

Focus on Karachi

Understanding Karachi: Patterns of Conflict and their Implications

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Abstract

The paper critically examines the patterns of conflict in Karachi and their socio-economic, political and security implications by arguing that many of the conflicts flourish under the political umbrellas, and the city has become the victim to the power temptations and control on part of political actors. In order to understand the patterns of conflict in today's Karachi, there are four different, but inter-related and in some cases overlapping, aspects – ethno-political; sectarian; terrorism; and crime-related conflicts – which not only have made the situation more complex, but also led to a perpetual wave of violence in the city. The paper further argues that many of Karachi's conflicts have emanated from two inter-connected processes: unchecked influx of migrants in various phases, and as a result the formation of informal squatter settlements. In order to resolve Karachi's conflicts, the paper, therefore, suggests both short-term and long-term strategies, which focus on the issues of governance which would help separate the nexus between politics, criminality and militancy; and the need for changing Pakistan's security narrative vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbors respectively.

Introduction

On 11 June 2015, the Director General of Sindh Rangers, Major General Bilal Akbar, during the Sindh Apex Committee meeting revealed a link between criminality, politics and violence in Karachi. According to the press release, General Akbar said that an evil nexus of political leaders, civil servants and gang lords was involved in nurturing and sheltering organized crime and terrorism in Karachi. The press release further revealed that the political and religious parties operate their armed gangs in Karachi. They collect illegal money, whose volume is around Rs. 230 billion annually, and use for the purchase of arms and ammunition. General Akbar, while showing firm resolve also said that Pakistan Rangers Sindh's operation would continue against terrorism, target killings and other crimes. According to him, the elimination of terror

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networking is also essential for laying the foundation for durable peace in the metropolis and in the country.¹

Pakistan's Law Enforcement Agencies launched a targeted security operation in Karachi in September 2013, with an aim to eliminate the criminal and terrorist elements in order to establish peace in the city. It must be noted that for the last few decades, Karachi has been in the grip of 'unending' conflicts, which have resulted in armed clashes between different political and religious parties as well as various criminal groups. These conflicts have cost the loss of thousands of innocent lives and damage to the property.

Once termed as the 'city of lights', Karachi has now come under the shadow of darkness, where miseries of people rise with every passing day. The conflicts in Karachi are multifaceted: they are ethno-political, sectarian, terrorist and criminal. It is hard to make a clear distinction among these types of conflicts. The boundaries are blurred as one type of conflict often sets off violence in a very different milieu. For instance, in August 2010, the killing of Muttahida Qaumi Movement's (MQM) MPA, Raza Haider, on sectarian grounds sparked widespread ethno-political clashes between the MQM and the Awami National Party (ANP). The violence claimed at least 35 innocent lives.²

Since Karachi's conflicts are not a new phenomenon, the patterns can be understood in broader context by analyzing two interconnected processes: unchecked influx of migrants in various phases, and as a result the formation of informal squatter settlements. Karachi's violence is intrinsically linked with these two processes. The continuous mass migration, particularly of laborers, to Karachi that resulted in the population explosion, had two major impacts on the city. First, is the growing fear among the Mohajirs of their alienation in Sindh's politics and losing out their economic and political position to other ethnic communities. This was later on exploited by the MQM in the name of violent 'Mohajir nationalism.' Second, the increased demand for the low-income housing schemes and slums in the periphery areas of the city that put significant pressure on the meager resources of the city.

In order to understand Karachi's transformation from a peaceful city to the most dangerous city,³ it is pertinent to analyze the patterns of conflict in the city, and their socio-economic, security and political implications for Pakistan in general and Karachi in particular. The paper argues that many of the conflicts in Karachi flourish under the political

¹ *The Express Tribune* (Karachi), 12 June 2015.

² *Dawn* (Karachi), 3 August 2010.

³ *The News International* (Karachi), 8 September 2013.

umbrellas, and the city has become the victim to the power temptations and control on part of political actors. The paper concludes with suggesting both short-term and long-term strategies, focusing on the issues of governance which would help separate the nexus between politics, criminality and militancy; and the need for changing Pakistan's security narrative vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbors respectively.

An overview of Karachi

Karachi is the most populous city and the largest business, industrial and urban center of Pakistan. With an approximate population of more than 20 million people – most of them migrants, having diverse cultural, language and religious identities – the city contributes 42 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, 70 per cent of the income tax and 62 per cent of sales tax revenue to Pakistan's economy.⁴ Moreover, in terms of direct taxes and revenue collection in Sindh, the share of Karachi is almost 96 per cent.⁵

A key port city and strategically located on the shores of the Indian Ocean, Karachi serves as a major shipping and maritime hub of Pakistan. Although Karachi also provides a sea outlet for foreign trade to the landlocked Afghanistan under the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) with Pakistan, the city's geo-strategic importance further enhanced in the post-9/11 scenario, becoming the primary entry-point for the NATO supplies in Afghanistan.

In terms of ethnic and religious composition, Karachi is the most diversified city of Pakistan. Ethnically, the Mohajirs (Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India at the time of the partition in August 1947) are in majority who constitute 41 per cent of the city's population, followed by the Pushtun (about 17 per cent), the Punjabis (about 11 per cent), the Sindhis (about 6 per cent), the Baloch (about 5 per cent), the Sarikis (about 3 per cent) and those from Hazara and Gilgit (2 per cent).⁶ In case of religious composition, according to 1998 Census, Karachi is an abode of 96.45 per cent Muslims (Sunnis 65 per cent, and Shiites 30

⁴ *The Nation* (Karachi), 9 April 2012.

⁵ S. Akbar Zaidi, 'Karachi as a province', *Dawn*, 11 January 2014.

⁶ Nadeem F. Paracha, 'Karachi: The Past is another City', *Dawn*, 25 August 2011. Available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/654449/karachi-the-past-is-another-city>. Accessed on 30 April 2015.

per cent); 2.42 per cent Christians; 0.86 per cent Hindus; 0.17 per cent Ahmadis; and others include Parsis, Sikhs, Bahais and Buddhists.⁷

Politically, Karachi is a very vibrant city, where almost every mainstream political party of Pakistan has its followers. Nevertheless, the dominant political party of the city is the MQM, while the other political parties, which have significant representation in the city are: Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), ANP, and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI). Moreover, the religious-political parties which also have played an important role in the politics of the city are: Jama'at-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan, a Sunni- Barelvi party.

Besides liberal and religious political parties, Karachi has also been witnessing the presence of militant sectarian groups. These included: Sunni-Deobandi outfits, such as, Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jama'at (ASWJ – previously known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan – SSP) and its off-shoot Lashkar-e-Jhangvi; Sunni-Barelvi groups, such as Sunni Tehrik; and the Shia militant groups, such as, Sipah-e-Mohammad. After the 9/11 incident, Al-Qaeda and Pakistani Taliban also made their inroads in the city as they had already been in contact with their fellow *jihadis*. Notably, Pakistani Taliban formed their group, known as the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which emerged in Karachi, particularly after Pakistan military's security operations in the tribal areas.

With reference to the criminal gangs, the two notorious groups which in recent years have brought the civic life of the city to standstill, especially in the old commercial areas, such as, Lyari, Kharadar and Shershah, are PPP-backed Peoples Amn Committee, and the Katchi Rabta Committee, supported by the MQM.

Patterns of conflict in Karachi

The prolonged armed conflicts in Karachi are not a new phenomenon. The city has been witnessing both ethnic and sectarian conflicts since 1950s. These included: Anti-Ahmadiya riots in 1950s and 1970s; Sindhi-Mohajir conflict in 1970s and 1980s; Mohajir-Pathan conflict in 1960s and 1980s; Mohajir-Punjabi conflict in 1980s; and sectarian conflict in 1990s. However, today, conflicts in Karachi can be seen not only in continuation of the old trends, such as ethno-political with reference to the MQM versus other nationalities, and sectarian-related to traditional Shia-Sunni schism, but also the introduction of Al-Qaeda-related terrorism, carried out by the home-grown militant *jihadi* groups, such as, the TTP, as a reaction to the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan

⁷ Mohammad Nafees, 'Karachi: The State of Crime', March 2012, Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad, p.4.

and Pakistani state's U-turn vis-à-vis Taliban regime after the 9/11 incident.

To understand the pattern of conflict in today's Karachi there are four different but inter-related and, in some cases, overlapping aspects. They have not only made the situation more complex, but also led to a perpetual wave of violence in the city. These aspects are: ethno-political; sectarian; terrorism; and crime-related conflicts.

Ethno-political conflicts: The ethno-political conflicts in Karachi are mainly associated with the armed clashes between the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, led by the MQM, and other nationalities, such as, the Pashtuns (1960s, 1980s and 2000s), the Punjabis (1980s), the Sindhis (1970s and 1980s); and the intra-MQM feuds, e.g., MQM-A⁸ versus Mohajir Qaumi Movement-Haqiqi (MQM-H)⁹ since 1990s till today.

The first ever ethnic riots in Karachi took place between the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs and the Pashtuns during Ayub Khan's regime in the 1960s. Ayub Khan's policies created a perception among the Mohajirs, who used to control the power corridors of Pakistan as the junior partners of the Punjabis and the military, of being marginalized and losing their dominance in the bureaucracy, educational institutions and industries. Two major factors due to which the supremacy of Mohajirs was suffered were: the shifting of capital from Karachi to Islamabad by Ayub Khan, and his patronization of the Pashtuns in establishing businesses, industries and transport activities in Karachi. They were also recruited in the police and security forces, and by the late 1960s, the Mohajirs had been elbowed out of these professions. Before the Ayub era, the transport system, including taxis, were owned by the Baloch, the Mohajirs and the Sindhis.¹⁰

The Mohajir's political and socio-economic alienation during the Ayub's era compelled them to support Fatima Jinnah, the younger sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, against Ayub in the presidential elections of 1964. The defeat of Ms. Jinnah as a result of the alleged rigging in the elections, and the continued mistrust of the Mohajirs vis-à-vis the Ayub regime because of its previous policies led to the heightened tension between the Mohajirs and the Pashtuns. This resulted in severe clashes between the two communities in Karachi. This also determined the future course of the Mohajir-Pashtun relations in Karachi.

⁸ This is referred as the MQM Altaf group.

⁹ Led by Afaq Ahmed, MQM (H) is a splinter group of the MQM-A.

¹⁰ Arif Hasan, *Understanding Karachi* (Karachi: City Press, 1999), p. 27.

Karachi again experienced ethnic riots between Mohajirs and Pashtuns in the 1980s. Ethnic polarization became so intense that, in 1985, a small road accident in which an Urdu-speaking college student was killed, led to the deadly ethnic violence between the two communities. The most affected areas were Liaqatabad, Nazimabad, Sohrab Goth and Orangi Town. The most ferocious ethnic riots between the two communities took place in Aligarh Colony in December 1986. It happened when the army launched a raid on the heroine processing center in Sohrab Goth, a predominantly Pashtun locality. Soon after the raid, the Pathan and Afghan thugs, in revenge, attacked the nearby Mohajir locality of Aligarh Colony, whom they blamed for informing the army about their illegal activities. In that massacre, hundreds of Mohajirs were killed and their businesses and homes were destroyed. Notably, the Pashtun residents of the colony were spared. Mohajirs retaliated by attacking the Pashtun neighborhoods. The army was called in to restore peace in the city.¹¹

Although during the 1990s and much of the time during Musharraf's regime (1999-2007), there was no major Pushtun Mohajir clash but during the last government of the PPP (2008 to 2013) such clashes erupted again. The uneasy political alliance between the PPP, MQM and ANP in the last political set up, incurred a loss of thousands of innocent lives in the city.

Besides Mohajir-Pashtun ethnic violence, there also occurred the Mohajir-Punjabi and the Mohajir-Sindhi clashes during the late 1980s. Although the Mohajir-Punjabi riots did not last long and the differences between the two soon bridged, the Mohajir-Sindhi clashes in Karachi and other urban centers of Sindh further deepened the ethnic polarization between the two communities with serious repercussions for the Urdu-speaking community living in the rural areas of the province. Most of them, subsequently, migrated to Karachi.

Historically speaking, the ethnic conflict between the Mohajirs and the Sindhis is not a new phenomenon. The first Mohajir-Sindhi conflict emerged when Karachi was separated from Sindh and designated as the Federal Capital Area in 1947. The Sindhi politicians and intellectuals opposed this act as several civic buildings and institutions, which previously belonged to the province, were now taken over by the federal government.¹² However, this severe clash of interests did not lead to armed conflict between the two communities during the 1950s and 1960s, but the ethnic riots between the two communities that took place

¹¹ Charles H. Kennedy, 'The Politics of Ethnicity in Sindh', *Asian Survey*, 31:10 (October 1991), p.948.

¹² Arif Hasan, *op.cit.*, p.24.

during the 1970s can be attributed to the policies of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Bhutto government's decisions to declare Sindhi as an official language by passing the 'Sindhi Language Bill', as well as, the imposition of 'quota system' for government jobs and admission in educational institutions in Sindh province, resulted in widening the gap between the two communities. Moreover, Bhutto's nationalization policies further enhanced the fear among Mohajirs of losing their socio-economic status. This was the period, when some students of the Karachi University established All Pakistan Mohajir Student Organisation (APMSO) in 1978, and later on, in 1984, formed the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) with an objective to fight for the rights of the Mohajirs. By the late 1980s, the MQM became a significant political actor in the politics of Pakistan, in general, and Sindh, in particular, with a series of electoral victories in the national, provincial and local bodies' elections in the following decades.

The MQM initiated a process of ethnicization of the Mohajir community by presenting it as the fifth nationality of Pakistan. It is noted that a significant part of the Mohajir community supported this radical agenda. The MQM effectively managed to capitalize on Mohajirs' resentment and launched a mass mobilization campaign. A perception about the MQM is that it resorted to street-gang methods in order to control Karachi.

Besides inter-ethnic riots, Karachi has also witnessed deadly intra-ethnic clashes, particularly between the two groups of the MQM. The split in the MQM in the 1990s, and as a result the emergence of a splinter group, known as the MQM (Haqiqi), led by Afaq Ahmed, caused deadly infighting between the two groups. The turf war between the two groups has caused hundreds of deaths of the activists and leaders of both groups, and also severely affected the areas, such as, Landhi, Korangi, Malir, Shah Faisal Colony and Liaquatabad. Politically and numerically weak, the MQM (H) refused to surrender before its much stronger rival MQM (A). The main contention of the MQM (H) has been its emphasis upon the Mohajir identity, which, according to it, has been betrayed by MQM (A) when it transformed from Mohajir Qaumi Movement to Muttahida Qaumi Movement. Due to their constant targeting, a large number of the MQM (H) members joined the Sunni Tehrik, which explains the increasing clashes and rivalry between the MQM (A) and the Sunni Tehrik,¹³ particularly since the last decade till today.

¹³ Ali K. Chishti, 'Karachi's targeted killings', *Daily Times* (Karachi), 17 June 2010.

The MQM-Sunni Tehrik confrontation led to another source of conflict, which may not be divided clearly on ethnic or sectarian lines. For instance, both the MQM and Sunni Tehrik confront with each other for political space as Mohajirs form the major support base of the Sunni Tehrik. This confrontation may well be seen in areas such as Burns Road, Boltan Market, Kharadar, Shah Faisal Colony, Korangi and Landhi. Similarly, the MQM also competes with the Shia organization, Majlis-e-Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM), which was established in August 2009. Although in May 2013 elections, the MWM did not fare well, the MQM fears that it would affect its major Shia support, particularly in Karachi.

Sectarian conflicts: It is true that the sectarian monster has engulfed the peace and security of Pakistan, and so is the case with Karachi. In a city disturbed by ethnic conflicts, sectarian conflicts have become far more pervasive and dangerous. The sectarian conflicts in Pakistan could be seen as a legacy of the anti-Soviet Afghan war and General Zia's Islamization policies, which gave birth to the Sunni-Deobandi activism with the establishment of a large number of Deobandi *madrasas*, which not only provided fresh recruits for the Afghan war, but also the ideology to sustain that war. At home it created an anti-Shia narrative in the country and, as a result, Karachi experienced repeated bouts of sectarian violence. The most ferocious were the bomb blast during the Muharram procession in December 2009 on M.A. Jinnah Road, killing 42 people;¹⁴ and the attack on Shia-dominated locality, Abbas Town, in March 2013, in which at least 45 people were killed.¹⁵ The most recent one being the Safoora Goth incident in which Ismaili Shia community was targeted. In that organized and ruthless terrorist attack, 43 commuters were killed.¹⁶

The sectarian conflicts in Karachi can be seen not only between Shia-Sunni sects, but also intra-Sunni sub-sects, particularly between the Barelvi group, such as, the Sunni Tehrik, and the Deobandis, led by ASWJ and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Established by Barelvi Mohajir youth in the early 1990s, the main objective of the Sunni Tehrik is to regain the control of mosques from their rival Deobandis. It must be noted that the Barelvi hostility is directed more toward the Deobandis and Ahl-e-Hadith than the Shias.¹⁷

¹⁴ *The News International*, 30 December 2009.

¹⁵ *Dawn*, 3 March 2013.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 May 2015.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group Report on 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism', Asia Report No.130 (29 March 2007), p.11.

Terrorism-related conflict: The international developments also contributed to the soaring conflicts of Karachi. The security of the city has been immensely affected by the US-led 'war on terror' after the 9/11 incident and Pakistan's role as a frontline state. As a result of the US' military campaign in Afghanistan and the collapse of the Taliban regime, thousands of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters sneaked into Pakistan. Many of them found their way to Karachi, and regrouped there by using their already established links with the local militant sectarian and *jihadi* groups as well as the *madrasa* network in the city.

In the beginning, Al-Qaeda used Karachi as a hide-out and then started showing its muscles by attacking not only the Pakistani civilian and military leadership and installations in Karachi, but also the western diplomatic sites. For instance, General Pervez Musharraf, then Chief of Army Staff and President of Pakistan, was attacked in Karachi in 2002 and 2003. Similarly, on 10 June 2004, a convoy of the then Corps Commander of Karachi, Lieutenant General Ahsen Saleem Hayat, was ambushed in Karachi. Moreover, in May 2011 Mehran Naval base, and in June 2014 the Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, were attacked. The western diplomatic sites and people, who were targeted, were: the U.S. Consulate in Karachi in 2002 and 2003, and the French technicians in Karachi in 2002. The tactics which the Al-Qaeda used were the suicide bombings and car blasts. Notably, these tactics were also imitated by the local militant sectarian and *jihadi* groups.

Besides this, Karachi gained international notoriety when the Al-Qaeda-Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) network of terrorists carried out the Mumbai incident in November 2008. According to the intelligence officials, who informed the Anti-Terrorism Court, Rawalpindi, on 10 November 2012, that the terrorists who carried out the Mumbai carnage were trained at various centers of the LeT. They got navigational training in Karachi.¹⁸ Reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, the top LeT commander, Zarar Shah, admitted during the interrogation that the attackers went by boat from Karachi to Mumbai.¹⁹

The emergence of the TTP has given a new dimension to Karachi's conflicts. The Pashtun areas of the city, which were once the strongholds of the ANP, have now been controlled by the TTP and its associated militant groups. The power-base of the ANP was snatched by the TTP when thousands of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reached Karachi as a result of Pakistan military's launching of security

¹⁸ Malik Asad, 'Mumbai case suspects trained at LeT camps', *Dawn*, 11 November 2012.

¹⁹ *Dawn*, 1 January 2009.

operations in the tribal areas in 2009 and the frequent US' drone strikes in those areas. It is noted that in the guise of the IDPs, hundreds of Al-Qaeda and TTP militants also reached Karachi. Their arrival has added a new chapter to the fraught history of Karachi. It has not only further deteriorated the law and order situation and, as a result, increased violence in the city, but has also introduced Taliban's own interpreted *Shariah*-based justice system in their under-controlled areas.²⁰

It is reported that there are more than 40 groups of banned TTP operating in Karachi.²¹ These groups are involved in the target killing of the leaders of secular and liberal political parties, law enforcement agencies, the military as well as civilian installations in the city. Moreover, the TTP and its associated groups also displayed their power at the time of the May 2013 general elections by threatening the liberal and secular political parties to halt their election campaign in the city. On 3 May 2013, the TTP killed Sadiq Zaman Khattak, an ANP candidate. Similarly, on 4 May 2013, the TTP also attacked the MQM's election office in Azizabad that resulted in the killing of three people and injuring forty others.²² As a result of continued threat from the TTP, liberal political parties, such as, the MQM, ANP and PPP could not effectively run their election campaign in the city.

There are also reports that the Islamic State (IS) has made its inroads in Karachi. The local media reported that the unknown group has done wall-chalking of the IS in different areas, particularly Sohrab Goth, Gulshan-e-Maymar and Manghopir, of the city.²³ According to Raja Umer Khattab, an official of the Counter-Terrorism Department of Sindh Police, the militants, who were involved in the Safoora Goth incident, were inspired by the IS and wanted to establish their link with it.²⁴

Crime-related conflicts: Crime and violence in Karachi originate from an array of sources, and can be ascribed to numerous factors. It is true that politics, criminality and violence are closely connected in Karachi. The armed gangs have been patronized and supported by the political and

²⁰ 'How the Taliban Gripped Karachi', *BBC*, 21 March 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21343397>. Accessed on 20 July 2015.

²¹ *The Nation*, 3 July 2014.

²² *The Express Tribune*, 4 May 2014. Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/544444/explosion-heard-in-karachi-express-news-3/>. Accessed on 15 December 2014.

²³ *The Nation*, 16 October 2014.

²⁴ *Dawn*, 2 July 2015.

religious parties. One such example is the on-going gang war in Lyari, which has been witnessing a turf war between the PPP-backed Peoples Amn Committee, now led by Uzair Baloch, and the MQM-supported Katchi Rabta Committee. These criminal gangs have been involved in target killing, extortion, kidnapping for ransom and other street crimes in these areas. Moreover, Karachi's political parties have also been involved in grabbing the most expensive commercial and residential land in Karachi, particularly in areas of North Nazimabad, Gulshan-e-Iqbal as well as the newly discovered areas of interest adjacent to the Northern Bypass, Baldia, Orangi and Gadap Town near the Balochistan border.²⁵

In his verdict in the Karachi suo motu case on 5 October 2011, then Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, while quoting the intelligence reports, said that criminal groups had political backing and that such elements had become part of political parties.²⁶ The court further said that banned outfits, including the Sunni Tehrik were involved in extortion, while there were allegations of the same crime against political parties, such as, the PPP, Jama'at-e-Islami, ANP and MQM.²⁷ Similarly, quoting a senior police officer, Declan Walsh writes, 'This violence is not random, it's fully controlled by the politicians. They can turn the tap on. And they can turn it off'.²⁸

The emergence of the TTP in the areas such as Manghopir and other Pashtun-dominated localities, has also a share in the criminal activities of the city. They are involved in bank heists, kidnappings and extortions. It is said that the Taliban are the top most extortionists in Karachi, and collects one to two billion rupees daily in Karachi.²⁹ The TTP generates funds for its fighting in the tribal areas against the military through these criminal activities in Karachi.

The wider context of Karachi's conflicts

The ethno-political, sectarian, terrorism-related and crime-related conflicts in Karachi have evolved over a period of time. The major underlying causes which have exacerbated these forms of conflicts in the city may be traced to two inter-related processes: one is the unchecked

²⁵ Shaista Aazar, 'In response to Declan Walsh's article on Karachi's deadly divide'. Available at: <http://criticalppp.com/archives/28250>. Accessed on 20 December 2014.

²⁶ *The Express Tribune*, 6 October 2011.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Shaista Aazar, *op.cit.*

²⁹ *The Nation*, 3 July 2014.

migration, which led to the population growth; and two is the inadequate urban planning that led to the unplanned squatter settlements.

Unchecked migration and informal settlements: The different patterns of conflicts in Karachi may be ascribed to the different waves of unchecked migrants to the city in various phases since 1947, and the subsequent government policies to deal with the problems arose out of that migration. It is true that much of Karachi's phenomenal population growth is based on large-scale internal and external migration, which has changed the demographic structure of the city. It is true that the informal squatter settlements are mainly the result of this migration.

First wave

Karachi witnessed a major demographic change when around six million refugees came from India to Pakistan at the time of partition of the Indian subcontinent in August 1947. At that time, the population of Karachi was around 450,000, of which 61 per cent were Sindhi-speaking, 6.3 per cent were Urdu/Hindi-speaking; and in terms of religious division, 51 per cent were Hindus and 42 per cent were Muslims.³⁰ However, between 1947 and 1951, the refugee influx changed the ethnic, cultural and religious dynamics of the city. By 1951, Karachi became a pre-dominantly Urdu-speaking city with the population of 50 per cent, while the ratio of Sindhi-speaking population went down to 8.6 per cent. Similarly, a Hindu-majority city turned into a Muslim-majority with the population of 96 per cent Muslims and 2 per cent Hindus.³¹ A new language and culture completely changed the dynamics of the city, and in the following years gave birth to many of Karachi's and Sindh's ethnic and political problems.

The Urdu-speaking refugees mainly settled around the city-center, Saddar *bazaar*, since most of the federal secretariats, courts, educational institutions, embassies and entertainment places, were in the vicinity of Saddar area. In order to deal with the problem of suitable housing facilities for the civil servants and the refugees, the government initiated various settlement plans; one of them was the MRV³² Plan of 1952. The plan designed to build federal and legislative buildings in the north-east of the city, and flats for the refugees' rehabilitation along the Lyari corridor.³³ However, this plan could not materialise because of the

³⁰ Arif Hasan, *op.cit.*, p.24.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² MRV was a Swedish firm.

³³ Arif Hasan, *op.cit.*, p.25.

eruption of the student riots in the city in 1953 and perpetual political instability that resulted in frequent dismissal of governments in the country during that period. This led the policy-makers to re-think their plans about developing a federal capital area and refugee colonies at different places of the city. None of the plans materialised and, in the meantime, a military dictator, General Ayub Khan, took over the state apparatus in October 1958. Ayub's policies had a deep impact on the future of the city.

Second wave

With the coming of Ayub Khan, the political as well as ethnic dynamics of Karachi changed radically. The heavy industrialization process in the country, particularly in Karachi, also compelled thousands of domestic migrants from all over Pakistan to migrate to the city in the search of job opportunities. This second wave of migrants was mainly from the Punjab and North West Frontier Province [now Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK)]. According to Arif Hasan, during the period from 1951 to 1972, the population of Karachi increased by 217 per cent.³⁴

The heavy influx of migrants to Karachi also created housing problems in the expanded city. In order to cater to their housing needs the government, in 1958, established two satellite towns – Landhi-Korangi and New Karachi – under the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan (GGRP). The industrialists were given incentives to invest there. It was also envisaged that these industries would also provide employment opportunities to the refugee residents of these areas. Moreover, under the GGRP, building of squatter settlements within the metropolitan area was banned. As a result, the squatter settlements were established on the roads, which connected the satellite towns with the city-center. This development also created various interest groups, mainly related to the land mafia, in the following years.

Third wave

The third wave of migrants — the Afghan refugees — came in the 1980s. Most of them headed to Karachi during the Afghan war. The arrival of these external migrants not only produced intense demographic pressure on Karachi, but also introduced drug and arms culture. According to Farhat Haq, there is no evidence to suggest.

... that the Afghan refugees were the ones who dominated the drug trade, but the trade did expand greatly in the 1980s,

³⁴ Arif Hasan, *Community Initiatives: Four Case Studies from Karachi* (Karachi: City Press, 1998), p.12.

leading to the expansion of an underground economy in which “black” money was laundered through financing land development and transportation.³⁵

Majority of the Afghan refugees settled in the Pashtun areas of the city, such as, Qaidabad, Landhi, Akhter Colony, Sohrab Goth, Banaras Colony, Metroville, Surjani Town and Orangi Town. This increased the density of Pashtun population in these areas of Karachi. Consequently, this extra-ordinary population growth exerted tremendous pressure on the social facilities and infrastructure of the city. Arif Hasan views:

New patterns of illegal land development emerged, new systems of informal banking came into being, the transporters’ mafia expanded to control the city roads, and the older squatter settlements came under attack.³⁶

Although the exact number of the Afghan refugees in Karachi is unknown, it is estimated that there are more than 80,000 Afghans living in Karachi.³⁷ Worried about the unchecked influx of the Afghan refugees, the MQM, held them responsible for the instability in Karachi. It demanded that all Afghan refugees should be shifted to the camps near the border areas.³⁸

Fourth wave

The fourth wave of migrants which headed to Karachi was the Pashtun IDPs from KPK and the tribal areas. They fled their homes and reached Karachi as a result of military’s operations and US drone strikes after the 9/11 incident. Fearing the incoming IDPs would add to the number of already settled Pashtun population of the city, and also threaten its political domination in the city’s politics, the MQM linked the Pashtun influx with the ‘Talibanization’ of Karachi. Addressing an *Iftar* dinner over phone on 29 September 2008, Altaf Hussain, MQM’s self-exiled leader in London, said that the process of ‘Talibanization’ had geared up in Karachi and the system had been imposed in two localities of the city, Sultanabad and Pakhtoonabad. He further said that the CD shops in these localities had been closed, and threats had been issued to cable operators.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.994-95.

³⁶ Arif Hasan, ‘Karachi’s Godfathers’, *The Herald* (Karachi), December 1986, p.77.

³⁷ Quoted in Huma Yusuf, *Conflict Dynamics in Karachi*, p.15.

³⁸ Farhat Haq, ‘Rise of the MQM in Pakistan: Politics of Ethnic Mobilization’, *Asian Survey*, 35:11 (November 1995), p.994.

³⁹ *The News International*, 30 September 2008.

During this period, besides the Pashtun migrants, the city also received a large number of Sindhi migrants, who migrated as a result of severe floods in Sindh in 2010 and 2011. Majority of them settled in Sindhi villages near the National Highway. Although, the coming of Sindhi migrants benefited the PPP in terms of strengthening its constituency, it caused widening political rift between the MQM and the PPP. In this background, the two uneasy partners fought over the local bodies system; the MQM wanted to retain the Musharraf era's local bodies' system under which Karachi was divided into eighteen towns, while the PPP yearned for introducing pre-Musharraf's era system in which the city was divided into five districts. Presently, Karachi is divided into six districts – South, East, West, Central, Malir and Korangi.

Quoting Haris Gazdar, Akbar Zaidi, a renowned economist, predicts that by 2025, non-Urdu speakers would constitute 60 per cent of Karachi's population.⁴⁰ It is in this context that the MQM has demanded to make Karachi a separate province. In his telephonic address to a public gathering in Hyderabad on 3 January 2014, Altaf Hussain demanded a new province for Mohajirs. He said, 'If you don't like the Sindhi Urdu speakers, then make a separate province for them'.⁴¹ However, Hussain's demand drew strong reactions from various political parties, including the PPP, ANP, PTI and Jama'at-e-Islami. They all not only condemned Hussain's statement, but also showed their firm opposition to the division of Sindh province.⁴² The Sindhi nationalist parties, such as Sindh Taraqi Pasand Party (STP), Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM), Sindh National Movement, Sindh National Party, Sindh United Party, Jeay Sindh Mahaz and others announced protest rallies and sit-ins against the MQM's demand.⁴³ It is argued that if MQM continues with its demand for a separate Mohajir province, as it is reiterated by Mr. Hussain in his address to the Rabta (Coordination) Committee in April 2015,⁴⁴ the ethnic gulf between the Mohajirs and the Sindhis would not only widen, but also increase the possibility of armed clashes between the two communities.

Implications

The protracted conflicts have major socio-economic, political and security implications not only for Karachi, but also for Pakistan and the

⁴⁰ S. Akbar Zaidi, 'Karachi as a province', published in *Dawn*, 11 January 2014. Available at www.dawn.com/news/107978.

⁴¹ *The News International*, 4 January 2014.

⁴² *Daily Times*, 19 January 2014.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *The Express Tribune*, 28 April 2015.

world at large. A general sense of insecurity is prevailing among the people in the city. This sense of insecurity is based upon, what Laurent Gayer says, the fears ‘extending from the physical realm, which includes fear for one’s own life and the beloved ones, to the material, i.e., fear for one’s property, to the existential, i.e., fear for one’s future.’⁴⁵

As a result, Karachi’s economy has been mainly affected by these conflicts. The political disturbances, frequent strike calls and extortions are the major source of concern for the traders and businessmen of the city. With each political or sectarian killing, parts of Karachi became deserted as the armed-men, after taking control of the streets, compelled the residents and traders to flee and close their shops and markets. Karachi is the economic hub, if it shuts it affects the economy of the whole country. Consequently, the local industrialists, mainly textile businessmen, and traders, started shifting their investments to other cities of the country or even outside the country, thus severely impacting the manufacturing sector of the city.

In political terms, over the years, Karachi has witnessed ‘political ethnicization’, where ethnic communities largely vote for their respective political party. In other words, the Mohajirs vote for the MQM; the Sindhis and the Baloch for the PPP; and the Pashtuns for the ANP. Although, this trend has changed in the last elections (May 2013), in which a new party, PTI, emerged on the political horizon of Karachi. It bagged most of its votes from the Mohajir and Pashtun dominated areas, but the ethnic divide on political lines in the city is still sharp and may take long to bridge.

Another political implication of Karachi’s conflicts could be seen in the form of the rising political clout of the Deobandi political party, ASWJ, in Landhi area. In the last elections, the ASWJ almost defeated the MQM at PS-128 provincial assembly seat. The constituency comprises the Pashtun-dominated working class localities of Landhi, Quaidabad and Malir. In these areas, the ASWJ has been rigorously working for the protection of the labors and set up various labor committees in order to put pressure on the management of several factories. The growing influence of the extremist Deobandi political party meant a great advantage for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants who have settled in these localities after fleeing from the troubled tribal areas.

In terms of security, a deteriorating security situation not only weakened the writ of the state, but also made Karachi a violence-prone

⁴⁵ Laurent Gayer, ‘Frontline Karachi’. Available at: <http://newsweekpakistan.com/frontline-karachi/>. Accessed on 16 December 2014.

mega city. Although the Ranger's targeted operation in the city has produced some positive outcomes as peace has been restored, and extortion and target killings have been significantly reduced,⁴⁶ but overall security situation is still far from satisfactory. According to the Sindh Police report, more than 900 people were killed in the first half of 2015.⁴⁷

The precarious security situation of Karachi has also serious implications for international security, particularly with reference to Pakistan-US relations because of the emergence of the city as a center of militancy and terrorism, particularly after the coming and settling of Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, including the TTP, who have consolidated their presence, and are now well outside the reach of US' drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan. This is also perceived as Pakistan's indecisiveness about fighting terrorism, thus leading to deterioration in relations with the US.

Conclusion

In view of the above scenario, it seems highly difficult that the Karachi's convoluted conflicts and resultant violence would end in the foreseeable future. However, the resilience of the city, which has borne shocks of violence, provides some optimism for making Karachi a violence-free city.

Nevertheless, at the moment, the most pressing threat is the growing influence and activities of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The alarming aspect of this situation is the link of Taliban/Al-Qaeda activities in Karachi with that of the situation in Pakistan's tribal areas, where military operation is going on. It is assumed that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants have superseded the other actors, involved in terrorism or crime-related violence in the city.

Therefore, the resolution of conflicts and preservation of peace in the city require both short-term and long-term strategies. In the short-term, there is a need to focus on the issues of governance, which include maintaining the law and order situation in the city. In this regard, it is inevitable to de-politicize the police department. Moreover, it is also necessary to provide better civic necessities to the people, particularly those living in the slum areas as these are the areas where criminal gangs flourish with the support of the political parties which need these gangs

⁴⁶ According to a claim of the Director General Sindh Rangers, the crime in Karachi has halved as a result of the operation against the criminals in the city. *The Express Tribune*, 27 April 2015.

⁴⁷ *Dawn*, 22 July 2015.

in order to strengthen their political control over the masses. These measures would also help break the nexus between criminality, politics and violence.

In case of long-term strategy, the solution of the conflicts in Karachi is linked to the state's foreign policy. For this, there is a need to change the larger security narrative of the country. This narrative is primarily linked to Pakistan's security establishment's strategic interests in India and Afghanistan. A failure to meaningfully address and resolve Karachi's conflicts would further provide an opportunity to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants to increase their activities in the city. This would squeeze the political space of the major political parties, and undermine any effort to establish peace in the city.