

# **Paradigm Shift in Karachi's Conflict Matrix: A Case Study**

*Huma Baqai\* & Maria Hassan\*\**

## **Abstract**

Karachi is the only true megalopolis in Pakistan. It is also a textbook case of urban challenges and political vicissitudes. The qualitative study provides an insight into the long standing generic ethno-political realities of the city and the emergence of a new non-state actor, the Taliban, on the scene. This new actor at one time controlled Karachi and was responsible for 90 per cent spike in terrorist attacks in the city. The paper attempts to explain that the violent matrix of Karachi is not about law and order. The law and order break down Karachi experiences, is the byproduct of unprecedented demographic convulsions that the city continues to experience, the conflict under development trap, and the governance break down leading to the phenomenon of mafias and militancy. The ongoing Karachi operation, initiated in September 2013, was the state response to address the deteriorating situation on the ground. Karachi is a resilient city, it has responded positively to the initiative with 360 degree tangible improvement, acknowledged both nationally and internationally. The sustainability of the normalcy restored remains a challenge.

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## **Introduction**

Karachi is the only true megalopolis to Pakistan's credit. This overly populated, poorly managed, ethnically diverse and politically volatile urban centre is an interesting case for an academic enquiry in the domains of politics. The tussle to hold the reigns of the city dates back to the inception of Pakistan, with ethnic tension dominating the wide range of conflicts. This paper attempts to investigate the underpinnings of the most recent vicissitudes of the city's sociopolitical patterns, through a qualitative study. The current study argues that whereas the longstanding, generic ethno-political realities seem to be intact; there are enough evidences to prove that, in the recent past, a new player has

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\* Dr Huma Baqai, Director Communication & Public Affairs, Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi.

\*\* Ms. Maria Hassan, Director Centre for Writing, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi.

altered the conflict dynamics of the city. The non -state actor, i.e. Taliban, having identified Karachi perfectly suitable for rest and recuperation, started using the city's resources to fund their pursuits and this continued unabated till they enveloped the city, using the shield of the historical Mohajir-Pushtun conflict and the more recent Mohajir-Sindhi strenuous politics to its advantage to a point where they controlled one-third of Karachi and were responsible for 90 % spike in terrorists' attack in the city.

Prior to the operation, till September 2013, Karachi's was held hostage by a presumably never ending state of disorder fueled by politics of ethnicity and sectarianism and aggravated by terrorist groups and mafias.

Following is an overview of law and order indicators during 2008-2013, that compelled more than 3000 traders to relocate their business in Malaysia, Bangladesh, UAE and Thailand <sup>1</sup>

Killings	9322
Reported Kidnapping for Ransom	708
vehicles stolen	Four wheelers: 29477
	Two wheelers: 109078
Bank Robberies	104
Extortion paid by traders and industrialists	A minimum of PKR 80 million per day
Loss due to strikes	PKR 15-20 billion - ONE day of strike
Karachi land grabbed by land grabbers	30,000 acres
Karachiites paid through extortion, encroachments, ransom, & street crimes	Over Rs. 830 million daily

The current study was revisited in March 2016 to incorporate the efforts of operation against terrorism initiated in September 2013, post deteriorating law and order situation in the city and its linkages to international terrorism.

The Karachi operation improved the situation significantly, reducing target killing and dacoities to 70% and 65 % respectively with dropping trends in kidnapping for ransom with a 62% drop rate, an 84 % decrease in extortion and 72% in that of car theft which was also reportedly the lowest in the last fourteen years. The law enforcing

<sup>1</sup> Fahad Nabeel, 'Economic Review Economic Uplift of the City of Lights', *Stratagem* (2015). Accessed on 7 March 2016 at <http://www.stratagem.pk/economic-review/economic-uplift-of-the-city-of-lights/>

agencies have either killed or arrested 1200 alleged members of terrorist groups but 349 law enforcing personals have also lost their lives.<sup>2</sup>

### **Statement of the problem**

This study aims to unfold the aspects of the city's ethno-political changes that could have serious socio-economic repercussions locally and could also lead to severe international implications. The methodology employed for the inquiry was predominantly qualitative. Owing to the fact that the phenomenon under study is alive and was conducted in real time; media reports and archival resources were used as data source. Another major source was unstructured interviews. The interviewees comprised a diverse base from a cross section of society representing a range of economic strata and diverse political and social affiliations. The interviews served to gauge both the perceptions and the experiences of the interviewees. The data was then synthesised to help formulate the said argument.

The violence matrix of Karachi is not about law and order. The law and order situation is just a by-product of essentially three underlying factors which include;

- The demographic convulsions the city has experienced.
- Conflict under development trap.
- Governance breakdown leading to the phenomena of mafias and militancy.

The non-state actor, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) exploited all three to its advantage and contributed to the spike of violence, terror and crime in the city; the trajectories of which included war zones and no-go areas in the largest metropolitan of the country, challenging the writ of the state. Having a foothold in the periphery of tribal region, the Taliban proliferated urban centers and have become a mainstream urban phenomenon.

The on-going Karachi operation, started in September 2013 to arrest the situation, seemed to have addressed the tactical aspects of the conflict and is deemed as a success although sustainability and normalcy that it has restored is under question.

### **The city**

Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan, is also referred to as the country's commercial hub and the financial capital. The city has the distinction of

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<sup>2</sup> '3500 terrorists killed as Zarb-e-Azb completes two years', SAMAA TV. Accessed on 21 June 2016 at <http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2016/06/tribal-belt-cleared-of-terrorists/>

having a naval base and the country's only operational seaport. Anatol Lieven<sup>3</sup> argues that the partition 'wrenched' Karachi into an amazingly different path of development from 'Interior Sindh'.

Analyzing the dynamics of the city, Laurent Gayers<sup>4</sup> maintains that ever since partition, the divide within the city shifted from the former discrimination between black and white to the divide between planned and unplanned areas. The former consists of residential and commercial areas that were either developed by the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) or emerged later and became a part of the city's infrastructure. Most of the unplanned areas, that inhabits 7.5 million people, emerged as a result of unlawful tenancy mostly in the 'periphery of the city'. The disconnect between 'the planned and the unplanned' parts of the city is vividly evident through the stark contrast in the living conditions of the two.<sup>5</sup> Not very different from other megapolises of the developing world, Karachi can also be described as an "Urban Mess". Paradoxically, it is Pakistan's richest and the most educated city, but simultaneously the poorest and most violent.

Karachi emerged as 'the grocery of India' from a small fisherman village inhabited by the Baloch tribes from Balochistan and Makran, near the delta of Indus River, named *Kolachi Jo Goth* in 1729 after a local fisherman.<sup>6</sup> The descendants of the community inhabit the area even today on the small island of Abdullah Goth, situated near the Karachi port. The "Mai Kolachi" of Karachi is the reminiscent of the original name of the city. The British recognising the geographical significance of the city captured Karachi in February 1839 and annexed it in 1842 together with the province of Sindh. Around 1878, the city was connected by a railway line to the rest of India. Moreover, public building projects as Frere Hall and the Empress Market became the hall marks of the City. Home to around 9000 inhabitants, Karachi then became the first municipality of the subcontinent to give tax. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city had acquired the status of a cosmopolitan

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<sup>3</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2011), p.309.

<sup>4</sup> Laurent Gayer, 'A divided city: "Ethnic" and "Religious" Conflicts in Karachi, Pakistan' (Paper presented at the first Pakistan Seminar organized by the *International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS)* and the *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM)*, Amsterdam, 24 March 2003). Accessed on 22 February 2016 at <http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/artlg.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Sohrab K.H. Katrak, *Karachi: That was the Capital of Sindh* (Lahore: Paramount, 1963), p.27.

status with a population base of 105,000 comprising Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Zoroastrian's, Iranians, Lebanese, and Goa merchants. In 1900, as a solution to growing street congestion, India's first tramway system was introduced in the city. Karachi then became famous for its railways, tram network, churches, mosques, court houses, markets, streets and a magnificent harbour.

In 1947, Karachi was chosen as the capital of Pakistan, a new sovereign state in the subcontinent. It emerged not only as the administrative centre of the new country, but also a major centre for industry and business. It was the same time, when this city offered shelter to a huge influx of migrants and refugees from the other side of the recently determined border. The greater numbers settled in Karachi and fewer in Hyderabad; the migrants dominated both. Karachi continues to be the recipient of population influx from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Burma or internal natural or man-induced displacements.

### **Karachi — a demographic pressure cooker**

Karachi's growth is parallel to none; no other city anywhere else in the world, at any time in human history, has ever experienced such an enormous growth rate. Historically, postcolonial megacities' premier economic status contributed to an enormous increase in their populations. Karachi, following the trend, experienced a population growth rate of 432 %; from a city of 450,000 in 1947, it has turned into a demographic pressure cooker of 22 million inhabitants in recent times.<sup>7</sup>

Waseem,<sup>8</sup> argues that large scale relocation to Karachi set the ground for urbanisation in Pakistan and that this influx was inversely proportional to the city's growth potential. He further establishes a chronological built up of various 'waves of migration' starting from the post-independence Mohajir arrival to that of Pakhtuns and Punjabis from the 60s through to the 80s; the two major inflows of Sindhis first in the 70s and then in the 90s, furthered by ingression of Iranians and that of Afghans during Afghan war which spanned over the 80s and the 90s; the most significant being an overwhelmingly large number of political refugees from Afghanistan. Registered political refugees from Iraq

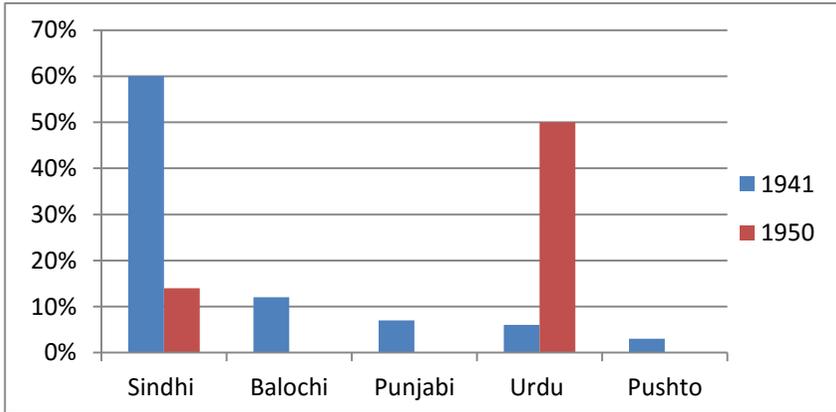
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<sup>7</sup> Farhan Anwar, 'Karachi City Climate Change, Adaptation Strategy, A Road Map', (2012). Accessed 28 March 2015 at [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/27915\\_100286295karachicityclimatechangead.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/27915_100286295karachicityclimatechangead.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Mohammad Waseem, 'Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan', *The Pakistan Development Review*, 35:4 Part II (1996), p.623. Accessed 28 March 2015 at <http://www.pide.org.pk/pdf/PDR/1996/Volume4/617-629.pdf>

(Kurds), Iran (Bahais), Sri Lanka (Tamils), and economic migrants from far and near totaled a staggering 1.5 million. As a result, Karachi became a hub of a wide range of underground criminal activities including, but not restricted to drug smuggling (including heroin) and human trafficking.<sup>9</sup>

1941 census reports the linguistic construct of the city before partition as: 60 % Sindhi, 12 % Balochi, 7 % Punjabi, 6 % Urdu and 3 % Pashtu. The 1950 census showed the Urdu-speaking population rising to 50 % and Sindhi speaking falling to a mere 14 %.<sup>10</sup> The dynamics changed altogether; within a decade, Karachi had been transformed from a Sindhi city to an Urdu-speaking city.



Karachi Demographics: Post 1947

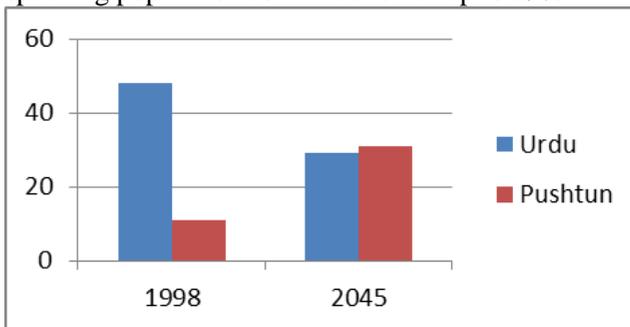
Not only the demographic composition of Karachi tilted in Mohajirs' favour, being the capital of Pakistan, Karachi also catapulted the Mohajirs' status in the civil bureaucracy and politics. This demographic shift has dominated the politics of Sindh; for the last five decades, the control of Karachi has been a sour point of the provincial politics. The underlying political conflict between the others and Urdu-speaking population culminated in the 1980s with the emergence of an organised political force representing the Urdu-speaking. This particular development has had a far reaching impact on the polity of Sindh which continues to shape the conflict matrix of Karachi; especially political militancy, ethnicity and sectarian driven conflict, discord over the local government law, politicised police force, tussle over political offices,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Kaiser Bengali, 'Anatomy of Violence,' *Dawn*, 9 September 2013. Accessed on 28 March 2015 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1041381/anatomy-of-violence>

politicisation of educational institutions and quota system.<sup>11</sup> And, more recently, tussle over the loot from the city where utility services to the citizenry have completely gone out of control of the provincial government; the land, water and extortion mafias of Karachi divided along political lines, the phenomenon of 'no go areas' are all trajectories of this.

Post-independence, the migration from India paved the way for migration from the northern parts of the country. Karachi's ability to absorb exodus of population and provide them sustenance continue to date. According to recent estimates, 350,000 persons still move to Karachi every year. This resulted in the share of the Urdu-speaking population peaking to a 54 % in 1981, and falling to 48 % in 1998, but now there is a third prominent player – the Pashtun - whose share of the population has continued to rise and reached 11 % in 1998. Drones attacks, surgical strikes and fear of operations have further accelerated Pashtun migration into the city in the last 10 years. The share of Pashtun population is estimated to reach 31 % by 2045, with the relative share of the Urdu-speaking population estimated to fall up to 29%.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Sameera Rashid, 'Conundrum of Violence', 2013. Accessed on 28 March 2015 at <http://www.viewpointonline.net/2014/02/conundrum-of-violence/3308-conundrum-of-violence>

As an innate consequence, Sindhis strived over the next couple of decades to increase their politico-administrative clout in the city/province. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was elected as the prime minister, he acceded to long-held Sindhi demand for greater share in the administration by introducing the quota system for the civil services and educational institutions. The quota system restricted the entry of Urdu-speaking people into the civil services and institutions of higher as well as professional education. These measures placated the Sindhi passions, however, paradoxically, acted as a catalyst for 'Muhajir political mobilization'. Since Muhajirs were aggrieved by the sidelining, real and imaginary, of their community by the Bhutto government, hence, Karachi was the epicenter of anti-Bhutto agitation in 1977 which culminated in the Zia dictatorship.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

Karachi's population grew more than 80% between 2000 and 2010 alone. Presently, an estimated 5 million residents are Pashtun which make about 25% of cities entire population. Interestingly, at present there are more Pashtuns in Karachi than in Peshawar, Kandahar or Kabul<sup>13</sup>. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees statistics there are some 71,000 Afghan refugees in the city.<sup>14</sup> But experts working with Afghan refugees estimate that the actual number is around 700,000. The flow of population continues.

The polity of Karachi poses an interestingly complex paradox. The Mohajir / Mutahida Qaumi Movement clashes with PPP representing the interest of the province in the Sindh Assembly. However, Sindhis are a minority in the urban centers of their province despite being in the government.

The conflict on the street of Karachi was between the rising number of Pashtuns and the shrink in the number of the Urdu-speaking people. The rising Pashtun numbers in the city helped Awami National Party (ANP) exercise their influence and acquire two provincial assembly seats in 2008. MQM and ANP clashed more often than not, and it was not unusual for one group to hold the other responsible of the killing of their men.

In 2010, the media started reporting the emergence of Taliban<sup>15</sup> phenomenon in Karachi, and then their increasing concentration in certain areas of the city.<sup>16</sup> This narrative did not suit ANP; therefore, ANP termed MQM's claims regarding the presence and foothold of the Taliban in Karachi as a mere ploy for ethnic cleansing of Karachi against Pashtuns. Owing to the lack of trust between the two parties, ANP rejected MQM's early allegation as being 'politically-motivated'. This trust deficit served Taliban's purpose and they took advantage. However,

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<sup>13</sup> Alok Basnal, 'The ongoing Talibanization of Karachi', in *Asia Pacific Bulletin no 209* (Washington: East-West Center, 2013). Accessed on 1 April 2015 at [http://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb\\_209.pdf](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb_209.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Saba Gul Khattak, 'In/security: Afghan Refugees and Politics in Pakistan', *Sustainable Development Policy Institute Working Paper Series 84*, 2003. Accessed on 14 April 2015 at <http://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/W84-INSECURITY.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> 'Taliban number rising in Pakistani city of Karachi', BBC, NEWS SOUTH ASIA. Accessed on 24 April 2015 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/southasia/10356541.stm>

<sup>16</sup> 'Karachi faces growing Taliban menace', BBC, NEWS SOUTH ASIA. Accessed on 24 April 2015 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/southasia/10354433.stm>

after 2012, Frontier Colony attack, that claimed the life of an ANP leader and former LB member along with workers, the party did not finger point MQM neither in the case of subsequent killings of its workers, nor after forced eviction from Pashtun-dominated areas. Tehreek-e-Taliban<sup>17</sup> has killed 70 ANP leaders in Karachi since it sent a warning to them, in June 2012, demanding the ANP leadership to quit their party and take their flags and posters down. Consequently, up to 44 ANP Karachi offices have been closed. Qadir Khan, a former ANP spokesperson, now an MQM member, says 'no political party or group can stand up to these militants'.<sup>18</sup> MQM, the strongest political party in Karachi challenged by none, was also threatened by the Taliban in 2008 where TTP spokesman, Maulvi Umar, issued a warning against MQM chief Altaf.<sup>19</sup>

This and the deteriorating law and order situation led to the operation against the militants having the ownership of all the political parties, the very vocal powerful business community of Karachi and the civil society with the sole objective of restoring peace in Karachi and ridding it off the Taliban. Two and a half years down the lane, the same operation is now seen as controversial. Political fragmentation has become very profound. There is an atmosphere of complex confrontation between Pakistan Peoples Party and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) and blame game between the federal government and government of Sindh. The confrontation between MQM and PPP has just deepened with MQM's blames on the PPP and the federal government for not doing enough to protect them against the operation which they now see as being politically motivated. The Sindh government blames the federal government of using the operation to target the PPP. The leadership of the two major political forces of the province have given statements against the operation hinting of it being biased and politically motivated. The reservations of the Sindh government are indicated by their feet dragging in extending special power of Rangers in Sindh. The activities of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) are also seen in the same light. The issue now is: what is the mandate of Rangers in Karachi? There seems to be no

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<sup>17</sup> 'Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan — Incidents and Statements involving TTP: [2016](#), [2015](#), [2014](#), [2013](#), [2011-2012](#)', South Asia Terrorism Portal. Accessed in May, 2015 at <http://www.satp.org/satporgt/p/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/ttp.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed Ali, 'Taliban in Karachi: the real story', Dawn, 31 Mar 2013. Accessed on 15 May 2015 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/799118/taliban-in-karachi-the-real-story>

<sup>19</sup> Laurent Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (India: Harper Collins, 2014).

convergence of view on it. The murky politics of the city threatens the operation, where the political parties want the operation to work for their respective interests. The general understanding in Sindh is that the mandate of Rangers is restricted to elimination of non-state terror, extortion and kidnapping for ransom. The Rangers' dabbling with the corruption terror nexus and the nexus that exists between politics, crime and terror including providing political cover to terror organisations did not go down well with the political parties of Sindh. What further aggravated the situation are now the allegations of established links of political parties with agencies like RAW.

Although law enforcement agencies and the Rangers make tall claims of nabbing several suspects belonging to banned militant outfits in the Karachi operation, started since September 2013, leaders of political parties, especially Awami National Party, Muttahida Quami Movement and Pathan residents say that law enforcement agencies have not focused on the Tehreek-e-Taliban in their entire operation.<sup>20</sup>

However, the recent disclosures made by ISPR present a counter-narrative and are encouraging; indicative of operation moving in the right direction. The ISPR reasserted its position of the operation being biased free and across the board. The evidence presented by them is substantive and as per their report three major terrorist networkers working in Karachi namely Al-Qaeda (subcontinent group), Lashkar-e-Jhanghvi (LeJ) and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan were targeted; these groups work in collaboration with each other. About 97 terrorists of these groups were arrested not only Karachi but from across the country, 26 of them high were profile targets, wanted by agencies and had head money on them. Those arrested included suicide bombers, explosive experts and financiers and facilitators of the groups.<sup>21</sup>

The non-state militancy is like a hydra, you cut one head and several others come up. The recently identified Afridi Group<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>20</sup> Zia-Ur-Rehman, 'The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-Militant economy of Karachi', Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies. Accessed on 14 March 2016 at <http://www.san-pips.com/download.php?f=271.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Madiha Fareed, 'Major terrorists network busted: DG ISPR', Dunya News, 30 March 2016. Accessed on 2 April 2016 at <http://dunyanews.tv/en/SpecialReport/322469-Major-terrorists-network-bustedDG-ISPR>

<sup>22</sup> Zia-Ur-Rehman, 'New militant groups seen rising in Pushtun areas', *The News*, 5 April 2015. Accessed on 5 May 2015 at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/33168-new-militant-group-seen-rising-in-pashtun-areas>

It is not clear to which Taliban faction Afridi Group belongs to, Pashtun elders suspect that they are either members of the Lashkar-e-Islam

functioning in Pushtoon majority areas of the city Sohrab Goth, Ali Town, Keamari and Banaras, is one of many. This is their modus operandi; they regroup and resurface with new faces and new names but have the same objective.<sup>23</sup> Karachi's demography and economic paradigm give the requisite cover, financial foothold and the recruits they need.

### **Conflict under development trap**

One third of Karachi is extremely poor and it may be categorised as one of the biggest slums in the world. In 2006, Poor neighbourhoods housed about 61 % of Karachi's total population- a 10% increase from 1998; 89 % of people live below the poverty line.<sup>24</sup> The rich-poor divide marks every group interest that exists in Karachi. Be it political parties, ethnic communities or religious parties.

The city has been in the grip of turmoil and violence for the last three decades. HRCP's first major report on lawlessness and violence in Karachi was issued in 1995, since then, the only peace that Karachi has witnessed is absence of active violence. Lately, low intensity violence carries on without any gaps. The life in Karachi gets a jolt only when killing, crime and violence cross a certain limit. The city's violence dynamics threaten to destabilise Pakistan and have foreign policy implications. The urban and more dangerous face of the violent non-state actor have gradually turned Karachi into its epicenter and its growing role in regional and national terrorism cannot escape observation. According to *The Economist*, on 5 August 2008, a spokesman for Mr. Mehsud threatened to bring *jihad* to Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and home to many poor Pushtuns.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to 2007, TTP existed in Karachi, but its activities were confined to fund raising, rest and recuperation. The operation by Pakistan government in the valley of Swat in the same year resulted in massive internal displacements. Thousands left their homes and Karachi was the obvious choice already home to some five million Pashtuns. This trend gained momentum in 2009, when the military operation reached South Waziristan, Mohmand agency, Bajaur and Dir. In the beginning,

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(LeI), a Khyber Agency-based militant group headed by Mangal Bagh, or affiliated with the TTP Darra Adamkhel chapter, founded by Tariq Afridi alias Geedar.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Arif Hassan, 'Housing Imperatives for Karachi', *Dawn*, 11 December 2007. Accessed on 14 March 2016 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1070731>

<sup>25</sup> 'More to worry about than Musharraf', *The Economist*, 7 August 2008. Accessed in April 2015 at <http://www.economist.com/node/11893663>

they wanted to blend in so they cut their trademark long hair, shaved their beards and worked as petty laborers.

Utilizing the politico-ethnic-religious nexus of violence in Karachi, they started carrying out their war in this megacity, which provided them with the perfect cover. Swati militants assassinated pro-government Swati residents and targeted the leadership of the ANP and got away with it. ‘Killing influential Pashtun elders are a key strategy of Taliban groups, first successfully carried out in Afghanistan, then FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’. In Karachi also through an organized campaign, Taliban started killing influential Pashtun leaders and elders, marginalizing the ANP and forcing them to vacate their traditional strong holds, resulting in major Pashtun majority areas falling under the influence and control of the Taliban.<sup>26</sup> Pashtun neighbourhood in district east and west, and pockets in district Malir, Central and South came under the influence of the TTP. Thirty (30) plus factions of TTP have presence in the city; most influential being Hakimullah Mehsud and Mullah Fazlullah factions.<sup>27</sup> The Taliban also used their influence to generate substantial amounts of money for criminal activities; one-third of bank robberies and 10% of kidnapping were linked to the Taliban, with an average ransom ranging from Rs. 60,000 to Rs.250,000.<sup>28</sup>

Historically speaking, Karachi’s ethnic and sectarian conflicts has very little direct linkages to ethnicity and religion. Largely, it’s a part of the urban struggle for the control of the affluence the city offers. It reached new heights, post-2006; where land grabbing increased tremendously. It is said to be a 25 billion a year business, with the sitting governments and political parties giving it full patronage. 70 % settlements in the city are illegal, and around hundred thousand illegal plots change hands in the city every year.<sup>29</sup> The turf war between competitors turned parts of Karachi in ‘no go areas’ for others and sometimes, even the law enforcement agencies. There were around 50 ‘no-go areas’ in Karachi, which police could not enter. Most of the

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<sup>26</sup> Zia-Ur-Rehman, ‘Karachi: ANP worried as threat of Taliban attacks resurfaces’, *The News*, 2 December 2015. Accessed on 3 March 2016 at <http://afpakwatch.wordpress.com/tag/taliban-in-karachi/>

<sup>27</sup> Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed, ‘Taliban in Karachi: the real story’, *Dawn*, 31 Mar 2013. Accessed on 12 March 2016 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/799118/taliban-in-karachi-the-real-story>

<sup>28</sup> Zia-Ur-Rehman, *op.cit.* Accessed on 3 March 2016 at <http://afpakwatch.wordpress.com/tag/taliban-in-karachi/>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Karachi: unholy alliance for mayhem’, *Human Rights Commission of Pakistan*, 8 October 2011. Accessed on 12 September 2015 at <http://hrccp-web.org/hrccpweb/wp-content/pdf/ff/1.pdf>

extortion rackets and other crime were being generated from these population pockets.<sup>30</sup>

During 2010-11, Taliban were gaining foothold in the city. The militants had employed a covert strategy and worked under the cover of political and religious parties to escape the attention of law enforcement agencies. In 2012, Taliban presence in Karachi made headlines when the organisation claimed responsibility for an attack on a private media channel office, as a warning to the rest of the media houses in the country. They continued to make inroads and started flexing their muscles; since 2013, TTP has been acknowledged as an established threat to the security of Pakistan; and has been reportedly functioning from Karachi with impunity. Confronting them was becoming exceedingly difficult even for law enforcement agencies. They were defiant; and would hit back with vengeance.<sup>31</sup>

The Pakistani Taliban were held responsible by the law enforcing agencies and Citizens Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) for a 90 % spike in terrorist attacks in the city. The criminals caught increasingly claim to be working for the Taliban even when they have no actual ties to the group. In the areas under their controls, TTP was levying a tax on residents and businesses, according to a businessman in Sohrab Goth, a Taliban-run neighbourhood just north of the city center.

The militant group had set up courts in neighbourhoods to resolve disputes, which handed down judgments, handling matters that include disagreements over land ownership and regulating levels of theft from power lines that they allow, residents revealed. 'The Taliban milk money from their own communities', the businessman said. 'They have calculated the worth of every person here'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 'For Karachi, 2013 will be a record year of extortion demands', The Express Tribune, 2 July 2013. Accessed on 2 March 2016 at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/571302/for-karachi-2013-will-be-a-record-year-of-extortion-demands-police>

<sup>31</sup> Zia Ur Rehman, 'The Pakistan Taliban's Karachi Network', *Combating Terrorism Centre*, 23 May 2013. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-pakistani-talibans-karachi-network>

<sup>32</sup> For instance, on a monthly income of 40,000 rupees (\$380), TTP took a levy of 1,000 rupees (\$9.5). Concrete blocks made for use in construction—major businesses in the Pashtun areas—were sold for 18 rupees each, of which Rs. 3 goes to the Taliban. The businessman said TTP's hold had hardened over the past year. They came up with organisations, like the Sohrab Goth-based Insaf Aman Committee (Committee for Justice and Peace), to arbitrate disputes among Mehsud tribesmen over property, family feuds, and business matters according to *Shari'a* (Islamic law). They

The citizens were left at the mercy of mafias, the most prominent being land, water and transport mafia; the government of the Sindh failed miserably. These mafias are also infiltrated by religious militants, who used them to generate funds for their nefarious designs. The most glaring issues for Karachi included dysfunctional institutions, bad governance and a very weak justice system. There was also a complete breakdown of state-society relations.

The informal governance role that was initially filled by the city mafias controlled by the militant wings of political parties had been taken over by the Taliban, at least in the Pashtun-dominated area. They were the new strong man on the block. Huma Yusuf, a Karachi-based researcher, stated that the rise of Taliban influence made the city more ungovernable. The conflicts between politically and ethnically-based groups in the past could have been resolved by arbitrators who had financial and cultural stakes in the city. The Taliban were accountable to none of them.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Taliban prior to the operation had emerged as an invincible entity, challenging the writ of the state, in the most populous city of the country controlling one third of its area. TTP dominated 33 of Karachi's 178 administrative units. Their immediate objective was financial gains. However, the long term goals were gaining control and improving their negotiation power in the peripheries and elsewhere.

Post September 2013 operation, the security agencies have claimed liberation of Taliban 'no-go-zones' in Karachi; also referred to as 'warzones'. The Taliban had dug deep into the areas populated by Pathans, creating virtual 'no-go-areas', terrorizing the local population. The police claims to have complete control of these areas, especially of the most dangerous western part of the city. They also claim that 70-80 per cent have been purged. The Talibanization of Karachi has died down. Pakistan is now at the lowest level of terrorist violence in almost a decade.<sup>34</sup>

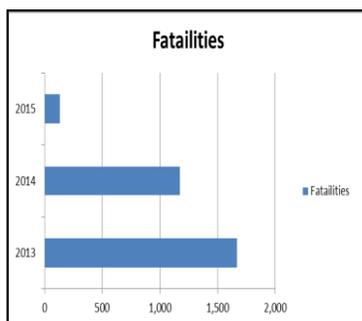
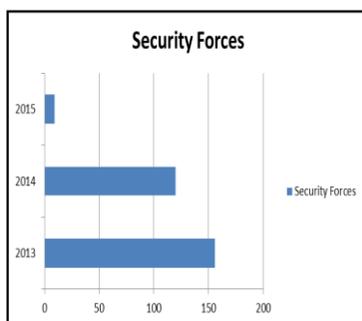
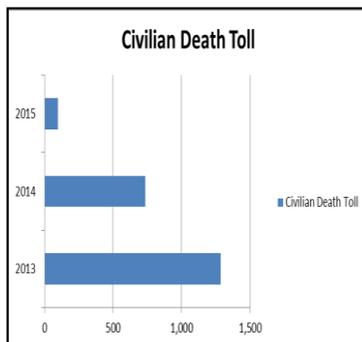
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became a law unto themselves in the city replicating their strategies in Afghanistan & in the peripheries of Pakistan i.e. generating fear. TTP was seen as a group that has the ability to stage attacks anywhere in Karachi.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Craig, 'Karachi residents live in fear as Pakistani Taliban gains strength', *The Washington Post*, 14 February 2014. Accessed on 15 March 2016 at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/karachi-in-fear-as-pakistan-taliban-gains/2014/02/03/010aafea-8991-11e3-833c-33098f9e5267\\_story.html?wprss=rss\\_homepage](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/karachi-in-fear-as-pakistan-taliban-gains/2014/02/03/010aafea-8991-11e3-833c-33098f9e5267_story.html?wprss=rss_homepage)

<sup>34</sup> 'Pakistan liberates Taliban 'no-go zones' in Karachi,' *Aaj TV*. Accessed on 16 March 2015 at <http://aaj.tv/2015/09/pakistan-liberates-taliban-no-go-zones-in-karachi/>

## Civilian deaths, attacks on security forces and overall fatalities have gone down



Source: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/timeline/2015.htm>

September 2014 news report, which is exactly one year into the operation, claims that business in Manghopir has picked up. However Manghopir continues to serve as a hiding place for the Taliban and a site of ongoing Rangers and police operations. Religious militancy in Karachi and Pakistan is deeply entrenched and has many a manifestations which must be addressed.

The politico-religious configuration of Karachi give militants the operational space that can not be addressed by military operations alone.

The military operation has done the ground preparation and have pushed the Taliban to a position of weakness. However, two impediments remain: lack of a political post operation strategy and more importantly the emerging perception that the operation is politically motivated largely targeting two main stream political parties of Sindh.

### **The resilient Karachi**

Karachi is a resilient city, its decent into chaos started in the 1980s with Zia-ul-Haq's policies, unrestrained migration of the Pashtuns, religiosity, break down of law and order and, last but not least, complete lack of response and understanding of the deteriorating situation by the successive governments. In spite of all this, the city has functioned and delivered.

Karachi being the economic hub, contributes approximately 60 per cent to Pakistan's economy and according to Sindh government, generates about 15 % of the national GDP, and 42 % of the value added in large scale manufacturing. Thus, it becomes an obvious choice not only for the central bank and the stock exchange but also for major multinational and national enterprises, banks, Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), major media houses and real estate magnates for their head offices and major operations. Up to 90% of Pakistan's capital market comes through the KSE, owing to the contribution of giants of manufacturing industry housed in North Karachi Industrial & Trade Estate, Sindh Industrial & Trading Estate (SITE) and Korangi Industrial and Trade Estate. Hence, with its geo-strategic significance, Karachi is ideally positioned for businesses and investment.<sup>35</sup>

A February 2007, World Bank report classified Karachi as the 'most business-friendly' city in Pakistan. A study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) had estimated that Karachi's GDP might reach 120 billion by 2020, with 6 % a growth rate. Provided the peace and stability the city was expected to maintain as the major industrial and commercial center of the country. However, for Karachi it proved to be a lost decade. There was a complete breakdown of law and order and governance; Karachi became known for daily death tolls, war zones & no-go areas. This resulted in flight of capital, shifting and slowing down of business activities and extreme cases closure of industry. It was categorized as one of the most dangerous cities of the world. Diplomats, business men, professionals shunned Karachi. The Karachi which in 2007 was described as one of the most business friendly city with a growth

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<sup>35</sup> 'Budget Strategy Paper 2016-17 to 2018-19', Finance Department Government of Sindh, February 2016. Accessed on 10 April 2016 at <http://fdsindh.gov.pk/site/userfiles/Final%20BSP%202016-19.pdf>

potential of 6 % per annum, was being economically strangled. Foreign investment in Pakistan was \$5.4 billion in 2008, which slid to \$1.6 billion in 2011 and is further; reduce to \$1 billion in 2012.<sup>36</sup> The secular liberal face of the city was fast disappearing and last but not least it is now frequently quoted as one of the most dangerous cities of the world.

### **The contemporary situation**

2016, the third year into the operation, normalcy has returned to Karachi. There is an upsurge in economic, social, cultural activities.

The port city is now experiencing increased economic activities. Karachi retail outlets reported record sales during the Eid festival in the year 2015, breaking a ten year record with Rs. 90 billion Eid-ul-Fitr sale. The Karachi in the same year spent around Rs. 30 billion on sacrificial animals during Eid-ul-Adha. The Independence Day celebration in August 2015 saw a lot of zeal and fervor by Karachiites, Chairman All Karachi Tajir Ittehad said, sales recorded on Aug 2015 crossed Rs. 5 billion, breaking the sale records of past 40 years.

This has been further endorsed by the international observers and media. *The Washington Post* stated that the Karachi has now become a safer place. The World Bank in its January 2016 report on 'Global Economic Prospects' states that macro-economic adjustments and crack down on violent crimes in the country's industrial and commercial hub of Karachi are supporting investors' confidence.<sup>37</sup>

On the local front the real estate sector in Karachi has experienced a boom; the brokers and developers reported an increase in property prices of Karachi post operation, especially of areas such as: DHA, Clifton and DHA City.<sup>38</sup> The property value of DHA City increased by almost 20 % in 2015. This trend is expected to continue largely because the law and order agencies have eliminated the *qabza* mafia from the city and people are

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<sup>36</sup> Israr Ahmed, 'How important is Karachi to Pakistan?', *Business Recorder*, 05 May 2012. Accessed on 12 March 2016 at <http://www.brecorder.com/weekend-magazine/0/1186182:how-important-is-karachi-to-pakistan/?date=2012-05-05>

<sup>37</sup> 'Karachi Operation, CPEC Bolstering Investors' Confidence: World Bank', *Business Recorder*, 7 January 2016. Accessed on 28 March 2016 at <http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/pakistan/271622-karachi-operation-cpec-bolstering-investors-confidence-world-bank.html>

<sup>38</sup> 'Lamudi Pakistan Analyzes the Impact of Karachi Operation on the Country's Real Estate Sector', *Geo Tau Aisay*, 22 September 2015. Accessed on 12 May 2016 at <http://www.geotauaisay.com/lamudi-pakistan-analyzes-the-impact-of-karachi-operation-on-the-countrys-real-estate-sector.html>

confident of the possession of their homes, plots and files. This has further contributed in restoring the confidence of the investors, both local and overseas, resulting in an increase in FDIs in Pakistan.

The city is returning to its past glory, said Dr. Ishrat-ul-Ibad, the longest serving Governor of Sindh. During his meeting with Brian Heath, the Consul General of the US in Karachi, Ibad said that, in the wake of *Zarb-e-Azb*, there has been a positive change in the law and order situation and this is now globally recognized. He further stated that Karachi is now securing the distinction of a peaceful city.<sup>39</sup>

The unprecedented success and response to events like the Literature Festival Karachi and Children Literature Festival by Oxford University Press, the massive turnout of the people at the Karachi City of Lights Festival, Karachi Mubarak Festival in May 2015 and food and tea festivals are just some of the examples. Karachi has also witnessed, in the last two years, a revival of the cinema going trend at all hours and the revival of performing arts especially theatre and a flurry of activities and entertainment for the fear stricken commoners of the city. The civil society initiatives are also encouraging; the most prominent being, I am Karachi; United for peace, the reclaiming of public space by the Karachi artists to replace hate graffiti with paintings and messages of peace and tolerance. Karachi is once again attracting tourists to its vast beaches and camel rides, to Port Grand and Kemari, Mazar-e-Quaid, Mohatta Palace, PAF Museum and the variety of cuisines it offers. Karachi is, now once again, becoming a city that never sleeps and a city that guarantees profitable business.

## Conclusion

Karachi's conflict matrix is very difficult to address, three decades of violence has taken its toll on the social fabric of Karachi. The tactical side of addressing the conflict situation has met with success post Karachi operation. The figures are indicative of the strides made to break the infrastructure of the terrorism in Karachi, which also had political and international linkages. The backbone of the terrorists has been broken, main infrastructure dismantled, sleeping cells are now being targeted and lot of pre-emptive intelligence based operation are being carried out in Karachi. However, what has made the task of addressing the conflict matrix of Karachi more daunting and challenging is the resurfacing of the hard core realities: First, the criminal groups, armed

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<sup>39</sup> 'Profitable Business Is Guaranteed in Karachi', *Business Recorder*, Monday, 06 June 2016. Accessed on 13 June 2016 at <http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/pakistan/300653-profitable-business-is-guaranteed-in-karachi-ebad.html>

groups and the non-state actors have overt and covert support of the political parties; second, this has resulted in the operation acquiring a political dimension, which is being resented by the main stream political parties of Sindh as well as Karachi. The sustainability of the operation lies in addressing the issues of politicization of over stretched and under-funded police, lack of political will to take difficult decisions and the ability of political parties to clean their ranks and files, the issue of governance and de-weaponization of the city.

Measuring the success of the Karachi operation in terms of drop in terrorist incidents is a very myopic way of looking at things. Unless long term multi-prong strategies are put into place to address the root causes of what plagues Karachi, none of what is being done will last.

The scepticism and doubts over the operation, inspite of its immediate success have already been raised. The nexus that exists between corruption, politics and terrorism has to be taken into account for long term peace to come to the city that earns 60-70 % of Pakistan's national revenue. The 2015 of release of quality of life index, still categorizes Karachi as a city with worst quality of life; it was ranked 29.

Although the operation has achieved considerable success in 2.5 years of duration, it now lacks political ownership in Sindh and is viewed by many as imposed, with cries of being biased and not extending into the other provinces of the country, especially Punjab.<sup>40</sup> Karachi is more peaceful, continuity of it is the challenge.

The operation has hit the Taliban where it hurts, however, to assume that their ability to regroup and strike again is blunted forever is a premature assumption and naïve. They have a track record of retreating and then resurfacing with vengeance. The Taliban are known for surviving hard times, adapting to new pressures and situations in order to regain power and political advantage. Hassan Abbas, the author of *The Taliban Revival*<sup>41</sup> categorically asks, 'Can the Talibanization Trends be reversed? Yes they can, but not until the root cause of problem is understood'. The responsibility lies with the institutions; the long term solution lies in addressing the multiple political, institutional and operational challenges that Karachi continues to face.

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<sup>40</sup> The 27 March 2016 carnage in Lahore, leaving 72 dead and over 300 injured, has triggered a military led crackdown on terrorists in Punjab. 'Military gives go-ahead for Punjab operation after Lahore carnage', Dawn, 28 March 2016. Accessed on 29 April 2016 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1248435>.

<sup>41</sup> Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (Washington: Yale University Press, 2014), p.5.