

You are in: [World: South Asia](#)

Front Page Thursday, 10 August, 2000, 20:18 GMT 21:18 UK

[World](#)**Who are the Kashmir militants?**[Africa](#)[Americas](#)[Asia-Pacific](#)[Europe](#)[Middle East](#)[South Asia](#)[From Our Own Correspondent](#)[Letter From America](#)[UK](#)[UK Politics](#)[Business](#)[Sci/Tech](#)[Health](#)[Education](#)[Entertainment](#)[Talking Point](#)[In Depth](#)[AudioVideo](#)

Kashmir Liberation Front: Dwindling membership and influence

Since the insurgency began in Indian administered Kashmir in 1989, the number of militants fighting India's security forces has increased to thousands.



The various militant groups face a substantial Indian security presence.

According to figures provided by the Indian military, there are about 125,000 troops and paramilitaries in the Kashmir Valley and surrounding areas.

Unofficial figures put that figure much higher.

The biggest and most influential insurgent factions are based outside the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar and appear to be committed to accession to Pakistan.

**Key groups**

However, the three main groups - Hizbul Mujahideen; Lashkar-e-Toyeba; and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen - are reluctant to stipulate in detail what they are fighting for, beyond the removal of India from Kashmir.

It remains to be seen how long they will remain powerful because many militant groups in Kashmir that were prominent five years ago no longer appear to wield influence today.

The pro independence Jammu

**Militants and Pakistan**

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and Kashmir Liberation Front was one of the most active militant groups at the start of the Kashmir insurgency, but today this group appears to have a dwindling membership and far less military power.

All three of the currently largest militant groups are thought to have bases in Pakistan, which says it provides them only with political, diplomatic and moral support.

But India alleges that most militant groups receive weapons directly from Pakistan.

Hizbul Mujahideen is one of the older militant groups, comprised mostly of Kashmiris. It has been active since the early days of the insurgency.

Lashkar-e-Toyeba is predominantly made up of non-Kashmiri fighters and is thought to embrace a rigid form of Sunni Islam.

Harkat-ul-Mujahideen is believed to have been formed out of a merger of two factions, and according to British defence sources it is in effect an international brigade, composed mainly of Afghans, Pakistanis and even some Arabs.

Non-Kashmiris first joined the insurgency in large numbers in 1994. Estimates of their number vary from 600 to 2000.

Recently another group - Jaish-e-Mohammad [Army of Mohammad] - has emerged in Pakistan.

It was formed by an Islamic cleric, Maulana Masood Azhar, to fight against Indian rule in Kashmir.

Masood Azhar was released from an Indian jail last December, in exchange for hostages on board a hijacked Indian airliner.

### **Separatist alliance**

One of the few organisations allowed by India to operate against its presence in Kashmir is the All Party Hurriyat [Freedom] Conference.

This is a non-violent umbrella group of secessionist organisations.

It is made up of at least 23 constituent groups including trade unions and religious and political organisations.

Islamabad admits to:  
political  
diplomatic  
and moral support

India alleges  
Military support



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Although the Hurriyat is at pains to disassociate itself from violence, it is believed that the political wings of some militant groups are represented within its membership.

Commentators say that Hurriyat's influence in Kashmir is undermined by its lack of unity.

Members cannot agree for example whether Kashmir should become independent or part of Pakistan.

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[^^ Back to top](#)

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