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Profiling the Violence in Karachi

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* Mujtaba Rathore, Masror Hausen, Amir Rana, Safdar Sial, and Abdul Mateen contributed to this report.

Summary

Political violence continued to mar the security scenario of Karachi with the highest number of disturbing incidents taking place throughout 2008. During the year, 66 incidents of political violence were reported from Karachi, killing 143 persons and injuring 333 others. Most incidents of political clashes in Karachi were reported between the Sunni Tehreek (ST) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the Awami National Party (ANP) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) were also dragged into such violence on ethnic or political basis.

The General Elections in 2008 where the Awami National Party secured two seats for Sindh Provincial Assembly for the first time in its history rang the alarm bells for MQM.

The ethnic rioting has been a hallmark of Karachi's checkered history. Some dismiss it as a natural part of urbanization in a city which lacked proper planning. Therefore, in an environment where the different ethnic communities tended to stick together in ghettos, getting hold of a place to live resulted in violence. MQM which consists of Urdu-speaking migrants set a platform for a face-off with Pukhtoons.

Dozens of sectarian groups and militant organizations exist in Karachi, but only a few of the multiple Islamic groups are militarily active. Among them are outlawed Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Jamaatul Furqan, Harkatul Mujahideen, Jandullah, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami. Many sectarian organizations such as outlawed Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Tehrik Jafriya Pakistan and Sunni Tehreek are active on political fronts, too. Apart from sectarian and militant outfits, Karachi remains an important support base for mainstream religious parties, most prominently Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Markazi Jamiat Ahle Hadith, Jamiat Ghurba-e-Ahle Hadith, Jamaatul Muslimeen, Dawat-e-Islami and Tableegi Jamaat. Many religious charity organizations have their headquarters in the city; banned Al-Rasheed Trust, Al-Akhter Trust, and Al-Furqan Trust are among them. At the same time, the religious seminaries across the city contribute to the shaping of the religious landscape of Karachi. Not only do these religious and sectarian groups have contradictions of interest with each other but also play a role in ethno-political tensions in the city. Especially, JI and Sunni Tehrik have sharp political rivalry against MQM.

Crime syndicates such as Dawood Ibrahim Group and Lyari Gangs have exploited Karachi's weak governance systems and also growing commercial activities in order to gain a basis for their operations. Most of the commercially-driven criminal activities are politically-motivated and have links to terrorism, either directly or indirectly. Organized crime poses a serious threat to the security and social fabric of Karachi.

Taliban are trying to consolidate their position in Karachi. Karachi has already been one of their major sources of financial accumulations through criminal activities. One of the major sources of the TTP is its reliance on bank robberies, thefts, car snatching, kidnapping for ransom. The TTP has sought the help of well-established criminal gangs in various cities of Pakistan, including Karachi.

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