and reduce the appeal of radicalism. It is based on interviews with politicians, government officials, law-enforcement personnel, the legal community, journalists and civil society activists across southern Punjab, in the provincial capital, Lahore, and in the federal capital, Islamabad.

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## II. The Eye of the Storm: Security Dynamics in Southern Punjab

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### A. Southern Punjab's Jihadist Landscape

Southern Punjab has long been a convenient base for jihadist outfits, bordering as it does the lawless, insurgency-hit Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan to the west, northern Sindh, where radicalism is on the rise, to the south and India to the east.<sup>6</sup> Extremist groups laid roots there during Zia-ul-Haq's military government (1977-1988). Pakistan's support for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s and its military-sponsored jihad in India-administered Kashmir allowed these groups to consolidate and extend their presence in the region. The military regime also backed radical Deobandi outfits, both to counter its moderate political opposition and in response to Shia resurgence domestically in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution.<sup>7</sup> Pervez Musharraf's regime (1999-2007) gave a new lease on life to Deobandi hardliners, guided both by domestic considerations, including support for Islamist parties to counter political opposition, and a foreign policy focused on using jihadist proxies against India and Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

While some groups have become less prominent or morphed into new entities, southern Punjab's jihadist landscape still features a dangerous mix of local (sectarian), regional (anti-India and anti-Afghanistan) and global (al-Qaeda and its allies) organisations. Local recruits feed all three networks.<sup>9</sup> Broader regional conflicts also continue to have significant ramifications, particularly the Saudi-Iran proxy war, which fuels violent sectarian tensions in Pakistan as it does across the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

#### 1. Sectarian agenda: LeJ

To provide plausible deniability and enable its own participation in electoral politics in southern Punjab, Pakistan's first major radical anti-Shia Deobandi group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), created a separate faction in 1996, Laskhar-e-Jhangvi, which was used to provoke and conduct anti-Shia violence.<sup>11</sup> Carrying out hundreds of attacks on Shias, the southern Punjab-based LeJ was funded by wealthy donors from urban/industrial centres countrywide, as well as from the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.<sup>12</sup> Brutally suppressed by Nawaz Sharif's

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<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group Report, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group Report, *State of Sectarianism*, op. cit. Pakistan's Shia community, the largest after Iran's, are between 15 to 20 per cent of an approximately 200 million population. There has been no census since 1998. "Pakistani Shias protest support for Saudi-led military coalition", *Newsweek*, 9 January 2016; "Mapping the world's Muslim population", Pew Research Centre, 7 October 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report, N°137, *Elections, Democracy and Stability in Pakistan*, 31 July 2007; *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit.; and Asia Briefing N°51, *India, Pakistan and Kashmir: Stabilising a Cold Peace*, 15 June 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Crisis Group Report, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit. Also, "Strongholds of terror", *The Express Tribune*, 10 February 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group Special Report, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group Report, *State of Sectarianism*, op. cit. SSP candidates won National and Punjab Assembly seats from Jhang's urban constituency in 1990 and 1993 and a National Assembly seat in 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group Report, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit. Also, Muhammad Amir Rana (Saba Ansari, trans.), *A to Z of Jehadi Organisations in Pakistan* (Lahore, 2005).

second Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government (1997-1999), its activities subsided, and its leadership took refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

LeJ marked its re-emergence under General Pervez Musharraf's military regime with the May 2002 car bomb outside Karachi's Sheraton Hotel that killed fourteen, including eleven French engineers. It was also reportedly involved in the January 2002 abduction of *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl, who was held and beheaded by al-Qaeda operatives.<sup>13</sup> Both incidents, involving international targets, reflected the expansion of LeJ's anti-Shia agenda to an anti-Western one and the consolidation of its ties to al-Qaeda. While continuing to focus on targeting rival sects and religious minorities, particularly Christians, it became "the lynchpin of the alignment between al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban, and local sectarian groups".<sup>14</sup>

LeJ's modest core membership is anywhere between 500 and 1,000, and its operations are conducted by small groups, at times as few as two to three explicitly trusted members.<sup>15</sup> These figures, however, exclude a large network of sympathisers, sustained by the mosque and madrasa sector, who both facilitate such attacks by providing on-the-ground intelligence and perpetuate sectarian divisions and anti-state sentiment.<sup>16</sup> As LeJ has evolved and expanded beyond southern Punjab, including to Balochistan, FATA and, albeit to a lesser extent, Afghanistan, its formerly centralised structure has afforded far more autonomy to local commanders and factions, both in the interests of flexibility in planning and conducting attacks and to evade law-enforcement.<sup>17</sup>

Since LeJ chief Malik Ishaq, who has yet to be replaced, was killed in a July 2015 extrajudicial police "encounter", police officials claim that the leadership is under sustained pressure and in disarray. Yet, the group's extensive madrasa network continues to ensure a steady source of financing, recruits and sympathisers. Moreover, the ability to target witnesses, police, prosecutors, judges and other officials undermines efforts to bring its perpetrators to justice, symbolised by the failure to prosecute Malik Ishaq on more than 40 murder cases, which resulted in his June 2011 release from detention.<sup>18</sup>

LeJ is primarily responsible for mass killings of Shias in sectarian hotbeds such as Jhang, Karachi and KPK, in particular Dera Ismail Khan, Hangu, and Kohat districts. It is also active in Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and FATA. In the latter's Orakzai and Kurram agencies, which also have large Shia communities, it maintains

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<sup>13</sup> "Pakistan names 'Karachi bombers'", BBC News (online), 29 June 2002. "Pakistan arrests militant suspected in Daniel Pearl killing", *The New York Times*, 19 March 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ali K. Christi, "'The Karachi affair' & French naval bombing", *The Friday Times*, 25 February-3 March 2011. Crisis Group Report, *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> According to an authoritative account of Pakistan's jihadist organisations, the "reason given for the limited number of [LeJ] activists is that it was mandatory to take a vow until death to complete the Jhangvi mission and to break contact with all family and friends". Rana, op. cit. Also, "Foreign Terrorist Organisations", Country Reports on Terrorism 2014, Chapter 6, U.S. State Department, June 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interviews, counter-terrorism and other law-enforcement officials, southern Punjab, February-March 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Initially, LeJ's organisational structure was based on a central leader (*Salar-e-A'ala*) overseeing twelve commanders (*salars*), each with responsibility over a geographic unit of a handful of districts. A central *shura* (council) ran the organisation. Rana, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, police officials, Lahore and southern Punjab, February-March 2016; investigators, prosecutors involved in the Ishaq case, Lahore, February 2016. "Malik Ishaq: The life and death of a terror kingpin", *The Express Tribune*, 29 July 2015.

operational bases, with commanders and foot soldiers from southern Punjab, as well as local recruits. The January 2015 bombing of a Shia mosque in Shikarpur district, killing 60, showed it has expanded its presence in northern Sindh.<sup>19</sup>

The group has been implicated in prominent attacks, including against state targets in response to counter-terrorism operations and to raise its profile and so attract more recruits and funds. These include the October 2009 siege of army headquarters in Rawalpindi; in March 2009 in Lahore on Sri Lanka's cricket team and a police training academy; and the September 2008 Marriot hotel bombing in Islamabad. LeJ also claimed the December 2011 Ashura Day bombings that killed some 60 in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> In the southern Punjab context, it and other sectarian extremists are bent on destroying largely tolerant religious traditions. Not just Shias are targeted but also the region's majority Barelvis and Sufis, who embrace a more syncretic form of Islam, with practices and rituals that Deobandis and Wahhabi/Salafis portray as heretic. There is stringent security at Sufi shrines in southern Punjab after several were attacked.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Regional jihad: Jaish-e-Mohammed

Along with the central Punjab-based Lashkar-e-Tayyaba/Jamaat-ud-Dawa (LeT/JD), the southern Punjab-based Jaish is among the most important of anti-India oriented jihadist groups.<sup>22</sup> In December 1999, five years after his arrest in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir, Jaish's founder, Masood Azhar, then a leader of the Kashmir jihadist Harkat-ul Mujahideen, was freed from an Indian prison in exchange for passengers held hostage in the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight that landed in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Though the Musharraf government vowed to arrest him on return to Pakistan, he travelled days after his release to Karachi where, addressing some 10,000 supporters, he called on Muslims not to rest "until we have destroyed America and India". In February 2000, he formed the Jaish, with alleged support from the military's intelligence agencies. In October 2001, with the LeT, the Jaish attacked the Legislative Assembly in Srinagar, and their attack two months later on the Indian parliament brought the nuclear-armed neighbours to the brink of war.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Arif Rafiq, "Sunni Deobandi-Shi'i Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: Explaining the Resurgence since 2007", Middle East Institute, 11 December 2014. Crisis Group Report, *Countering Militancy in FATA*, op. cit. "Mastermind of Shikarpur carnage killed in Quetta", *Dawn*, 15 February 2015.

<sup>20</sup> "Analysis: Why attack Lahore?", BBC News (online), 15 October 2009; Crisis Group Report, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit. "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi: inciting sectarianism in Afghanistan?", Agence France-Presse (AFP), 8 December 2011; "Rare attacks on Shiites kill scores in Afghanistan", *The New York Times*, 6 December 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group Reports, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*; *State of Sectarianism*, both op. cit; interviews and observations at shrines, southern Punjab, February 2016. "Pakistan Sufi shrine suicide attack kills 41", BBC News (online), 3 April 2011; "Six killed by bomb at Sufi shrine in Pakistan's Punjab", BBC News (online), 25 October 2010; "Thousands rally against attacks on shrines", AFP, 6 February 2011.

<sup>22</sup> The LeT/JD is headquartered in Muridke, a city near Punjab's provincial capital, Lahore. Khaled Ahmed, *Sectarian War: Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Violence and Its Links to the Middle East* (Karachi, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> "Freed militant resurfaces", Associated Press, 5 January 2000; Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Gurgaon, 2011). Azhar was detained for a year after the attacks but no formal charges were brought. He was released in December 2002 on Lahore High Court orders. Crisis Group Asia Reports, N°35, *Kashmir: Confrontation and Miscalculation*, 11 July 2002; *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit.

Unlike LeT, the Jaish also has a domestic, jihadist agenda. Its manifesto specifies that in addition to jihad “against enemies of the faith” (minorities), it is “working to bring back the Muslims to the door of Islam”.<sup>24</sup> The group emerged from the same sectarian pool as the LeJ and its parent organisation, SSP. Azhar, its founder, was closely affiliated to the SSP, as were many other leaders and operatives. A journalist who has extensively covered sectarian conflict in Pakistan described the SSP as “the umbrella political group while Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi represented the organisation’s [Kashmir] jihadi and domestic militant wings respectively”.<sup>25</sup>

The group’s organisational structure initially comprised a central Shura (council) to oversee seven departments, including for “military” operations, the release of prisoners, proselytisation, honouring martyrs, publications and media, and even arranging marriages. As in LeJ’s case, this structure has become less formal and more devolved as Jaish has expanded across the country. Estimates of its size roughly tally with those of LeJ: core membership, according to some sources, is at most in the several hundreds, but like the LeJ, the small numbers are supported by a network of sympathisers whose ranks continue to swell via Deobandi madrasas and mosques.<sup>26</sup> Expansion has also been enabled by social grids and charities, such as the Al-Rehmat Trust and Al-Rashid Trust (renamed Maymar Trust after the U.S. designated it a terrorist support organisation in 2001), that conduct major fundraising.<sup>27</sup>

Some of Pakistan’s earliest suicide attacks were attributed to Jaish, including in March 2002 on an Islamabad church and August 2002 on a Christian school near Murree and a Christian missionary hospital in Taxila.<sup>28</sup> Some operatives, joining with transnational groups, including al-Qaeda, have turned on erstwhile benefactors. In an al-Qaeda initiated December 2003 attack, some Jaish recruits in the Air Force tried to assassinate President Musharraf. While the security agencies took action against individuals, they allowed the organisation and its leaders, who disowned the attack, to continue operating. Ongoing state support is evident in the manner in which Jaish was allowed to resurface. Held responsible, with the LeT, by India for the 2008 Mumbai terror assault, Azhar kept a low profile for years but reappeared in January 2014. Despite an official ban on Jaish public activity, he held a large rally in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan-administered Kashmir’s capital, where he called for jihad against India. The foreign ministry spokesperson responded to Indian criticism by calling it a “one-time event”.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Published in fortnightly *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, June 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Khaled Ahmed, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, police and interior ministry officials, Islamabad and Lahore, March and May 2016. “Foreign Terrorism Organisations”; Rana, both *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> “Treasury Targets Pakistan-Based Terrorist Organisations Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed”, press release, U.S. treasury department, 4 November 2010. Also, see “Banned outfits collecting funds booked, Punjab tells SC”, *Dawn*, 30 July 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interviews, retired, active law enforcement, intelligence officials, Lahore, March 2016. Riaz Hassan, *Life as a Weapon: The Global Rise of Suicide Bombings* (Oxon, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> “Hunt for Musharraf plot ‘mastermind’”, BBC news (online), 28 May 2004. Yielding to international pressure post-Mumbai, the government reportedly placed Azhar under temporary house arrest in December 2008. “Pak places Masood Azhar under house arrest”, *The Nation*, 9 December 2008. “Masood Azhar’s address to rally in Muzaffarabad draws Indian ire”, *The Express Tribune*, 21 February 2014; “The return of Masood Azhar”, *Dawn*, 2 February 2014.

## B. *The Terrain*

### 1. Absence of rule-of-law

Beyond state support, Jaish, much like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), also exploits opportunities provided by political dysfunction and inept governance.<sup>30</sup> Absence of rule-of-law and parallel legal structures has resulted in large swathes of southern Punjab becoming a no-man's-land where criminal and militant networks flourish. Parts of Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan districts, bordering Balochistan, are provincially-administered tribal areas, governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR 1901) and fall outside the jurisdiction of the regular police.<sup>31</sup> Both have many jihadist madrasas, some directly linked to Islamabad's Lal Masjid (Red Mosque), which hosts many students from these districts. Taunsa town in Dera Ghazi Khan district has a major jihadist base.<sup>32</sup>

Extremists have warned NGOs against opening offices and conducting activities; this informal ban is aided by the military's prohibition on foreigners visiting the district, possibly because of its nuclear installation. In a civil society void and facing no such restrictions, jihadist groups flourish.<sup>33</sup> In the area between and around southern Punjab's Rajanpur, Sindh's Kashmore and Balochistan's Dera Bugti districts, the lack of inter-provincial law-enforcement coordination and an often inaccessible riverine terrain (*kacha*) have created sizeable sanctuaries for criminal and jihadist groups. This includes three small islands on the Indus River that heavily armed groups had occupied. The difficulty of the terrain was reflected in the April killing and capture of over twenty police during operations against *kacha*-based criminal elements.<sup>34</sup>

Southern Punjab's Layyah district borders on KPK's Dera Ismail Khan district and Dera Ismail Khan's Frontier Region, which is part of FATA. With easy access to FATA's South Waziristan Agency, routes across Layyah were historically used for drugs and arms trafficking. Kidnapping-for-ransom, using links to criminal outfits and regional and transnational networks, including al-Qaeda, is now a major revenue source for jihadists. Haider Gilani, ex-Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's son, was abducted in Multan in May 2013 and freed three years later in a U.S.-Afghan raid on an al-Qaeda hideout in Afghanistan's Paktika province; Pakistani Taliban operatives were also present, suggesting the extent of collaboration between local criminal and jihadist groups and transnationals. Shahbaz Taseer, son of ex-Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, was abducted from Lahore in August 2011 and reportedly

<sup>30</sup> Crisis Group Special Report, *Exploiting Disorder*, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Law-enforcement agencies include the Baloch Levies and military border police. Punjab Border Military Police (Amendment) Ordinance, 2006; Punjab Border Military Police Act 1904. Crisis Group Report, *Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA*, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> "Seminary affiliated with Lal Masjid sealed by Punjab police", *The Express Tribune*, 4 March 2015. In March-April 2007, militants from various groups, including the SSP and Jaish, and from a female madrasa, Jamia Hafsa, occupied Lal Masjid, provoking a months-long standoff with the government. Crisis Group Report, *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, op. cit. Crisis Group interview, police deputy inspector general, southern Punjab district, February 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, NGO workers, civil society activists from Dera Ghazi Khan, February 2016. Also, U.S. diplomatic cable leaked by Wikileaks, as published in "2008: Extremist recruitment on the rise in south Punjab madrassahs", *Dawn*, 21 May 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Many kidnapped hostages have been held there. Crisis Group interviews, serving and retired senior police officials, southern Punjab, Lahore, February-March 2016. Also, "Rajanpur *kacha* area: Police and bandits negotiate for release of hostages", *The Express Tribune*, 9 July 2013. "Gangsters kill six, seize 15 policemen in Rajanpur", *The Express Tribune*, 14 April 2016.

held hostage in FATA and Afghanistan at different times by LeJ, Pakistani Taliban factions, the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, before being freed in Balochistan in March 2016.<sup>35</sup>

Muzaffargarh, between Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan and from where the suicide bomber in the March Easter Sunday attack reportedly came, is a stronghold of the LeJ and its parent organisation, SSP. Banditry and extortion is rampant; pamphlets circulate urging youth to join extortion rackets, even specifying the money to be earned.<sup>36</sup> SSP and LeJ also have major presences in Bahawalpur district, specifically Ahmedpur and Uch Sharif *tehsils* (sub-districts). Khanpur town, on the border between Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan districts, has hard-line Shia as well as SSP-run Deobandi madrasas.<sup>37</sup> Jaish's stronghold is also in Bahawalpur, which borders India's Rajasthan state.

## 2. Exploiting local alienation

State sponsorship and the climate of impunity are largely responsible for allowing jihadist groups to flourish in southern Punjab; the risks of joining such groups are far less than potential benefits, including jobs and other financial rewards, social status and sense of purpose. No linear course links radicalisation, recruitment and violence in southern Punjab. Recruitment can occur non-ideologically, with many foot soldiers seeing jihad as a job offering financial stability for themselves and families, even if they are "martyred" on the battlefield; in many cases, radical indoctrination follows recruitment.<sup>38</sup>

Key among the non-ideological aspects of such recruitment and support are weak governance and economic neglect of the largely rural southern regions and perceptions of exploitation by the industrialised central and north Punjab, referred to by southern Punjabis as *Takht Lahore* (throne of Lahore). Identity issues are also in play. Seraiki is widely spoken and considered a separate language in southern Punjab but regarded as a Punjabi dialect in the centre and north. A Seraiki nationalist movement, calling for a separate province, is trying to harness resentments against *Takht Lahore's* exploitation of the south's resources, perceived jobs monopoly, including in the bureaucracy, and control over government. In southern Punjabi perspectives, theirs is "the other Punjab", neglected by a powerful civil-military bureaucracy dominated by central and northern Punjabis. Though the region has at least 30 per cent of Punjab's population (estimated at 100 million), the southern districts are the province's poorest.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hostages are commonly abducted and taken via these routes to FATA, Balochistan or Afghanistan. "Gilani's son recovered in raid on Al Qaeda hideout in Paktika", *Dawn*, 11 May 2016. "The real story of Shahbaz Taseer's recovery", *The News*, 12 March 2016; "Shahbaz Taseer: Pakistan's high-profile kidnap victim reunited with family", *The Guardian*, 9 March 2016; "Ali Haider Gilani recovered from Afghanistan after three years", *Dawn*, 10 May 2016.

<sup>36</sup> "Terror strikes families in Lahore park; at least 70 killed in suicide blast", *Dawn*, 28 March 2016; "Blast at a crowded park in Lahore, Pakistan, kills dozens", *The New York Times*, 28 March 2016. Crisis Group interviews, Muzaffargarh residents, NGO workers, February 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interviews, police officials, journalists, civil society representatives, southern Punjab, February 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Crisis Group interviews, law-enforcement officials, NGO and social workers who engage former militants, southern Punjab, February 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Aisha Shahzad, "Relative Deprivation in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Seraiki Movement", *Pakistan Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 1 (January-June 2015); "Seraiki province: Zardari orders Gilani to

Education indicators significantly trail those of central and northern Punjab districts. The percentage of out-of-school children is high. Inadequate infrastructure and teacher absenteeism produce lower levels of learning and retention rates.<sup>40</sup> Job opportunities are also severely limited. Industry is largely concentrated in central and northern districts such as Faisalabad, Chiniot, Gujarat and Sialkot, while southern districts are largely agrarian, with much of the raw material produced there used by the factories, mills and other enterprises in central Punjab's industrial hubs.<sup>41</sup> As a result of underdevelopment, southern Punjab also retains aspects of traditional power and economic structures, including concentration of wealth and political clout in landowning and *pir* families, allowing radical Islamist groups to exploit resentments stemming from gross economic disparities and present themselves as challengers to the traditional elite.<sup>42</sup>

Article 38 (a) of the constitution requires the state to "secure the well-being of the people, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race, by raising their standard of living, by preventing the concentration of wealth and means of production and distribution in the hands of a few to the detriment of general interest and by ensuring equitable adjustment of rights between employers and employees, and landlords and tenants". Land reforms were first introduced in then-West Pakistan in 1959.<sup>43</sup> The first democratically elected government, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's leftist Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), introduced more aggressive land reforms in 1972 and again in 1977. These were diluted by Zia's military regime, which also used land allotments to reward political allies, bureaucrats, and the military as an institution.<sup>44</sup> The military's land grabs, including under the Army Welfare Scheme, dispossessed many small farmers in southern Punjab, and continued through the 1990s and under Musharraf's regime.<sup>45</sup> Similar acquisitions have continued during the current period of civilian rule.<sup>46</sup>

In general, landholdings have shrunk in size due primarily to Islamic laws of inheritance under which land is divided between descendants of the landowner. Yet, despite this gradual break-up of large landholdings, land inequality is highest in

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initiate consultative process", *The Express Tribune*, 14 April 2012. Nadeem F. Paracha, "Smoker's Corner: The other Punjab", *Dawn*, 31 May 2015. "A raw deal for south Punjab", *Dawn*, 1 June 2015.

<sup>40</sup> "Alif Ailaan Pakistan District Education Rankings 2015", Alif Ailaan and Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2015. "Education for all: State of south Punjab schools abysmal", *The Express Tribune*, 3 September 2013. Also, Crisis Group Report, *Education Reform in Pakistan*, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> "The resources are ours, but all the factories are in upper Punjab", said a Bahawalpur-based political activist. Crisis Group interview, Bahawalpur, February 2016; interviews, chambers of commerce, southern Punjab, February 2016.

<sup>42</sup> *Pirs*, descendants of Sufi saints, are considered living saints.

<sup>43</sup> In September 1955, the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province (later renamed KPK) and Balochistan were merged into a single unit, West Pakistan, in a move to counter the Bengalis' numerical majority in East Pakistan, which won independence in 1971 as the new state of Bangladesh. See Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> A Jhang-based chamber of commerce representative said: "At first, land was awarded to army officers for acts of gallantry. But in the 1980s, they [the military] got a taste for land, and after that the state handed properties like toffees to officers who did not achieve anything significant. It was pure cronyism". Crisis Group interview, Jhang, February 2016.

<sup>45</sup> This included an almost 34,000-acre allotment to the army in Bahawalpur in 1993. Ayesha Siddiqi, "The New Land Barons?", *Newsline*, July 2006.

<sup>46</sup> "Musharraf doled out 10,000 kanals of land to civilians", *The News*, 25 June 2015; "6,700-kanal state land retrieved from revenue officials", *The Nation*, 6 October 2010; "Nawaz concerned over army occupation of Cholistan land", *The News*, 6 February 2010.

southern Punjab and rural Sindh.<sup>47</sup> Lower agricultural output, and a gradual shift toward mechanisation and other capital-intensive farming methods, has compelled many former field workers to migrate to cities. Towns are growing, with some peri-urban areas even exceeding the main city in size. This presents law and order challenges in southern Punjab, including armed competition over property and the growth of land mafias, as well as growing criminal and sectarian networks that fill their ranks with unemployed labourers.<sup>48</sup>

Migration has also played a crucial role, especially in urban centres such as Jhang, the birthplace of organised sectarian militancy in Pakistan. Located on the cusp of central and southern Punjab, it had a large Hindu population, mostly in the city centre, which migrated to India in 1947. Muslim migrants from India replaced it, mostly Deobandis who had limited economic opportunities and lived in cramped quarters in the city, in marked contrast to the large landowners in Jhang's rural areas, who were mostly Shias and Barelvis and formed the political elite. The migrants "accused the Syeds and Sials [Shia and Barelvi landowning families] for their backwardness", according to the PPP Jhang district president.<sup>49</sup> As Deobandi leaders, under the banner of a new organisation, Anjuman-i-Sipah-i-Sahaba, exploited these grievances, a primarily socio-economic divide assumed the trappings of sectarian rivalry: Deobandis against both Shias and Barelvis.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, except for the 1969 incident in which several Sunni clerics were killed, violent clashes were minimal until the 1980s, in large part due to democratic politics, as political party loyalties superseded sectarian differences.<sup>51</sup> In 1985, however, Zia's military regime supported the Anjuman's reincarnation as the SSP under Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi's leadership to promote Sunni orthodoxy and counter Iranian-inspired Shia mobilisation.<sup>52</sup> The SSP also attracted major Saudi funding. Hundreds of Shias were killed during the decade. Jhangvi's 1990 assassination, which the SSP blamed on Shias, intensified sectarian violence through the 1990s that killed hundreds more Shias, Deobandis and Barelvis and stifled the economy. The SSP and its LeJ offshoot also assumed a monopoly over extortion, using unemployed or low-wage labourers as enforcers.<sup>53</sup> As the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan secretary general said: "During the Zia period, there was no expansion of employment; jihadis were the only ones recruiting".<sup>54</sup>

In an SSP/LeJ strategy to take the fight to Shia centres, sectarian militancy migrated from Jhang to Multan, the heart of Sufi Islam and, in a sense, of southern Punjab, where many Shia migrants from India had settled in the years before and

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<sup>47</sup> A 2005 Asian Development Bank study found the highest incidence of land inequality in Pakistan in Muzaffargarh, followed by Multan, Rahimyar Khan and Vehari. See "33pc of poor live in Sindh, Punjab: ADB", *Dawn*, 29 March 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Crisis Group interview, NGO worker with extensive experience working across southern Punjab, Lahore, February 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Qallab Abbas Bukhari, lawyer, Jhang, 23 February 2016; and journalists, politicians, lawyers, chamber of commerce representatives, Jhang, February 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Jhang, February 2016. Also, Qallab Abbas Bukhari, "Ground zero", *Dawn*, 10 November 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Deobandis, Barelvis and Shias were all active in the PPP. Bukhari, op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group Reports, *Islamic Parties; State of Sectarianism*, both op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Redistricting also turned Jhang into a predominantly urban constituency, to the SSP's benefit. Its candidate won a National Assembly seat in the 1990, 1993 and 2002 elections.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interview, I.A. Rehman, Lahore, 9 February 2016.

after independence.<sup>55</sup> Since the 1990s, there have been over 50 sectarian attacks in Multan.<sup>56</sup> There is high likelihood of continued SSP and LeJ expansion in southern Punjab by exploiting sectarian tensions and wide disparities in land ownership and associated injustices, combined with the limitations of a failing rural economy. Indeed economic factors often underlie non-ideological motives for joining groups such as LeJ, Jaish and LeT/JD, including the loss of livelihoods and/or homes as a result of southern Punjab's cyclic droughts and floods.<sup>57</sup>

Droughts in southernmost districts such as Rahimyar Khan have reduced large landholdings' productivity, sometimes by half, leaving many tenant farmers out of work and often homeless.<sup>58</sup> In southern Punjab, periodic floods have damaged infrastructure, devastated rural and urban economies and caused massive displacement. After the 2010 floods, many tenant farmers and farmhands were homeless and survived by working for criminal and/or sectarian groups.

Such crises have also expanded jihadist opportunities to win hearts and minds: the LeT/JD particularly benefited from the preferential opportunity the civil-military bureaucracies gave it to provide humanitarian relief. "With the floods, the acceptance of militant organisations is even stronger", said the director of a leading national NGO that implements projects on humanitarian response. According to an NGO worker, such aid "is provided on the basis of sectarian affiliation. They now have a freshly developed network of volunteers. They come into an area, choose a madrasa and/or mosque to provide aid from, and thus make them stronger in the community".<sup>59</sup>

### C. *Southern Punjab's Madrasa Sector*

Although there is no direct link between poverty and/or radicalisation, economic hardships and the state's failure to fulfil the basic responsibility to provide services such as education create opportunities for sectarian extremists to mould young minds to their cause, including via large, well-financed madrasas that provide free room and board. "Needs have gone up, while jobs are scarce", said a Multan-based social worker, who works closely with madrasas.<sup>60</sup>

Deobandi seminaries dominate the madrasa sector in southern Punjab, although the madrasa unions of other sects also maintain significant networks in the region, especially the Bareilvi Tanzeem al-Madaris, whose seminary numbers are comparable to those of the Deobandi madrasa union, the Wafaq-ul-madaris al-Arabiya. However, the latter's size and capacity, reflected in its student body, far exceeds that of its

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<sup>55</sup> Multan would presumably be the capital of an envisaged Seraiki province. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten* (New Delhi, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Sectarian clashes in 2013 around Muharram processions in Multan forced the civil administration to call in the army and paramilitary Rangers. "Enflamed passions: Army deployed in Multan, as security heightened in Punjab", *The Express Tribune*, 16 November 2013.

<sup>57</sup> An Asian Development Bank study found Pakistan's highest land inequality in the southern Punjab districts of Muzaffargarh, Multan, Rahimyar Khan and Vehari. "33pc of poor live in Sindh, Punjab: ADB", op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, law-enforcement officials, NGO and social workers who engage ex-militants, southern Punjab, February 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalists, local NGOs, lawyers, and other civil society representatives, southern Punjab, February 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report, N°237, *Pakistan: No End to Humanitarian Crises*, 9 October 2012; interviews, Mohammad Tahseen, director, South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), Lahore, 9 February 2016; NGO worker, Lahore, February 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, Multan, February 2016.

rivals. According to police statistics, though Bareilvi madrasas outnumber Deobandi ones 146 to 141 in Bahawalnagar, neighbouring on Bahawalpur, the latter have more resident students (around 4,300 to 2,950). Similarly, Bareilvi seminaries outnumber Deobandi seminaries 249 to 206 in Rahimyar Khan, Punjab's southernmost district, but host almost 2,000 fewer resident students.<sup>61</sup> Shia seminaries cater to an older student body, typically young men who have already matriculated.

In southern Punjab, Deobandi madrasas and mosques challenge both Sufism as a school of thought and the authority of politically powerful *pirs* who enjoy considerable support among Shia and Sunni followers of Sufi Islam.<sup>62</sup> The head offices of the Wafaq-ul-madaris al-Arabiya, which seeks to counter Sufi ideological influence and clout and oversee expansion of the Deobandi mosque and madrasa network, are in Multan, nicknamed "City of Saints" for its many Sufi shrines. Multan reportedly has the highest madrasa concentration of any Pakistani city.<sup>63</sup>

Deobandi madrasas in southern Punjab include large, urban-based seminaries that are part of a national network overseen by the top leadership of Islamist parties, such as Fazlur Rehman's and Samiul Haq's factions of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F and JUI-S); and madrasas in both urban and rural areas run by the Islamist parties' second-tier leadership. Many seminaries attached to local mosques are unaffiliated with major parties, thus are significantly smaller.<sup>64</sup>

Many government and donor-funded local NGO initiatives to reform the madrasa curriculum, set separately by each madrasa board, or reduce madrasas' appeal in favour of regular public (government-run) schools, have been misconceived. One was the Punjab government's *Daanish* (Wisdom) school scheme aimed at empowering "the poorest of the poor through quality education" but which replaced a potentially more constructive plan to build model public schools in areas with clusters of madrasas.<sup>65</sup> Donor-supported NGO efforts to introduce a more moderate syllabus in madrasas have made little progress. An NGO worker engaged with such reform projects said clerics "say one thing in public and another in the madrasa". Another said, "the madrasa administration will say, 'we know more about human rights and civic education than you do, so just tell us how many computers and sewing machines you are going to give us'".<sup>66</sup>

In a bid to attract more students and expand their reach while retaining the sectarian focus of their core curriculum, madrasas are introducing subjects such as computer sciences and English. The head of a Multan-based madrasa network said, "before, our students' needs were more basic. Now, those needs have gone up, and we have to go along with it". His network also seeks to establish a regular school.<sup>67</sup> Deobandi groups may be emulating the LeT/JD network of educational institutions,

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<sup>61</sup> Ayesha Siddiqi, "The New Frontiers: Militancy & Radicalism in Punjab", Centre for International and Strategic Analysis, 4 February 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group Report, *State of Sectarianism*, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Fahd Humayun, "Bringing NAP to south Punjab", *The News*, 6 February 2016; "Madrasa reforms: Punjab shut down only two suspected seminaries", *The Express Tribune*, 18 January 2016. Crisis Group Reports, *State of Sectarianism* and *Pakistan: Madrasas*, both op. cit.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, madrasa personnel, NGO workers engaged in madrasa reform initiatives, Multan, February 2016; Report, *State of Sectarianism*, op. cit.; and Asia Report N°73, *Unfilled Promised: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*, 16 January 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report N°257, *Education Reform in Pakistan*, 23 June 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Multan, Lahore, February 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interviews, madrasa administrators and clerics, Multan, February 2016.

which include both madrasas and regular schools, including in the southern Punjab districts of Multan, Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan. Competition between sects also fuels madrasa growth and, in turn, fresh sectarian tensions. In Rahimyar Khan's Khanpur *tehsil*, clusters of Shia and Deobandi (SSP) madrasas in close proximity result in regular clashes between students.<sup>68</sup>

The bid to shape young minds extends beyond the madrasa sector. Islamist groups and Sunni proselytising movements such as the Tableeghi Jamaat seek to co-opt both teachers and students, including on college campuses. According to informed observers, while itself non-violent, the Tableeghi Jamaat is an agent of "internal conversions" from Barelvi to Deobandi and as such expands the potential recruitment pool of jihadist groups.<sup>69</sup> Many with links to violent sectarian groups in Punjab have been associated with it at some point. The Jaish and LeT/JD also target students and teachers on college campuses. The SSP and LeJ have sympathisers among primary teachers in public and low-cost private schools who use the classroom to promote sectarian hatred and support for extremist violence. "Radicalisation starts in the classroom", said an NGO worker from Jhang. "Shia and Sunni groups start by handing out cash to teachers in school to radicalise and recruit children. The SSP has opened wings in colleges, and so have [militant] Shia groups".<sup>70</sup>

Jihadist groups have made concerted efforts in recent years to engage girls and women, seemingly motivated by the perceived multiplier effect of reaching their children while also gaining recruits who can fly under the radar of security agencies.<sup>71</sup> Recent literature stresses the historical importance of women in jihad, for example to "recite exciting verses to encourage the fighters and admonish the fleeing ones", and to inspire, by their presence, men to "fight courageously and dauntlessly and ... not think of retreat".<sup>72</sup> Madrasas for girls are on the rise, as many established seminaries tap greater demand for female education.<sup>73</sup> The Tableeghi Jamaat also provides a vehicle for groups like the Jaish to reach women. According to informed observers in Bahawalpur district, the Jaish periodically (as frequently as every two weeks) convenes large assemblies of women, often through the Tableeghi Jamaat network.<sup>74</sup>

In January 2016, the Punjab government issued a notice prohibiting preaching on university campuses, including banning the Tableeghi Jamaat from campus hostels; requiring that sermons in mosques around campuses be regulated; and requir-

<sup>68</sup> Khanpur lies between Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan. Crisis Group interviews, NGO workers, Bahawalpur, Rahimyar Khan, February-March 2016.

<sup>69</sup> With a significant domestic and international presence, the Tableeghi Jamaat is a Sunni proselytising movement, aimed at bringing "ordinary Muslims back to the fold". Rana, *op. cit.* Crisis Group Report, *State of Sectarianism*, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, Jhang, February 2016; interviews, southern Punjab law-enforcement officers, February-March 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interview, security analyst Ayesha Siddiq, Islamabad, February 2016. (Bahawalpur, the Jaish headquarter, is Siddiq's home town); Crisis Group interviews, women's rights activists, Bahawalpur, February 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Maulana Muhammad Mas'ud (Masood) Azhar, *Fat-hul-Jawwwad* (Detailed discourse on verses on the topic of jihad), vol. 1, translated by Professor Rasheed Ahmad Mas'ud (Lahore, undated). This volume, acquired from a Jaish-run bookstore next to its madrasa in Bahawalpur, and three accompanying volumes are easily obtainable in bookstores specialising in Islamic texts across the country.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interviews, madrasa principals and teachers, education activists, Multan, Bahawalpur, February 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Ayesha Siddiq, Islamabad, February 2016; women's rights activists, Bahawalpur, February 2016.

ing university administrations to inform law enforcement of any faculty member with sympathies for radical Islamist groups.<sup>75</sup> Yet, an education activist in Multan noted, the public school syllabus itself “negates the links between young people and their Sufi history, and the role of Sufis on their culture. Instead, students are exposed to jihadist thought, whether through the public school curriculum, electronic media or social media”. A Bahawalpur activist and teacher said, “textbooks make one sect heroes and another sect *kafirs* [infidels]”.<sup>76</sup>

#### D. *Societal Impact*

Though jihadists still are a fringe minority of southern Punjab’s moderate society, exposure to radical ideological discourse in madrasas and mosques increases the potential for violence. Radical actors also continue to benefit from Zia-era Islamic laws that endowed them with a legal and political apparatus disproportionate to their size and support within society. “The state is good enough at spreading and enforcing a narrow Islamic ideology in Pakistan”, an NGO worker who engages closely with madrasas said. “The jihadists don’t need to bother about society at large”.<sup>77</sup>

A climate of impunity and absence of rule-of-law, moreover, give opportunities to groups such as SSP and LeJ to intervene in local land and other disputes, even kidnapping cases, in return for a financial cut. LeT/JD reportedly runs Sharia (Islamic law) courts, deciding civil and criminal matters across Punjab, including in the southern districts of Multan and Bahawalpur. Civil society activists are intimidated by the presence of these organisations in Multan, Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan, even as NGO space shrinks due to state restrictions and intimidation by intelligence agencies. Intimidation can also take overt form, as in the May 2014 murder in Multan of Rashid Rehman, a lawyer and representative of the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP), who was defending a university professor some students accused of blasphemy.<sup>78</sup>

A general climate of impunity also encourages extreme religious, sectarian and gender discrimination and exclusion. Christian and Hindu communities in southern Punjab, long denied equal rights, face growing challenges. These include a rise in forced marriages and conversions to Islam and forcible seizures of property by land mafias, many controlled by SSP and LeJ, to which the police are commonly unwilling to respond.<sup>79</sup> Discriminatory laws and the institutional framework to implement them allow religious, sectarian and gender biases to be channelled through the criminal justice system. Very often this takes the form of blasphemy cases filed against

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<sup>75</sup> “Punjab campus hostels out of bounds for Tableeghi Jamaat”, *Dawn*, 30 January 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Multan, Bahawalpur, February 2016. Also, Crisis Group Report, *Education Reform in Pakistan*, op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group Report, N°160, *Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan*, 16 October 2008; interview, Lahore, February 2016.

<sup>78</sup> “Scandal of Stealth Courts”, *Newsweek*, 9 April 2016. NGOs need a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for specific activities in a defined district, granted, if at all, after long delays and under prohibitive condition. Crisis Group interviews, human rights and education activists and social workers, southern Punjab, February 2016. “Rights activist Rashid Rehman Khan gunned down in Multan”, AFP, 8 May 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interviews, legal and civil society representatives of Hindu and Christian communities, Multan, Bahawalpur, and Rahimyar Khan, February-March 2016. Also, “Intolerance growing in South Punjab: Report”, *The Express Tribune*, 3 September 2012.

Christians. According to a Bahawalpur-based Christian lawyer who defends members of the community, many clients change their names to conceal their religion.<sup>80</sup>

Southern Punjab also consistently ranks highest nationally in reported incidents of violence against women. According to the Islamabad-based NGO Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), 51 of 68 acid attacks nationwide in 2015 were in the region.<sup>81</sup> While extremist groups did not create gender biases, their expansion, discriminatory Islamic legislation and a general climate of impunity have reinforced them. After democracy's restoration in 2008, governments have taken some steps to protect women, including the 2011 Criminal Law (second amendment) Act, which made attacks with a substance such as acid punishable from fourteen years to life imprisonment and with a minimum million rupee (nearly \$10,000) fine. In January 2016, a Multan anti-terrorism court sentenced a man to life imprisonment for throwing acid at his wife in Khanewal district in 2014.<sup>82</sup>

The Punjab government announced in March 2015 the launch of exclusively women-staffed "Violence against Women Centres", which would allow women to register cases and receive medical and psychological support. The first is being built in Multan. In February 2016, the provincial legislature passed the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act to give institutional protection to victims of domestic abuse and violence. Its passage drew intense opposition from Islamist parties, which threaten a countrywide movement unless the "un-Islamic" law is withdrawn.<sup>83</sup> Should the Punjab government succumb to such pressure, it would further perpetuate the prevailing climate of impunity.

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<sup>80</sup> Crisis Group Asia Reports N°265, *Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan*, 8 April 2015; *Reforming the Judiciary*, op. cit.; interview, Bahawalpur, February 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Women, Violence and Conflict*, op. cit.; interview, Mohammad Khan, executive director, ASF, Islamabad, 28 January 2016.

<sup>82</sup> "Crime against women: man given 2 life terms for acid attack on wife", *The Express Tribune*, 24 May 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, Fauzia Viqar, chairperson, Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), Lahore, February 2016. "Pakistan religious groups denounce law protecting women from abuse 'un-Islamic'", Reuters, 15 March 2016.

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### III. The State's Response

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#### A. *Exempting Southern Punjab's "Good" Jihadists*

The impunity with which jihadist groups operate reflects not only law-enforcement failures, but also deliberate policy choices to support jihadist proxies so as to advance perceived national security interests, particularly with regard to Afghanistan and India. But the distinction between "good" and "bad" jihadists ignores what are, in some cases, ideological affinities and institutional affiliations.

The twenty-point NAP for countering terrorism, devised after the 2014 Peshawar attack, called for implementing existing laws and constitutional bars, including preventing banned organisations from operating and/or regrouping under new names; preventing terrorist funding; dismantling terrorist communication networks; prohibiting private militias; acting against sectarian organisations; countering hate speech and the dissemination of hate literature; and regulating the madrasa sector. At its core, it was meant to end distinctions between "good" jihadists, who promote the state's interests, and "bad" jihadists, who attack the state.<sup>84</sup> Southern Punjab embodies the objective's failure.

In the southern Punjab context, the background and aftermath of the Pathankot airbase attack in India symbolise the impunity accorded to "good" jihadists. In 2015, Indian and Pakistani political leaders took steps to improve bilateral ties, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unscheduled December visit to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's home. Derailing the nascent process was likely the motive for a major attack on the Pathankot base the next month, attributed by India to Jaish.<sup>85</sup> Unlike 2008, when the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) led the examination into the Mumbai attacks, the Sharif government authorised Punjab's law-enforcement agencies to investigate. Punjab's Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) lodged a First Information Report (FIR) against the attackers in a Gujranwala police station, based on initial evidence from New Delhi.<sup>86</sup> A five-member Joint Investigation Team (JIT), led by CTD head Rai Tahir and including intelligence officials, was constituted. Shahbaz Sharif's PML-N government sealed a Jaish seminary in Sialkot, bordering Indian-administered Jammu.<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, though Pakistan appears to be proactively investigating, there has been little progress. After the JIT's March visit to India, a JIT source reportedly alleged that Indian authorities failed to provide sufficient evidence or scope to investigate and suggested the incident was a "badly knitted [Indian] drama" to "malign" Pakistan. Jaish's founder, Azhar, remains inaccessible to police investigators, reportedly held under informal "protective custody" a retired counter-terrorism official described as "eyewash". According to an official who keeps abreast of security devel-

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<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism in Pakistan*, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> "A hug and high tea: Indian PM makes surprise visit to Pakistan", Reuters, 25 December 2015; "Pathankot attack: 'All terrorists dead'", op. cit.

<sup>86</sup> In May, Interpol issued Red Corner Notices against Jaish head Masood Azhar, his brother Abdul Rauf and two other Jaish operatives on request of India's National Investigation Agency. "Interpol issues red corner notices against Masood Azhar, brother", *The News*, 18 May 2016.

<sup>87</sup> "Pakistan forms JIT on Pathankot incident", *The News*, 26 February 2016; "Pathankot airbase attack: FIR registered in Gujranwala against attackers, abettors", *Dawn*, 19 February 2016.

opments, many Jaish leaders, including Azhar's brother Rauf, who heads Jaish's armed wing, remain in the military's "good books".<sup>88</sup>

The group's infrastructure in Bahawalpur is intact, including its sprawling headquarters at the Usman-o-Ali Madrasa and other mosques and madrasas across the district, many of which armed Jaish activists seized from organisations subscribing to the Sunni Bareilvi school.<sup>89</sup> A federal minister and member of parliament from Bahawalpur said, "the breeding grounds remain; the [sectarian] madrasas are still being financed". According to local observers, the Jaish also continues to run a prominently-located training cell on a main Bahawalpur road toward Ahmedpur *tehsil*, which attracts young (often teenaged) recruits from around southern Punjab. While insisting that the provincial government was acting effectively against jihadists, Punjab's law minister, Rana Sanullah, asked: "How can Punjab intervene and take action [against the Jaish and LeT/JD] ... when the state itself has been patronising them?"<sup>90</sup>

### B. *Tackling the "Bad" Jihadists*

The federal and Punjab governments have taken action against "bad" jihadists, those who attack state institutions and personnel, including through raids, arrests and even extrajudicial killings. Yet, when they serve a strategic or tactical purpose, they can be treated as allies. For instance, a prominent LeJ operative, Muawiya Asmatullah, was released after he reportedly pledged to abandon violence in Pakistan, while confining "our (LeJ's) practical jihadi role to Afghanistan". A resident of Vehari in southern Punjab, he is believed to have been the mastermind of some of the most high-profile terrorist attacks in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Peshawar since 2008.<sup>91</sup>

During the October 2009 militant siege of army headquarters in Rawalpindi, an army plane transported LeJ chief Malik Ishaq, among other jihadist leaders, from a Lahore prison to negotiate an end to the crisis.<sup>92</sup> He was released in July 2011, on Supreme Court orders, after agreeing to several conditions, including refraining from attacks in Punjab, fighting in FATA and stirring anti-Shia sentiment. Yet, he soon was travelling countrywide, giving anti-Shia sermons to large audiences that coincided with the spike in attacks on Shias in Balochistan, KPK and Karachi. The LeJ also continued to consolidate its links with FATA-based militant groups.<sup>93</sup> A former counter-terrorism official and a retired senior Punjab police official described Ishaq as having gone "out of control". In July 2015, the Punjab police killed him in an apparently staged "encounter". In retaliation, Punjab home minister, Colonel (ret.) Shuja Khanzada, the province's lead on policing and counter-terrorism, was assassi-

<sup>88</sup> "JIT report pokes holes in India's Pathankot theories", *Pakistan Today*, 4 April 2016. Crisis Group interviews, March 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interview, retired security official, Lahore, March 2016. Also, "Jaish-e-Mohammed builds huge base in Bahawalpur", *The Daily Times*, 14 September 2009.

<sup>90</sup> "Despite crackdown, some Pakistani militants walk the streets", *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 April 2016. Crisis Group interviews, journalists, lawyers and NGO workers, Bahawalpur, March 2016. "Jud, JeM banned: Rana Sana", *The News*, 18 May 2016.

<sup>91</sup> "Punjabi Taliban chief unlikely to be tried in military courts", *The News*, 17 January 2015. "Punjabi Taliban to join hands with Haqqani network", *The News*, 17 September 2014; "Muavia-led Punjabi Taliban behind church bombing", *The News*, 24 September 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Rafiq, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group Reports, *Policing Urban Violence*; *The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, both op. cit.

nated weeks later. A mob also tried to burn down an *imambargah* (Shia mosque) in Rahimyar Khan to avenge Ishaq.<sup>94</sup>

With the LeJ falling under the category of “bad” jihadist groups, several members have been arrested or killed. According to a senior police official in southern Punjab, the Punjab CTD-led operation against sectarian groups removed the top and second-tier leadership and ensured that “no contenders” took their place; over 300 suspected southern Punjab-based militants were on the Anti-Terrorism Act’s Fourth Schedule and “under constant watch”. He conceded, however, that the operation targeted the “known knowns”, and “sleeper cells” remained.<sup>95</sup> Yet, a counter-terrorism expert noted, “through their sleeper cells, the militant groups still possess the capability of carrying out large-scale militant attacks in Pakistan. The ... planning and preparation that went into the attack on Shuja Khanzada shows that [they] are still in business”.<sup>96</sup>

The arrests of LeJ operatives in Punjab have, moreover, been “sporadic” and “in patches”, which gives “the appearance of doing something”, according to a retired senior counter-terrorism official. The identities of those arrested are seldom known, and there is little information about criminal proceedings, provoking speculation that many may have been or will eventually be released, due in large part to a failing criminal justice system with a woefully low conviction rate that undermines efforts, even if sincere, to bring jihadists to justice.<sup>97</sup> An overly militarised response, including extrajudicial killings (see below), moreover, undermines rule-of-law and provides grist for the jihadists’ propaganda mill.

### C. *Inaction against Jihadist Madrasas*

One of the NAP’s most prominent objectives, regulation, including oversight and accountability, of the madrasa sector, has made little headway. Already by March 2015, the Punjab government had reportedly identified thirteen madrasas, mostly in the south, that were actively training militants for North Waziristan operations. It also identified almost 300 with “direct or indirect link with terrorist activities”. Yet, it has closed only two such madrasas.<sup>98</sup>

Another NAP objective, a clampdown on hate speech, has done little better. Hundreds of hard-line preachers have reportedly been arrested, and some efforts have been made to prevent circulation of hate literature, yet there have been few convictions, and such messaging is still widely available. Graffiti and advertisements on “short jihadi courses available”, which “no one dares remove”, are visible in public

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<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Lahore, February, March 2016. “Lashkar-i-Jhangvi chief Malik Ishaq, two sons killed in Muzaffargarh ‘encounter’”, *Dawn*, 29 July 2015; “Punjab home minister Shuja Khanzada killed in terror attack”, *Dawn*, 17 August 2015; “Sectarian threat looms large in south Punjab”, *The Friday Times*, 21 August 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interview, southern Punjab district, February 2016. The Fourth Schedule lists known suspects belonging to banned organisations and requires that they be closely observed, including through regular appearances at police stations. Bearing arms, obtaining bank loans and foreign and even domestic travel outside their province are prohibited.

<sup>96</sup> Amir Rana, “Militancy in Punjab”, *The News*, 21 August 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interview, Punjab, March 2016. For criminal justice system reform, see Crisis Group Reports, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies*; and *Reforming Pakistan’s Criminal Justice System*, both op. cit.

<sup>98</sup> “13 seminaries training militants in Punjab”, *The Nation*, 14 March 2015; “293 seminaries linked to terrorism”, *The Nation*, 26 November 2015; “Madrasa reforms: Punjab shut down only two suspected seminaries”, op. cit.

spaces. Such graffiti is especially visible near madrasas. “In Dera Ghazi Khan, there is [JD/LeT] literature everywhere saying ‘If you don’t die a martyr’s death, you’ll die like a dog’”, said an activist from that district.<sup>99</sup>

The government has also failed to stem the flow of funds, often a source of money laundering and terrorist financing, into jihadist madrasas.<sup>100</sup> Radical Deobandi groups continue to receive donations, particularly from the trader community countrywide, while many large landowners in southern Punjab give large sums to local mosques and madrasas, both as insurance and to gain political clout. Serving and retired counter-terrorism officials say that monitoring such funds is challenging, since madrasa administrators contend that donations from the devout are often anonymous. Saudi and United Arab Emirates-based clerics, charities and private donors also still finance Wahhabi-inspired Deobandi madrasas and mosques.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group observations and interview, Multan, February 2016. “Questions for oral answers and their replies”, National Assembly Secretariat, 29th Session, 15 February 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies*, op. cit.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior retired and serving Punjab police and intelligence officials and NGO activists, Lahore, Jhang, Multan, Rahimyar Khan, Bahawalpur, February-March 2016. Crisis Group Report, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies*, op. cit.

## IV. Countering the Jihadist Threat

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### A. *Raising the Costs*

More than financial gain, groups like the LeJ, Jaish and LeT/JD offer a sense of power, prestige, and purpose, which especially appeals to disenfranchised youth. By allowing such groups to operate and/or failing to bring them to justice, the state in effect makes them an option with high reward and little risk. The January 2016 Pathankot attack raised Jaish's profile considerably in its Bahawalpur home district, as the 2008 Mumbai attacks raised LeT/JD's. Unless the state prosecutes their leaders and dismantles their networks, it will reinforce the allure of radical Islamist organisations that appear to be above the law. It is equally important to implement regulation, reform and oversight of the madrasa sector, long a major contributing factor to the persistence of jihadist groups.

Most significantly, reform of the criminal justice system is another major NAP objective that appears to have fallen by the wayside, thus undermining efforts to counter extremist violence. Instead, there is increasing reliance on brute, misdirected force, while the law-enforcement institutions – police, prosecutors, and courts – are under-resourced and, amid new military courts and the rising authority of paramilitary agencies, increasingly marginalised. The woefully low conviction rate, particularly in major terrorism cases, embodies the failure.

Unless these flaws in the state's counter-terrorism policy are addressed, effective action against groups such as the Jaish, LeJ and LeT/JD is unlikely to bear fruit. Much depends on the PML-N federal and provincial governments' abilities to replace an overly militarised approach with one based on the rule-of-law and both civilian led and implemented.<sup>102</sup> The Easter Sunday attack in Lahore intensified a longstanding dispute between the military and both governments over authorising the paramilitary Rangers to conduct counter-terrorism operations in Punjab.<sup>103</sup> As with Karachi's ongoing Rangers-led operation, that could undercut the PML-N's authority in its political stronghold.<sup>104</sup>

The civilians have protected their turf. According to a senior police official privy to policy discussions between the civilian and military leaders, the former "is saying, 'we've built up the CTD [provincial counter-terrorism department], and we've raised a new counter-terrorism force; we've taken out Malik Ishaq, and we're taking on LeJ – we don't need you'".<sup>105</sup> Yet, the Lahore attack gave the military opportunity for army and paramilitary raids in southern and central Punjab, which reportedly apprehend an unspecified number of suspects and seized arms and ammunition. These were in parallel with civilian law-enforcement efforts. Some 5,000 were reportedly detained, but only around 200 were still in custody by late March. The April 2016 police and army operation in the Rajanpur *kacha* area, including dawn-to-dusk curfews and bombing by army helicopters, merely dismantled one of several local criminal gangs. An editorial in a leading English-language paper commented: "This is

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<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group Reports, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies*; and *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System*, both op. cit.

<sup>103</sup> "At least 72 killed in suicide blast as terror revisits Lahore", op. cit.

<sup>104</sup> For analysis of the Rangers' Karachi operation, see Crisis Group Reports, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies* and *Policing Urban Violence*, both op. cit.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interview, February 2016.

supposed to be the beginning of a sustained push against militants in Punjab. Has the state lost its collective mind?"<sup>106</sup>

The federal and provincial governments have refused to extend to the Rangers special policing powers under the 1997 anti-terrorism act that are available to the paramilitary force in Karachi. At least formally, the Rangers will work alongside civilian law-enforcement agencies.<sup>107</sup> The PML-N governments in Lahore and Islamabad are right to resist demands to give the Rangers special police powers in Punjab. But they, too, are relying on lethal force, including extrajudicial killings, rather than a transparent, accountable criminal justice approach. In April 2016, the HRCP noted that militarisation of law enforcement and other civilian institutions, on the rise since the December 2014 Peshawar school attack, was "seriously undermining the democratic system", with an "undeniable impact on the rights of individuals and groups".<sup>108</sup> The government should abandon an approach that may yield short-term dividends but is counterproductive in the long term.

Extrajudicial killings may remove individual commanders from the battlefield, but by further undermining rule-of-law and fuelling alienation, such abuses create opportunities for jihadist groups to radicalise and recruit. They invite violent retaliation and feed a propaganda mill that glorifies "sacrifice" and "*shahadat* (martyrdom)".<sup>109</sup> The government should focus instead on reforming and strengthening the criminal justice system, with better resourced and authorised provincial police at its core, if it is to dismantle terror networks, prosecute both leaders and foot soldiers, disrupt terror financing and end radicalisation via hate speech and literature in southern Punjab, Pakistan's jihadist heart.<sup>110</sup>

## B. *Protecting and Engaging Citizens*

To counter immediate and pressing security challenges, the federal and provincial governments should concentrate efforts on ending the climate of impunity, particularly by enforcing the law against jihadist organisations through a reformed and modernised criminal justice system. The federal government should repeal discriminatory Islamic legislation, most of it from the Zia era, which facilitates radicalism and reinforces religious, sectarian and gender discrimination and exclusion. Lahore should protect southern Punjab's religious minorities, in particular Christians and Hindus, and counter gender-based violence by ensuring that law-enforcement agencies proactively respond and perpetrators are held accountable. It should also refrain from backtracking on pro-women legislation.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "Pak army says several terrorists arrested in Punjab raids", *The News*, 28 March 2016. "Pakistan detained more than 5,000 after Easter bombing killed 72", Reuters, 29 March 2016. "Air power in Punjab", *Dawn*, 14 April 2016.

<sup>107</sup> "Govt decides to call out Rangers in Punjab", *The News*, 31 March 2016.

<sup>108</sup> "Pervasive militarisation undermining democratic system, rights", press release, HRCP, 3 April 2016.

<sup>109</sup> One of Jaish-e-Mohammed's fifteen "laws of fighting" is to "excel others in offering sacrifice"; the glorification of the *shaheed*, or one "killed for the revival and uplift of Islam" is a constant refrain in the group's literature. Mas'ud (Masood) Azhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 621.

<sup>110</sup> For detailed criminal justice sector reforms, beyond the scope of this report, see Crisis Group Reports, *Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies; Policing Urban Violence; Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System; Reforming Pakistan's Police*; and *Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan*, all *op. cit.*; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°212, *Reforming Pakistan's Prison System*, 12 October 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Women Violence and Conflict*, *op. cit.*

Yet, a holistic, sustainable policy to counter violent Islamist groups in southern Punjab requires a broader, more long-term view. Many steps can be taken both immediately and over the medium and longer terms, including addressing sentiments of exploitation and neglect by *Takht Lahore* and Islamabad so as to help bridge the gap between citizen and state and deprive spoilers of opportunities to exploit alienation. A beginning would be to increase southern Punjab's development budget and consult communities on development programs. The provincial government should also establish and implement requirements for hiring and training a significant proportion of local labour for such projects.<sup>112</sup> Parents would not have to expose children to radicalisation and exploitation by sectarian madrasas if the Punjab government reformed and expanded public schools, including removing intolerant religious discourse and distorted narratives glorifying jihadist violence from the classroom, and provided education assistance along the lines of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP).<sup>113</sup>

Political parties must also play a far more proactive role in redressing root causes of alienation in southern Punjab that stem from glaring economic inequities and governance failures even as the region's resources are exploited by outsiders. By including local leaders within party decision-making processes and structures, southern Punjab's priorities would be reflected in their policies and programs. The inclusion of local stakeholders would also help identify appropriate legislation for reform in the provincial and federal parliaments. As a first step, ruling and opposition parties in the provincial and federal parliaments should urgently enact legislation to enforce Article 38 (a), which calls for the "equitable adjustment of rights between employers and employees, and landlords and tenants".

Ultimately, the government and the political elite should help create an environment in which peaceful, progressive voices can be heard without fear of retaliation by either the state or violent jihadists. Among other steps, restrictions on NGOs and civil society organisations that are filling the gaps left by the state for delivery of basic services and promotion of democratisation and rights should be removed. Those restrictions tilt the playing field in favour of jihadists, who are not bound by government regulations and also benefit from the climate of impunity.

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<sup>112</sup> Well-intended projects failed in the past because there was no local buy-in and few local benefits. The Punjab government's Quaid-i-Azam Solar Park project in Bahawalpur, for instance, failed to generate the intended electrical output by a substantial margin and produced serious environmental damage, while using labour mostly from outside the region. "Why is the govt privatising the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park?", *Dawn*, 6 December 2015.

<sup>113</sup> BISP is a national social safety net program launched in 2008 to give a monthly cash disbursement to female heads of household subsisting on less than 6,000 rupees (around \$57) a month. The initial disbursement was 1,000 rupees (\$10-\$11), later raised to 1,500 rupees (\$14-\$15). See BISP website, [www.bisp.gov.pk](http://www.bisp.gov.pk).

## V. Conclusion

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Post-NAP security efforts to counter southern Punjab's violent sectarian groups are still more of a "pruning" exercise than a comprehensive crackdown.<sup>114</sup> Continued state sponsorship remains a source of empowerment for groups that fall under the category of "good" jihadists, such as the Jaish, which has extensive networks across the province. A prominent expert on Pakistan's sectarian extremism rightly noted: "Once you decide to support jihadis you have to roll back the writ of the state in order to allow them space to operate".<sup>115</sup> Selective counter-terrorism can have limited results at best, while a militarised approach, based on lethal force, to tackle the "bad" jihadists such as LeJ will further undermine rule-of-law and governance, aggravating the conditions in which extremism thrives.

Jihadist groups' promises of influence, prestige and financial reward are especially appealing to the disenfranchised in southern Punjab, who lack social or economic opportunities in its backward and largely rural economy. Economic hardship also forces families to send their children to sectarian madrasas, thus exposing them to a sectarian discourse that is further perpetuated by hard-line preachers in mosques and through the easy availability of jihadist literature. While jihadists still harbour a fringe minority, this exposure raises the potential of more joining their ranks.

Since the challenge is not confined to core members of organisations such as Jaish, LeJ and LeT/JD but extends to potential sympathisers, the PML-N governments in Islamabad and Lahore require more than a straightforward law-enforcement approach. Rule-of-law is vital, not least for ending the climate of impunity; so is addressing the perceptions of political marginalisation and economic exploitation by *Takht Lahore* in the Seraiki belt, which are being tapped by jihadists. Making southern Punjabis equal partners in the polity would help ameliorate this alienation, as would accepting and supporting a vibrant and vocal civil society that reflects Pakistan's cultural diversity and is ultimately the best protection against the challenges of a violent minority.

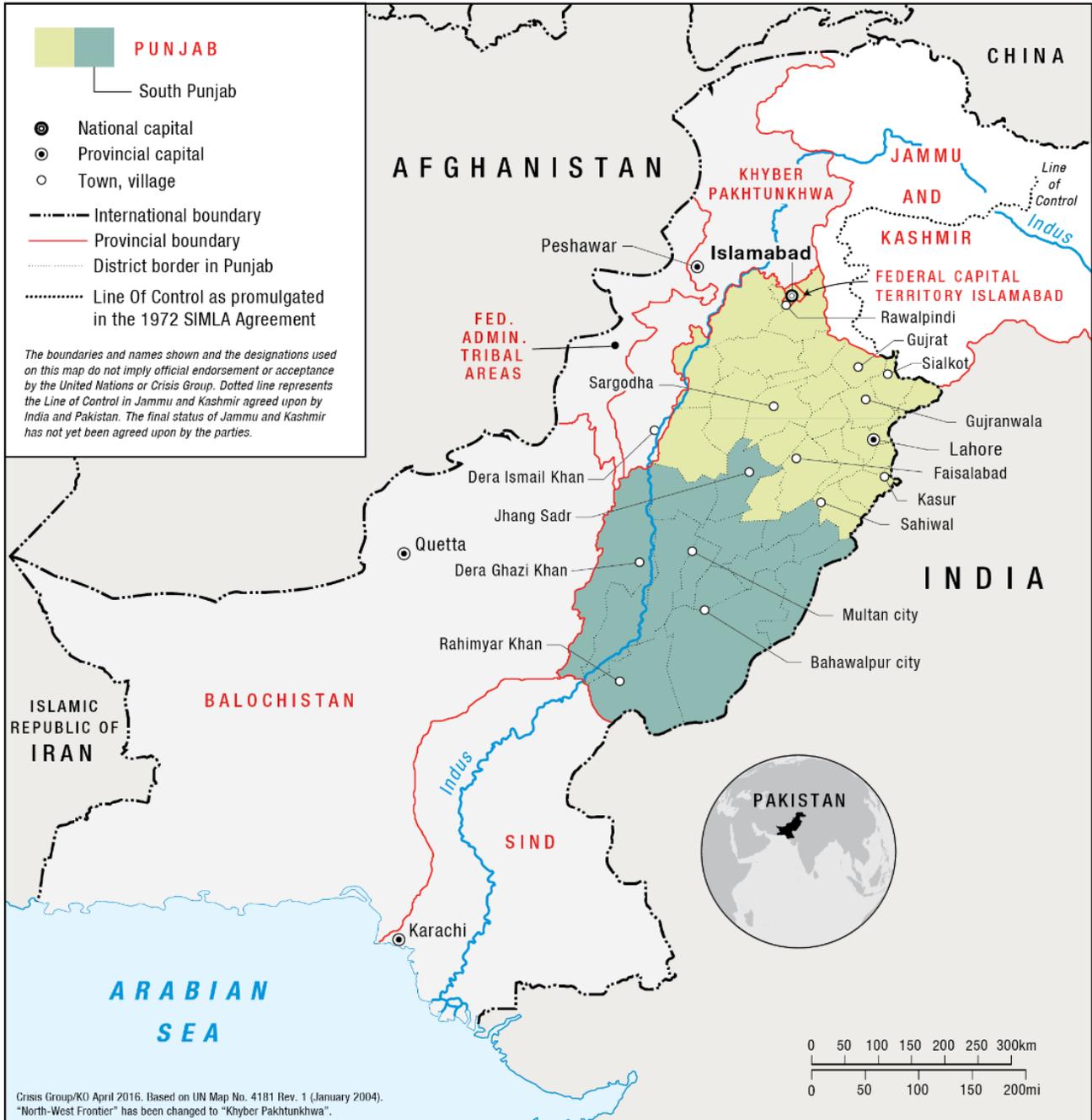
**Islamabad/Brussels, 30 May 2016**

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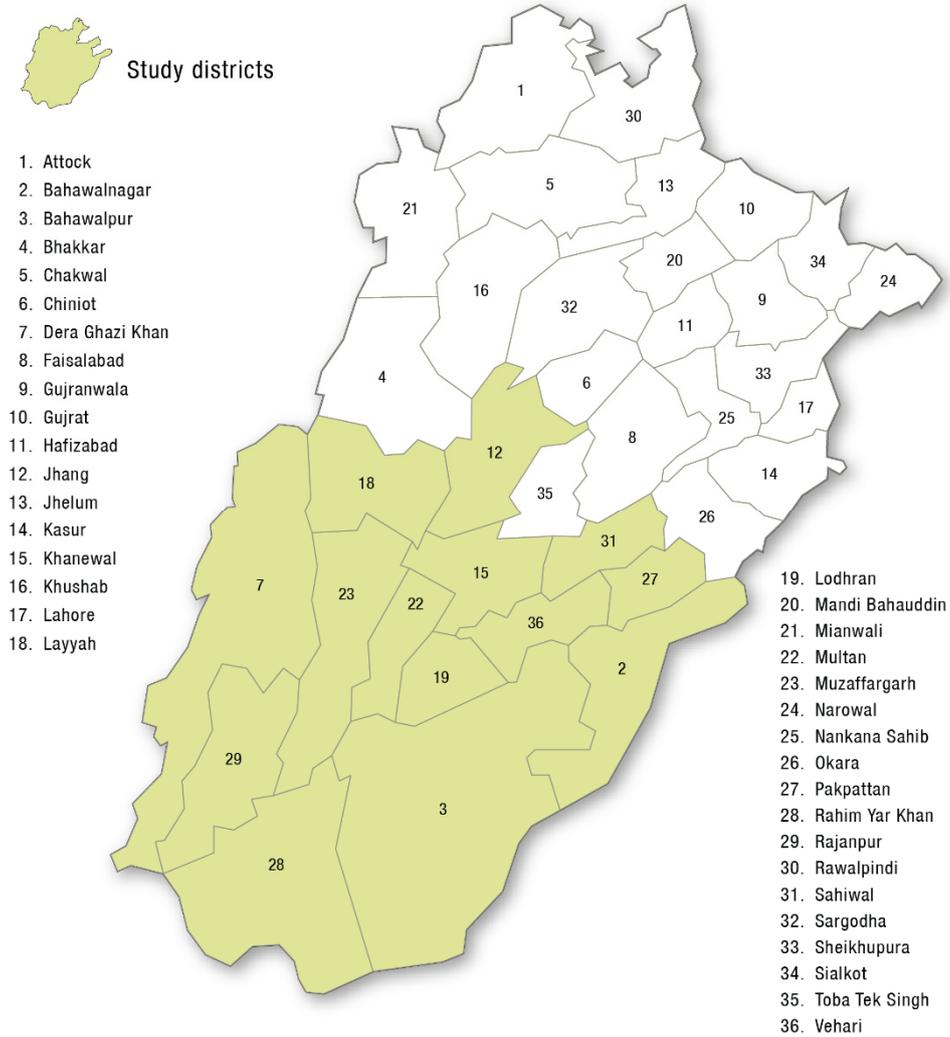
<sup>114</sup> Crisis Group interviews, counter-terrorism and other law-enforcement officials, Islamabad, Lahore, Bahawalpur, February 2016.

<sup>115</sup> Crisis Group interview, Khaled Ahmed, Lahore, 18 March 2016.

Appendix A: Map of Pakistan and Punjab Province



## Appendix B: Punjab Districts



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## Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

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ASWJ	Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, the renamed Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, a jihadist Deobandi group, the parent organisation of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997.
CTD	Counter-Terrorism Department, the lead investigation and civilian counter-terrorism provincial-level agency, earlier named Criminal Investigation Department.
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas, comprising seven administrative districts, or agencies, and six Frontier Regions bordering on south-eastern Afghanistan.
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency.
HRCP	The independent, non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, the military's main intelligence agency.
JD	Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the renamed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (see below).
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP).
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a jihadist Deobandi organisation, responsible for major sectarian killings and other terrorist violence, headquartered in Punjab but with a countrywide network.
LeT	Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, anti-India jihadist group led by Hafez Saeed, banned and renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa in 2002, responsible for the November 2008 Mumbai attacks.
NAP	National Action Plan, to counter terrorism and extremism, formulated in December 2014 in response to the December attack on Peshawar's Army Public School.
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, currently heading a majority government at the centre and in Punjab.
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party, founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967. Since Benazir Bhutto's December 2007 assassination, the party is headed by her widower, former President Asif Ali Zardari, and son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. It led the coalition government in the centre from 2008 to 2013 and is currently the largest opposition party in the National Assembly. It also heads the Sindh provincial government.
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, a radical Deobandi group and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's parent organisation; renamed Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat.
<i>Takht Lahore</i>	Throne of Lahore, a common colloquial reference in southern Punjab to describe the economically and politically dominant central and northern Punjab.