

Comprehensive review of NAP

Karachi Operation

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At the time of the school attack in Peshawar in December 2014, a targeted operation was already in its second year in Karachi. Launched in September 2013 and led by law-enforcement agencies, with paramilitary Rangers playing a key role, the Karachi operation has been targeting terrorists, militant wings of various political parties as well as criminal syndicates.

As the government adopted National Action Plan (NAP) in the wake of the Peshawar school attack, it decided to continue with the operation in Karachi. "Ongoing operation in Karachi will be taken to its logical end," read NAP.

Hub of crime economy

Karachi, with its affluent residents and big businesses, has proved fertile ground of financing of every sort of criminal activity whether Taliban militants, ethno-political parties or criminal syndicates, carry these out.

In 2013, Geo News quantified the size of 'crime economy' of the city, revealing that its residents are deprived of Rs 830 million daily through extortion chits, kidnappings for ransom, encroachments, loot and

plunder, street crimes, police excesses and other crimes.¹

On June 4, 2015, Rangers Sindh Director General, Major General Bilal Akbar, in his briefing in the apex committee reportedly claimed that more than 230 billion rupees are generated annually from citizens of Karachi through extortion, smuggling of Iranian diesel, water supply and land-grabbing, hides of sacrificial animals, and charity funds like *fitra*, *zakat*.² (The briefing's details were shared with media in the form of press release a week later on June 11.)

The Rangers' account of huge 'crime economy' of Karachi has astounded many but not traders community, which, in fact, has been bearing the brunt of 'extortion' at every level. Traders said that they used to pay the extortion money not only to the criminals belonging to independent syndicates and political parties but also to government officials.

Lyari gangs

Besides targeting the Taliban groups operating in Karachi including the TTP, the operation has, since the onset in 2013, focused on shattering the criminal networks in Lyari town.

¹"Karachi's black economy generates Rs830 million daily," Geo News, September 3, 2013, <http://www.geo.tv/article-116604-Karachis-black-economy-generates-Rs830-million-daily>.

² Imran Ayub, "Billions of black money being used to fund terrorism in Karachi: Rangers chief", Dawn, June 12, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1187627>

Many people have earlier died in this old town of Karachi, in the vortex of gang wars and crime.

In the on-going operation, law-enforcement agencies have shattered the crime network, by killing a number of gang leaders.³

Taliban in Karachi

Four factions of the TTP operate in the city, reflective of the broader divides in the TTP.

One of these is a faction of TTP Swat, loyal to Mullah Fazlullah, current TTP head, believed to have fled to Afghanistan. In Karachi, the TTP Swat' has a secretive setup. It is this group which has mostly killed policemen and leaders of Awami National Party in the western areas of the town.

Another is a faction of TTP Mohmand, which, after separating from the TTP, renamed itself as TTP-Jamaat Ahrar. Loyal to Mohmand-based Omar Khalid Khurasani, this group got major dents in Karachi at the hands of security personnel.⁴

As of the remaining two factions, they are derived from TTP South

Waziristan, or TTP Mehsud, comprising mainly Mehsud militants. One of these subscribes to Shehryar Mehsud, another to Khan Said alias Sajna, both based in tribal areas. In Karachi, Shehryar's group is led by an ex-policeman Daud Mehsud.

Attacking these groups has been one of the goals of the operation from the start.

A Karachi-based Mehsud tribal elder, requesting anonymity, claimed that after NAP, many Taliban militants have been killed by law-enforcement agencies, especially Rangers. "We haven't seen the Taliban killing anyone or extorting traders in the last two months. The TTP militants have disappeared and the residents of Pashtun neighbourhoods are now feeling secure," he said.⁵

Political parties

A few months ago, after an important meeting attended by army chief, corps commander Karachi, director general of Inter-Services Intelligence and director general of Rangers, law-enforcement agencies started naming politicians - for the first time. So much so that according to Rangers,

³ Author's interview with a Lyari-based social activist, Jan Baloch, July 19, 2015.

⁴ Zia Ur Rehman, "Broken in city, Taliban factions forge alliance for survival," *The News*, March 28, 2015.

⁵ Zia Ur Rehman, "Mehsuds in Karachi no longer in control of Mehsuds in Miramshah", *The News*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-328817-Mehsuds-in-Karachi-no-longer-in-control-of-Mehsuds-in-Miramshah>

much of the money generated in Karachi is mainly patronized by “a major political party”.⁶

Officials in law enforcement agencies said, after shattering the network of the TTP and Lyari’s criminal gangs, now they are focused on ethno-political and sectarian parties involved in targeted killings and extortions.

The first party to feel pressure was the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, a party popular among Urdu-speaking community in Karachi. The party has already been under pressure in Karachi and London. They see ongoing operation against them.

Also, besides detaining a number of the MQM activists in recent months, Rangers arrested a number of its activists for allegedly forcibly collecting donations in the city’s Rizvia Society neighborhood on July 2. In response, MQM lashed out at the law-enforcement agency. “Arresting workers for collecting Zakat and Fitra is an attempt to create hurdles in the way of welfare work and an atrocity on the masses,” the party’s statement said.⁷

The Rangers’ action against members and leaders of political parties for

their purported involvement in crimes and financial support to militants also upset the ranks of the PPP-led Sindh government. In mid-June, PPP’s leader and former president Asif Ali Zardari openly came down harsh on the military establishment for stepping beyond its domain.⁸

With a few days, Rangers arrested the Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS)’s acting chairman and two directors for alleged corruption and crime financing in Lyari. All the three arrested officials were appointed by the ruling PPP. FCS’s chairman Dr. Nisar Morai, also an aide of the PPP’s top leader, was not in country; he had left abroad four months earlier, probably fearing arrest. Rangers briefed the anti-terrorist court that the FCS’s arrested directors would forward seventy percent of the ‘black money’ they collected to Bilawal House, which serves as the PPP head office in Karachi.⁹ Meanwhile, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) also arrested five officials allegedly linked with land grabbing and terror financing. Above all, Rangers entered the premises of the Sindh Building Control Authority,

⁶ Rangers’ press release, July 11, 2015.

⁷ “Rangers arrest MQM workers for ‘forcibly’ collecting Fitra in Karachi,” *The News*, July 2, 2015.

⁸ “Zardari cautions military establishment for ‘stepping out of

domain”, *Dawn*, June 17, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1188576>

⁹ Zia Ur Rehman, “As law catches up with FCS officials’ fishy business, workers suffer,” *The News*, July 4, 2015.

collecting key documents about buildings.¹⁰

Besides two key parties in Sindh (MQM and PPP), the Sunni Tehreek, the Awami National Party and Sindh nationalist parties have also been in the radar of Rangers for several months and dozens of their members allegedly involved in criminal activities have been arrested. In June, Rangers raided the ST's headquarter twice, detaining for several hours its central leadership at Rangers Headquarter.¹¹ "The ST is the only party which did not protest over the arrest of its members. We support the Rangers' operation against targeted killers, extortionists and criminals in every party, including the ST," said a ST leader.¹²

Political experts link the recent raids to attempts at ending terror and crime financing. "For such groups, funds are very important for running their activities and they could generate funds either from abroad or the Karachi," said a journalist.¹³

Law enforcement officials also corroborate it. "For bringing sustainable peace in the city, it is

imperative to take action against 'terror financing' networks and the authorities have also been doing it," said a senior law enforcement official, who is involved in ongoing targeted operation. "This time, the federal government and military establishment are showing their seriousness for bringing peace in the city and they would not bow down to pressure from political parties - both in the government and opposition," he said.¹⁴

Impact in Karachi

Residents of Karachi have been feeling positive impact of ongoing operation in the city and it is largely believed that after announcement of the NAP, the operation had not only got a direction but also a support from the military, the federal government and other political parties.

Various reports on the crime statistics in Karachi show a significant decrease in target killings in the city after NAP. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), there has been a significant

¹⁰Mazhar Abbas, "Who is protecting Rs230 bn mafia?", The News, June 16, 2015,

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-323952-Who-is-protecting-Rs230-bn-mafia>

¹¹ "Rangers issue details of detained Sunni Tehreek activists", Dawn, June 23, 2015,

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1189973>

¹²Author's interview with Fahimuddin Shaikh, a spokesperson for the ST, July 25, 2015.

¹³Author's interview with a Karachi-based journalist Naimat Khan, July 25, 2015.

¹⁴Author's interview with a Karachi-based law enforcement official, July 23, 2015.

decrease in the number of target killings, both political and apolitical. From January to June 2015, 128 apolitical people were killed, making it a decrease of 68 percent from the last year's corresponding period, when 403 people were killed.¹⁵

Traders also appreciated significant decrease in instances of extortion and killings. They said that because of peace, this year's Eid shopping in Karachi broke the 10 years old record.¹⁶ According to a Pakistani TV channel, traders said a "total of Rs 90 billion had been invested on the occasion of Eid, adding that the sale of the goods exceeded their expectations".¹⁷

However, some raise questions on the intentions of the Rangers.

The HRCP has been showing its concern over Rangers' stay in the city

for a long time and demanding the government to strengthen the police, which is local and proactive and understand the city well. "Controlling law and order situation in the city is not key duty of Rangers and any responsibilities given to them should be temporary", said an HRCP's vice-chairperson. The HRCP, he said, have received many complaints against the paramilitary force for its alleged corruption and involvement in harassment of the people.¹⁸

The HRCP has also raised concerns over the increase in extrajudicial killings during the first half of 2015. With 38 killings in encounters, according to HRCP, there is a 19 percent increase in such killings from the same period in 2014 when the figure stood at 258.¹⁹

¹⁵ Zia Ur Rehman, "Rise in extrajudicial killings, fake encounters may undermine credibility of LEAs", *The News*, July 16, 2015,

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-329188-Rise-in-extrajudicial-killingsfake-encounters-may-undermine-credibility-of-LEAs>

¹⁶ Author's interviews with traders' leaders.

¹⁷ "Traders credit restoration of peace for record 70 bn Eid sale," *Dunya News*, July

19, 2015, <http://dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/Pakistan/289758-Karachi-Traders-credit-restoration-of-peace-for-r>.

¹⁸ Author's interview with Asad Iqbal Butt, the HRCP's vice-chairperson, July 22, 2015.

¹⁹ Zia Ur Rehman, "Rise in extrajudicial killings, fake encounters may undermine credibility of LEAs," *The News*. July 16, 2015.