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Information on the power and influence of the Taliban in Punjab, Lahore & Karachi

A June 2009 *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* news report states:

“In the latest retaliatory attacks by militants, a prominent anti-Taliban cleric who had condemned suicide bombings was killed on June 12 in a suicide attack in Lahore, the capital of Punjab Province. Two other people were killed and 11 wounded.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (13 June 2009) - *Pakistan launches air strike on Taliban stronghold*)

A May 2009 *Reuters* news report states:

“KARACHI, May 4 (Reuters) - An outburst of ethnic violence in Pakistan's commercial capital Karachi in recent days killed at least 27 people, as tension between the dominant Mohajir community and ethnic Pashtuns from the northwest boiled over.

The violence in the city of more than 16 million people reflects tension across the country as the mostly Pashtun Pakistani Taliban step up attacks from their strongholds in the northwest on the Afghan border.

The clashes will add to concern nuclear-armed Pakistan is becoming more unstable as President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai prepare to meet U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington on Wednesday.” (Reuters (04 May 2009) – Q + A – *Karachi-Fear of Taliban or political insecurity?*)

Under the heading ‘What is Happening?’, the same report states:

“Mohajirs in Karachi have become increasingly suspicious of a Pashtun community that has strong Islamist sympathies following the surge in militancy in the northwest.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which represents Mohajirs and has been the dominant political force in Karachi for years, has raised fears of “Talibanisation” of Karachi. The party says Pakistani Taliban and members of allied militant groups have infiltrated Pashtun-dominated districts of the city.

The MQM, which controls the city government and is also part of a provincial coalition government led by President Zardari's Pakistan People's Party, also

says Pashtuns are involved in crime, such as land grabbing. The MOM says the violence last week was a result of authorities' anti-crime efforts.

Some analysts say city politics rather than a real Taliban threat are at the root of the tension. The MQM fears changing city demographics, in particular the arrival of more Pashtuns, will weaken its power base." (ibid)

Another *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* news report from April 2009 states:

"KARACHI (Reuters) – Pakistani paramilitary troops are patrolling Karachi, with orders to "shoot on sight" violent troublemakers a day after at least 24 people were killed in ethnic clashes in the country's financial capital.

The bloodshed in the southern city comes as troops fought Taliban militants to regain control of a valley just 100 kilometers northwest of the capital, Islamabad.

"We have heavy deployment of troops across the city, and they have been told to go to any extent to control the situation, including shoot at sight orders for miscreants," a spokesman from the paramilitary Rangers said.

"The situation is under control now, but keeping in view the incidents of yesterday, traffic is pretty thin," he added.

Karachi has a long history of ethnic, religious, and sectarian violence, but the timing of the latest clashes will add to concerns that nuclear-armed Pakistan is becoming more unstable and insecure." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (30 April 2009) - *Troops patrol Pakistan's Karachi after clashes kill 24*)

An April 2009 *New York Times* news report states:

"DERA GHAZI KHAN, Pakistan – Taliban insurgents are teaming up with local militant groups to make inroads in Punjab, the province that is home to more than half of Pakistanis, reinvigorating an alliance that Pakistani and American authorities say poses a serious risk to the stability of the country.

The deadly assault in March in Lahore, Punjab's capital, against the Sri Lankan cricket team, and the bombing last fall of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, the national capital, were only the most spectacular examples of the joint campaign, they said.

Now police officials, local residents and analysts warn that if the government does not take decisive action, these dusty, impoverished fringes of Punjab could be the next areas facing the insurgency. American intelligence and counterterrorism officials also said they viewed the developments with alarm.

I don't think a lot of people understand the gravity of the issue," said a senior police official in Punjab, who declined to be identified because he was discussing threats to the state. "If you want to destabilize Pakistan, you have to destabilize

Punjab.” (New York Times (13 April 2009) – *United Militants Threaten Pakistan’s Populous Heart*)

Section III.2.1 of a December 2008 *International Federation for Human Rights* report under the heading ‘Allegiance to religious fundamentalism’, states:

“Since Pakistan’s entry in the war on terror, religious fundamentalism has risen. Pakistan, despite its military operations, is a heaven for the Taliban operating in Afghanistan. Until recently, Pakistani society was relatively protected from attacks and intimidation, but today, as a neighbour to Afghanistan, Pakistan is experiencing a Talibanisation, namely the imposition of ideology adopted and spread by the Taliban.170 Pakistan lives under constant threat of widespread terrorist attacks or targeted attacks against girls’ schools, women, non-governmental organisations, journalists, and all those whose way of life, liberty, or expression does not conform to the precepts dictated by religious fundamentalists.

The year 2007 was the most deadly since 2001. 56 suicide attacks were perpetrated, an average of one per week, including 23 in FATA, 21 in NWFP, 9 in Punjab, 2 in Baluchistan and 1 in Sindh. 15 suicide attacks were committed between July 14 and 31 in response to the onslaught of the Red Mosque.171 800 people died in these attacks during the year 2007 alone.” (International Federation for Human Rights (23 December 2008) - *Pakistan: a Long March for Democracy and the Rule of Law, 2007 – 2008*, p.32)

References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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