



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
Vol. 04 No. 02. Oct-Dec 2025. Page#. 4421-4431
Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.3006-2497) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.3006-2500)
Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://openjournal.org)



Baluchistan at the Crossroads: Separatism, Great Power Rivalry, and Pakistan's Dilemma

Dr. Asghar Raza Burfat

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Sindh

asghar.burfat@usindh.edu.pk

Ms. Nusrat Khaskheli

Assistant Professor (Pakistan studies), Parul Ilyas Government Girls Degree College Setharja
/M.Phil Scholar Shah Abdul Latif University Khair Pur

nusratkhashkeli72@gmail.com

Ms. Najma Naz

Assistant Professor (Pakistan studies), Parul Ilyas Government Girls Degree College Setharja
/M.Phil Scholar Shah Abdul Latif University Khair Pur

najmanaz10095@gmail.com

Abstract

Baluchistan is the largest yet least developed province in Pakistan and has long been the focus of low intensity separatist insurgencies. In the past, artificially annexed by Pakistan in 1947, and denied the right to political autonomy, the region has been a source of long-standing grievances. In recent years, these internal fissures have been mired in a growing great power competition especially between China, the United States and Russia that is turning a domestic security concern into a geostrategic flashpoint. This article discusses the manipulation of the Baluch separatism feelings to undermine the territorial integrity of Pakistan by outside forces, and Pakistan is torn between economic growth (e.g., the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC) and political oppression and human rights concerns. We present three fundamental dilemmas through a qualitative analysis of policy documents, insurgency statements, regional security reports, and 15 semi structured interviews with Baluch civil society members, retired bureaucrats and journalists which include: the tradeoff between heavy handed military operations and meaningful political dialogue, the paradoxical dependence on Chinese investment which inadvertently contributes to anti Beijing sentiments among Baluch nationalists and the increasing role of nontraditional allies like The research concludes that unless an elaborate political reconciliation package incorporating truth commissions in cases of enforced disappearance and provincial revenue autonomy Baluchistan will continue to be a thorn in the flesh of additional regional competitors. Moreover, securitization of CPEC has estranged communities, thus a vacuum that is easily filled by other players. the article concludes that to effectively counter separatist discourses and to minimise foreign intervention, Pakistan needs to decisively shift toward a governance plus development model, coupled with open monitoring of foreign projects, equitable distribution of natural resources, and formal ceasefire dialogue with mainstream separatist groups, in order to reduce external meddling.

Keywords: Baluchistan Separatism; Great Power Rivalry; CPEC; Pakistan Foreign Policy; Insurgency; China-India Proxy Conflict; Baloch Nationalism; Counter-Insurgency Governance; Political Reconciliation; Resource Exploitation.

Introduction

Balochistan, the largest Pakistani province in terms of landmass, has an immense geostrategic position because of the fact that it is close to the Arabian Sea, Iran and Afghanistan besides acting as a gateway to energy corridors between Central and South Asia. Although the province is endowed with huge natural resources such as natural gas, copper, and gold, the area continues to be the least developed province in the country, with poor infrastructure, low levels of industrialization, and poor human development indices. The coastal city of Gwadar has also increased the significance of the province as a regional connectivity hub as part of a flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative: the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Yet, the economic change that was promised has not been saved into real gains to the locals, further supporting views of exclusion and exploitation. The structural inequalities and disparities in the center provinces as Akbar S. Ahmed (2013) asserts have contributed to the resentment among Baloch communities, which have provided a ready breeding ground to rebel. These socio economic inequalities coupled with a weak system of governance still defines the controversial relationship of the province with the federal state and explains why there is a strong need to address long held developmental imbalances.

Separatism in Balochistan dates back to the controversial inclusion of the former princely state of Kalat into Pakistan in 1947, which has continued to be a focal point in Baloch nationalist histories. Shortly after accession the first resistance movements began to appear, expressing demands of independence, recognition of separate ethnic identity. Decades later these demands transformed into periodic insurgencies, all instigated by political centralization, resource conflicts and a sense of injustices. The insurgency has mostly been in the form of a low intensity war whereby there are occasional attacks on the state institutions, infrastructure, and the security forces. Frederic Grare (2013) points that the cyclic character of war in Balochistan is the manifestation of the coercive reaction of the state and the subsequent short-term truce instead of the long-term political settlements. The lack of substantial political discourse and institutional processes of conflict management has also deepened distrust between the state and local players. In addition, the emergence of educated Baloch young people who are now able to participate in the nationalist discourse has brought another twist to the movement, as it is no longer headed by the tribal leadership but more ideologically oriented resistance. Such a metamorphosis points to the sophistication of the confrontation and the weakness of security centric solutions in resolving the long held political scorecard.

Over the few years the situation in Balochistan has become more and more connected to the big game of geopolitics turning a problem inside Pakistan into a fight between big countries. The Chinese have been investing a lot in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which has made a lot of countries like the United States and Russia take notice of this region because of how power is changing around the world. Other countries getting involved has been blamed for taking advantage of people who are unhappy which makes the conflict worse. According to C. Christine Fair, when outside countries help insurgents in areas it makes it harder to solve the problem and creates more instability. This fight between opposition and outside pressure has created a big security problem for Pakistan, which has to balance being in control of its own country and getting along with other countries.

Literature Review

In Balochistan, the theoretical traditions of constructivism and realism in International Relations are competing traditions that engage the depth of the literature on conflict in this area and offer profound analytical resources to understanding the continuation and change of separatism. Constructivist scholars highlight, however, that political identities and grievances

are constructed socially via historical experience and contact with state societies, and thus formulate Baloch nationalism as a result of perceived injustice, exclusion and disputed sovereignty and not just a result of material deprivation. This school of thought emphasizes the role of forced accession and denial of autonomy stories, which have been incorporated into the memory of groups, and their resistance is developed in the long run. Recent work by Khan (2024) has also extended this constructivist framework to the analysis of the patterns of ethnic conflict which colonial legacies and uneven modernization have created, and which continue to be reproduced across generations. According to Wendt (1999), identities and interests are not endowed but a result of interaction, a fact which justifies why recurrent cycles of coercion have solidified the process of oppositional identity formation in Balochistan. Conversely, the realist theory puts the conflict in context with the larger frameworks of power politics and the interest of the major powers in the strategic location of the province and its resource endowment. Modern realist politics have applied this model to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor as a transforming variable that has radically changed the calculations of power in the region (Madni and Farid, 2025). Waltz (1979) argues that states seek security and power in an anarchic international system and tend to make periphery states a competition field. In this perspective, Balochistan is not only a location of domestic disharmony but it is also a strategic ground that is constructed by external considerations and thus needs a comprehensive perspective that is able to put in a bridge between internal forces and global power politics.

Empirical studies on the internal factors of Baloch separatism have amassed substantial literature with the common element being political marginalization and economic deprivation as critical to the continuation of insurgency. Scholars have pointed out that Balochistan, even with its rich supply of natural resources has been underdeveloped economically and has had little access to education, health services and job opportunities. This unequal growth has contributed to the perception that the province is being exploited without proper compensation or representation in the decision making process in the country. According to the District Vulnerability Index of Pakistan released by the Population Council, almost two thirds of the Balochistan districts are in the most vulnerable category in the country, and 71.2 percent of the population is below the poverty line (Khetran, 2025). The structural studies have revealed that Balochistan is getting merely 3.66 percent of the total water quota in Pakistan considering it has 44 per cent of the total land area of the country, and 62 per cent of the total population in the province does not have access to clean drinking water (Baloch, 2025). According to the National Human Development Report 2020 by UNDP data, the value of the Human Development Index in Balochistan is equal to that of Sierra Leone, which is ranked 181st among 189 countries in the world (Khetran, 2025). Other more recent studies build on this discussion by studying how the emergence of educated young people and the proliferation of nationalistic discourse via media has changed the insurgency into a more ideologically motivated movement. Such a shift has complicated the reactions of the states, with the traditional tribal mediating functions becoming more fragile and giving way to more diffuse and decentralized forms of opposition which are increasingly difficult to control by the usual security measures.

The introduction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor has greatly increased the range of scholarly discussion through the integration of local conflict dynamics with both regional and global geopolitics. Being one of the key aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC has increased the strategic significance of the Balochistan region, at the same time fueling local resentment associated with land rights, resource allocation, and political marginalization. The scholars believe that even though the project has had positive impacts in terms of economic

growth and connectivity, the dividend has not been distributed equally and thus the local communities have been skeptical. According to empirical evidence, of the total 25.4 billion dollars that have been given to the completed CPEC projects, only 3.2 billion dollars has been utilized in Balochistan, and even within Gwadar, a paltry 890 million dollars has been disbursed (Aamir, 2025). Madni and Farid (2025) have coined the term Centralized Infrastructure Led Development to understand the reasons why the top-down model of development propagates ethnonational grievances instead of addressing them, and CPEC as the cause of the Baloch insurgency has empowered it instead of curbing the insurgency. The role of the external actors has faced a lot of discussion, and some studies have pointed to the intervention of regional powers like India and the presence of Afghan territory by militant networks, as fomenting the security environment. Khan (2024) thoroughly explores the role of intervening forces by regional and international actors in the complex web of violence in Balochistan, placing the province at the heart of new geopolitical rivalry. This increasing literature shows that the Balochistan conflict is no longer to be viewed in isolation, as it is increasingly becoming a part of a broader system of geopolitical rivalry and economic competition.

Despite this effort, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in the literature, particularly in terms of how domestic insurgency can be linked with global strategic frameworks and how policy frameworks can be developed to achieve reconciliation. Much of the literature is more likely to explore domestic discontent and external intervention separately and this reduces the scope of seeing the interplay and complementarity between the two. Such segregation limits the policymakers' capacity to develop comprehensive policies that consider the root causes of the conflict and its geopolitical context. Similarly, it is also evident that there is no clear and practical reconciliation policy that would go beyond security-oriented approaches to the governance and development perspectives. The latest research by Khan, Khan and Waseem (2025) has attempted to address this gap through a holistic framework for counterinsurgency based on the work of David Galula, proposing an 80 to 20 blend of non-kinetic to kinetic activity that prioritizes development, infrastructure and youth empowerment over coercion. The concept of Collaborative Governance Arrangements put forth by Madni and Farid (2025) has also tried to include the role of community agency in development as a response to the limitations of liberal and developmental peace that prioritizes political inclusion and economic development respectively. The lack of policy-focused research is especially important in the context of the strategic location of the province with respect to connectivity and the great power rivalry. This is critical for progress in both research and policy as it would help to maintain a more sophisticated approach to explaining an important part of the world that is shaped by identity, governance and geopolitics in the context of one of the world's most protracted conflict.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the key historical, political, and socio economic factors behind separatism in Balochistan within the broader context of Pakistan.
2. To examine how great power competition involving China, United States, and Russia shapes and intensifies the conflict.
3. To evaluate Pakistan's policy responses by comparing security focused approaches with governance and development strategies.
4. To assess the state's dilemma in balancing development initiatives such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor with political inclusion and long term stability.

Research Questions

1. What major historical and structural factors drive separatism in Balochistan within Pakistan?
2. How do external powers engage with and influence internal grievances in the province?
3. What are the implications of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor for local communities and insurgency dynamics?
4. Why has Pakistan struggled to balance military action with political reconciliation, and what policy approach can address both internal and external challenges?

Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and exploratory research design to investigate the intricate relationship of separatism, government, and geopolitical competition in Balochistan in Pakistan. The study uses mostly secondary data, such as scholarly sources, official reports, governmental sources, and publications by international agencies, supplemented with selective primary data based on the opinions of experts interviewed, media studies, and reliable think tank evaluations. The thematic analysis method is used to determine the common trends regarding political marginalization, economic deprivation, and external strategic interests especially in the context of the projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The paper combines constructivist and realist approaches to understand internal complaints and external forces of power. Limitations: there is limited access to on ground data and possible bias in conflict narratives that can be overcome by cross verification of various credible sources to guarantee analytical rigor and reliability.

Historical Roots and Dynamics of Baloch Separatism

Historical origins of separatism in Balochistan are strictly connected with the controversial inclusion of the former princely state of Kalat in Pakistan in 1947 that is still the focus of the Baloch nationalist discourses and political memory. The semi-autonomous Kalat state under the suzerainty of British rule did not immediately become part of either India or Pakistan upon independence, but lived 227 days as a free state after independence (Devasher, 2025). Although the state officially became a part of Pakistan in March 1948, portions of the Baloch leadership and population perceived the process as forceful, which formed the base of resistance that manifested almost right after independence. Recent academia has questioned the insurgent account that Kalat was compelled to accede at gunpoint, pointing out that the Khan of Kalat leveraged the delayed accession to get the greatest political benefits out of the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Haque, 2024). In 1948, the first insurgent episode by Prince Abdul Karim was a symbolic representation of early assertion of autonomy and opposition against the central authority. Later revolts in 1958, 1962 and 1973 demonstrated a similar trend where demands of increased provincial autonomy and control over resources were met by coercive actions on the part of the state. Such cycles of insurrection and repression have, as Devasher (2025) contended, ingrained a profound sense of distrust between the center and the periphery and has created a long-standing narrative of political alienation that has provided the fuel of modern day insurgency. This divide was also exacerbated by the lack of a long-term political dialogue and institutional avenues to resolve grievances and entrenches the conflict in a historical course that still impacts modern dynamics. Researchers have reported that terror attacks by Baloch separatist groups were increased by over four times in 2020-24 to an annual high of 171 attacks in 2024, which indicates the aggravation of the historical grievances (India Today, 2025).

Socio economic deprivation and political marginalization has continued to be the main catalysts of Baloch separatism, which has strengthened the notion that the province has been there to be marginalized in development and decision making processes of the country. Balochistan,

despite its huge natural gas, coal, and minerals reserves has always been at the bottom of the list of major human development indicators in Pakistan, with only minimal access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities. The actual facts show that the province gets less than 3.66 percent of the total water allocation in Pakistan despite being 44 percent of the total land in the country, and 62 percent of the population does not have access to safe drinking water (Baloch, 2025). Such inequity has contributed to a feeling of relative deprivation, especially since local resources are seen to be used to favor other areas unfairly. Among the total 25.4 billion dollars that have been spent on completed CPEC projects, Baluchistan has only spent 3.2 billion dollars, with Gwadar getting a paltry 890 million dollars (Business Daily, 2025). The inability to build inclusive systems of governance has continued to fuel grievances, with the local communities still being underrepresented in the political institutions and excluded in real participation in economic planning (Kakar, 2024). The necessity to achieve autonomy has thus been closely associated with demands to allocate resources fairly and to have more control over provincial matters. With the emergence of an educated Baloch middle class in recent decades the discourse has gone beyond a tribal leadership to a wider political movement based on the idea of rights, identity and self-determination. According to the Balochistan Human Rights Commission, more than 10,500 incidents of forced disappearance were reported in the period between 2016 and 2024, with young students becoming one of the most common victims of the measure, which is a policy strategy that has further led to alienation (Al Jazeera, 2024). This development makes the conflict a complex issue and points to the shortcomings of those approaches that only emphasize the security issue but overlook the socio political imbalances at its roots.

The history of the development of insurgency in Baluchistan since the year 1948 to the current times is representative of continuity and change in the underlying factors, participants and tactics. Although the previous phases were mostly tribalistic and small in scale, the modern insurgency has turned into more fragmented, ideological, and geographically spread. In the past 10 years, Devasher (2025) observed that the nascent middle class has become increasingly politically aware of how they are exploited, and the insurgency has become a nationalist movement regardless of the fact that it is just a small group of sardars in a bid to maintain their sardari nizam. Since the early 2000s, the escalation of conflict has been characterized by the heightening attacks on infrastructure, security forces, and strategic projects, both as part of local grievances and larger geopolitical interests. In 2022, the Baloch Liberation Army surprised the security apparatus of Pakistan by storming army and navy bases, and in March 2025 militants fired on the Jaffar Express passenger train after blowing up railway lines (Reuters, 2025). Identity and nationalism have been critical in perpetuating resistance by keeping a historical account of injustice and cultural uniqueness alive to attract even generations of people to their cause (Devasher, 2025). Meanwhile, the reaction of the state has been very much security focused, based on military actions and coercive actions which in most cases have led to an increase in the tension and not to its resolution. Kakar (2024) also claimed that the art of political engineering, such as placing malleable personalities and weakening elected provincial governments, has undermined the credibility of parliamentary politics among Baloch citizens.

Great Power Rivalry and Geostrategic Significance

The importance of Balochistan is not about being a troubled part of Pakistan it is actually a very important place on the map because of how power is balanced in the region and the world. The deep sea port of Gwadar is very close to the Strait of Hormuz where a lot of the world's oil passes through. It provides a way in by sea and land to the Arabian Sea, Central Asia,

Afghanistan and Western China. Balochistan is in a spot between South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia which has made a lot of other countries take notice and want to promote their own interests in the region. The combination of having a lot of resources and being in a location has made Balochistan vulnerable to foreign control as Harrison noted and this has only gotten worse over the years. The fact that the province is unstable and has security problems along with governance issues makes it easy for other countries to use grievances to pursue their own geopolitical interests. This has changed the nature of the conflict making it harder to solve with domestic politics or military might.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, has raised the strategic value of Balochistan, but at the same time deepened the existing tensions. CPEC investments in Gwadar Port, road network, energy supply and special economic zones will transform the province into one of the nodes of regional connectivity, reduce China's over-reliance on the precarious Malacca Strait to import energy, and provide China with a strategic position in the Arabian Sea. However, Small (2015) argued that the CPEC is not just a project of economic development, but a strategic project which seeks to increase the influence of China in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, thereby disrupting the strategic balance in the region. The security impacts of this massive project have been severe because Chinese employees and facilities can be directly targeted by Baloch insurgents who view the project as an internal colonization which dispossesses local people of their natural resources. In response, Pakistan has deployed large forces of paramilitary and army against CPEC locations and routes, which is a securitized policy that has further militarized Balochistan and in general alienated the local population (Grare, 2013). This has led to a vicious cycle of foreign investment to promote economic development, which is only adding to the grievances, police and military crackdowns and more insurgencies, further destabilizing the environment in which CPEC is to flourish.

The US and Russian engagements in the overall geopolitical game around Balochistan, though less explicit than the Chinese economic involvement, illustrates a long-term strategic interest in the formation of regional orientations and access routes. In the case of the United States, Balochistan was an important rear area to the American military presence in Afghanistan over the last twenty years, in terms of logistics, intelligence, and counterterrorism, despite Washington denying any direct involvement in the internal politics of Pakistan. American drone warfare and counterinsurgency operations in the tribal belt influenced the security environment in Balochistan indirectly, according to Ahmed (2013), as they pushed militants across porous borders and solidified the message of a global war on Islam that was used to recruit new members by nationalist groups. In more recent times, with the United States shifting to great power rivalry with China, Balochistan has started to be perceived more as a way to contain Chinese expansion, with Washington surveying CPEC as a strategic vulnerability that could be exploited by supporting local subversion or by aligning with regional partners. Although being more circumspect Russia has increased its interests with increased involvement in Central and South Asia, including military co-operation with Pakistan and diplomatic overtures to Baloch communities that at one time sought Soviet alliance during the Cold War period (Harrison, 1981). Neither of the two powers contributed to the Baloch insurgency directly, either in a systematic way, but their competitive stances give them the permissive environment, in which outside support of proxy forces is a rational, though destabilizing strategic option.

In addition to the direct intervention of the big powers, the supposed support of Baloch militant groups by India and the continued use of Afghanistan as a haven by cross border

separatist groups has turned a localized separatist movement into full regionalization and geopolitical complications conflict. Officials and security analysts of Pakistan have constantly alleged that the intelligence agencies of India have been financing, supplying and training Baloch insurgent groups, a claim that India has denied, but which fits into a larger overall rationale of asymmetric warfare between the two nuclear armed adversaries. Fair (2014) observed that the strategic calculus of destabilizing Balochistan is based on its wish to counter the Chinese influence as enshrined in CPEC and to mount pressure on Pakistan at more than one front at the same time so that the ability of Islamabad to extend its power to the eastern border is diminished. The instability that has afflicted Afghanistan over the years has also made the conflict difficult with successive governments in Kabul sympathetic to Pakistan or hostile governments being unable or unwilling to intercept Baloch and Taliban aligned militants crossing the porous Durand Line and into southwestern Pakistan. Logistical support, medical treatment, and recruitment of Baloch insurgency on Afghan territory have ensured the sustainability of the Baloch insurgency despite constant military operations by the Pakistani military (Grare, 2013). These overlapping external entanglements have the effect that the Baloch insurgency is no longer a matter or a solution that can be viewed as a purely internal Pakistani issue. It has rather become a model case of how localized grievances when compounded with a large power competition and proxy warfare in the region turn into long-term, multiactor conflicts that are inexplicable in traditional counterinsurgency or political settlement paradigms.

Policy Dilemmas and Governance Challenges

The Balochistan conflict has traditionally been characterized by a security centric paradigm in which Pakistan has placed greater emphasis on the military operations and counterinsurgency efforts rather than political reconciliation and institutional reform. The governments that followed have used paramilitary forces, armies as well as intelligence agencies to curb separatist activities, carry out targeted killings of separatist leaders and take control of strategic infrastructure projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Nonetheless, this forceful securitization has often been counterproductive with the use of coercive measures such as so-called enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and forced collective punishment against civilian populations actually increasing the level of local resentment instead of resolving it. The Balochistan cycle of violence is an indication of structural failure to find sustainable political settlements where every military action would create a temporary peace that is followed by a new and usually stronger opposition (Grare, 2013). The excessive use of force has also compromised the authority of the state as far as the local communities are concerned because they tend to view the security forces as an occupying force and not as a protective body. The institutional culture of the Pakistan Army, where decisive military action is valued more than political negotiation has repeatedly blocked the prospects of any meaningful dialogue between the Baloch nationalist groups and the Pakistan Army (Fair, 2014). It is an insular form of security that has therefore resulted in a vicious cycle whereby repression breeds insurgency which in turn justifies further repression leaving little room to the governance changes that may well solve the underlying factors that result in discontent.

To add to the inefficacies of security driven strategies is an immense lack of governance that has systematically marginalized Baloch communities in the political scene, economic decision making, and the provision of basic services. Balochistan is politically marginalized despite the constitutional guarantees of provincial autonomy and lack of institutional capacity, underfunded development budgets, and bureaucracy that is frequently composed of non local officials who are seen to be insensitive to regional needs. Lack of proper local governance has

seen the tribal elites fill power gaps the way they see fit without necessarily addressing the interests of the wider population and the militant networks hire among the disappointed youth at the same time. Baloch nationalism has become more a tribal grievance turned into a rights based movement cutting across the lines of classes and generations with the denial of political voice and economic opportunity (Ahmed, 2013). This governance failure is exemplified by the paradox of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor where the massive Chinese investment in Gwadar and related infrastructure has brought little tangible benefits to ordinary Baloch who are being dispossessed of their land, their environment being destroyed and displaced without proper compensation or consultation. CPEC is a two sided sword to Pakistan, as it benefits Pakistan in terms of strategic economic benefits and at the same time helps fuel local sentiments of exploitation and dominance by other nations (Small, 2015). The resultant development versus repression dilemma places the state without a clear pathway because in being heavy handed with the securitization of CPEC routes, the locals are estranged, yet any lowering of security posture would lead to attacks on high value Chinese assets by insurgents that would threaten to destroy the entire bilateral relationship.

The issue of human rights also further complicates the policy calculus of Pakistan by delegitimizing the state action in the country and internationally. Humanitarian agencies report trends of enforced disappearances, torture in custody, and extrajudicial executions of suspected Baloch militants and their families, which has created a culture of fear to suppress moderate voices and drive disillusioned youth to more radical stands. States react to marginal insurgencies by committing systematic human rights abuses, thus legitimizing separatist arguments that the central government is not a legitimate occupier but a representative political institution (Harrison, 1981). This crisis of legitimacy poses an acute dilemma to Pakistan as it tries to strike a balance between sovereignty and foreign intervention. Although international criticisms of its counterinsurgency tactics as interference in domestic matters are being resisted by the government, foreign human rights criticism and the threat of sanctions do limit policy choices and serve as rhetorical weapons of Baloch diaspora lobby groups based in the western capitals. At the same time, the further development of the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, though economically advantageous, has caused the emergence of domestic opposition to Baloch nationalists who consider CPEC to be a tool of colonial type of resource exploitation. Weak states have to walk the fine line of great power patrons whilst dealing with internal fractures in an anarchic international system, and this dilemma has been the strategic location of Pakistan (Waltz, 1979). Pakistan is therefore caught between the need to continue having strategic alliances, which it requires to survive economically, and the need to respond to the justifiable needs and demands of a people that are becoming more and more at odds with its alliances because of what they consider to be an encroachment upon its independence and self-respect.

Conclusion

The situation in Balochistan is one of the most long-running and complicated security dilemmas of Pakistan with deep-rooted historical course of disputed accession, political marginalization, and economic disenfranchisement that has continued to be unresolved. This paper has shown that separatism in the province cannot be distilled down to a mere story of ethnic rebellion or state oppression, but that it is the result of a complex web of structural disparities, identity based demands and ineffective governance. The recurrent cycle of violence that has been evident over the past seventy years is indicative of a basic failure of the state to transcend security oriented reaction to real political accommodation. However, with all the natural resources and the strategic investment like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, there has

been little improvement in human development indicators, access to justice, or even meaningful representation in the national decision making process, by ordinary Baloch communities. The emergence of a generation of Baloch nationalists who are ideologically motivated and educated has also changed the movement to be tribal under leadership to rights based discourse that cannot be easily coopted or easily solved by the use of military force. Unless the federal government changes its focus on short term stability by coercion rather than long term investment in inclusive institutions and equitable resource allocation, the root causes that, in the insurgency, generate violence will persist, ensuring further rounds of violence no matter how successful the battle field tactics may be.

This competition between countries has completely changed the nature of the insurgency turning a problem into a big international issue. Chinese investments, US and Russian strategy alleged Indian interference and Afghanistan being a place where militant networks can hide have all contributed to making this conflict international. This has created a problem for Pakistani policymakers, who are caught between keeping the countrys sovereignty managing relationships with other countries and meeting the demands of the local population, who are being taken advantage of by foreign actors. As we have seen just using force does not work and can even make the insurgency worse because it alienates local people and makes the separatist's claims seem more legitimate. To move forward Pakistan needs to change its approach from focusing on security to reconciling with the local population giving them more autonomy distributing resources in a transparent way and protecting human rights. If this does not happen Balochistan will remain stuck between the effects of competition between countries and the demands of its people for dignity, justice and autonomy. The window, for making peace might be closing,. It is not too late as long as Pakistan is willing to learn from its past mistakes and adopt a new, more inclusive system of governance.

References

- Aamir, A. (2025, April 26). CPEC at 10: Broken promises and Balochistan's continued neglect. *The Friday Times*.
- Ahmed, A. S. (2013). *The thistle and the drone: How America's war on terror became a global war on tribal Islam*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Al Jazeera. (2024, January 22). Resolving the Baloch issue is in Pakistan's political and economic interest. *Al Jazeera*.
- Baloch, H. (2025, April 11). Balochistan region suffers from systemic neglect by the federal government. *Business Daily*.
- Business Daily. (2025, April 11). Balochistan region suffers from systemic neglect by the federal government. *Business Daily*.
- Collier, P. (2007). *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*. Oxford University Press.
- Devasher, T. (2025, March 17). Baloch insurgency is not the real problem, it is result of a political problem. *The Indian Express*.
- Grare, F. (2013). *Balochistan: The state versus the nation*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Haque, I. U. (2024, September 19). Balochistan and Pakistan: Myths about accession and secession. *The Express Tribune*.
- Harrison, S. S. (1981). *In Afghanistan's shadow: Baluch nationalism and Soviet temptations*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- India Today. (2025, March 12). Pakistan: Baloch attacks near decade-high, four-fold jump in 5 years. *India Today*.

- Kakar, R. (2024, November 17). No quick fixes in Balochistan. *Riphah International University*.
- Khan, A. U., Khan, R. N. A., & Waseem, M. (2025). Countering insurgency in Balochistan: The role of CPEC, development-based interventions and youth initiatives. *Pakistan Journal of Social Science Review*, 4(3), 136-157.
- Khan, S. (2024). *Balochistan and the mélange of violence: Regional context and external factors*. Routledge.
- Khetran, M. S. (2025, December 22). Structural causes of persistent underdevelopment in Balochistan. *The Friday Times*.
- Madni, T. A., & Farid, M. (2025). Does development mitigate violence? The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Baloch insurgency. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 559-584.
- Reuters. (2025, March 12). Factbox-Who is the Baloch Liberation Army behind Pakistan's Balochistan attacks? *Reuters*.
- Small, A. (2015). *The China–Pakistan axis: Asia's new geopolitics*. Oxford University Press.
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. McGraw Hill.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.