

Changing Dynamics of Baloch Insurgency: Implications for National Stability and Security

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Abstract

This article analyses Balochistan and its geopolitical significance using a multidisciplinary approach incorporating empirical evidence, theoretical paradigms, and expert opinions. It begins by offering a historical background and then delves into the main issues that led to the emergence of the insurgency, tracing its evolution through different stages. The article then examines the insurgency's social, economic, political, and cultural impacts on Balochistan and Pakistan, forecasting its potential spread throughout the region. Additionally, it scrutinizes the role of external actors and regional dynamics that have contributed to the insurgency, shedding light on the global geopolitical complexities in South Asia.

Keywords: Balochistan, Insurgency, Geopolitical Significance, Regional Stability.

Introduction

Balochistan, the most prominent Pakistani province by land area, is of great geopolitical importance due to its strategic location at the intersection of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Its position on major trade routes and abundant natural resources, such as natural gas, coal, copper, and minerals, solidify its significance in regional and global geopolitics (Mir & Ahmad, 2020). The province contains one of Pakistan's largest natural gas reserves, comprising a considerable amount of the country's aggregate production. The vast quantities of natural resources have made Balochistan a potentially competitive investment hub, attracting national and international investors at the exclusion of the locals. Excepting the locals' participation in the ongoing adventures and strategic projects has led to increasing conflict in the province against the alleged exploitation of natural resources (Surendra, 2009).

Being the primary gateway to the Arabian Sea and Central Asia adds to Balochistan's geopolitical importance. A vital route for transporting energy resources, Balochistan plays the role of a linchpin in the global energy market, connecting energy-overloaded Persian Gulf nations with energy-strapped South and Central Asian countries, to name a few. New transportation networks popping up in the wake of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in the province help reduce dependency on the Strait of Hormuz for energy supplies and have furthered the importance of Balochistan as a vital trading and transportation conduit (Burki, 2012). Being a key artery of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Balochistan connects the underdeveloped areas of Pakistan with China by road,

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rail, and pipeline projects, giving rise to interest in investment and development priorities (Shah & Mahsud, 2022).

Nevertheless, such geopolitical importance has cons. First, Balochistan has been home to consistent instability due to its proximity to Afghanistan and Iran, two nations striving for peace. Moreover, such proximity has provided sanctuary to the Baloch insurgents, leading to extended episodes of low-level conflict in the province against the heavy-handed treatment by the security forces (Beg & Baig, 2019). Apart from the geopolitical rivalry and instability in the neighboring countries, the porous border areas have proved to be supportive to the Baloch militants by creating an enabling communication and logistics environment where external factors such as India can quickly provide support to the separatist forces up in arms against the state of Pakistan (Ahmad & Nasir, 2023).

The people of Balochistan have always stood up against the external exploitation. The province has witnessed several armed uprisings since 1948. Initially, the nationalists demanded more autonomy and entitlement over natural resources. Gradually, the nationalists moved towards political ownership of the province along with the previous demands. However, the central government met such demands with scorn and repression. Such an attitude on the part of the government has led to mistrust and hostility towards the federal project (Kukreja, 2020). With time, the insurgency has seen a radical transformation, and the centrifugal forces have moved away from peaceful demonstrations and dialogues to more violent means to achieve their goals (Udin & Irfan, 2023).

Today, the Balochistan insurgency is the leading cause of instability and insecurity in Pakistan. Situated at the juncture of international rivalries, the conflict in the province has encouraged international players to pursue their vested interests in the region and destabilize Pakistan on various fronts. There is no end to the conflict, as the root causes of the genuine grievances have remained unaddressed so far (Ullah & Inayat, 2023). The continuing conflict and armed attacks in the province have given rise to humanitarian and prosperity issues. Widespread human rights violations and displacement of the civilian population have ruptured the social fabric and societal stability in the province, leading to the rise of other militant groups and drug lords. Without addressing the genuine grievances of the Baloch people and eliminating deep levels of mistrust, a peaceful and prosperous Balochistan and, thus, Pakistan is not possible (Ramavtar, 2012).

Literature Review

The Balochistan insurgency has been subject to limited amounts of study. Existing at the fringes of international conflicts, the insurgency has been ignored by national and international scholars and researchers equally. However, the considerable literature available on the subject of this study has been collected and reviewed in the following sequence.

Balochistan's vast territory, shown as a bleak and miserable environment, accurately reflects the essence of its post-1948 history. Its past with the Pakistani state is tainted with deception and ambiguities. Of Pakistan's four provinces, it is the biggest and richest in resources, yet it is also the least inhabited and developed. The ruthless repression of the state has never stopped the Baloch nationalism movement, but it has always returned more robust than before and outlasted earlier resistance organizations. Although the insurgency began immediately upon the Khan of Kalat's forced signing of the accession instrument in 1948, it has generally occurred throughout five distinct periods. The fifth and present era is the most extended and violent episode; it began in 2004 and is still strong (Talal, 2023).

The fact that Balochistan is Pakistan's poorest province and is still being exploited for its abundant natural riches intensifies the feeling of political marginalization, ineffective government, and state colonization. As Selig Harrison correctly pointed out in 1981, "the separatist creed is centered on the belief that Baluchistan contains vast, undeveloped natural wealth." One of the main reasons the province is essential to Pakistan is its economic potential. Yet, the main driver of the insurgency is the lack of native ownership and advantages (Asma & Shamem, 2023).

Nonetheless, 70% of the Balochistan province's population remains without access to Sui gas, and 78% lack electricity, more than 50 years after the resource was initially discovered. Merely 17% of Balochistan's resources were consumed domestically, with the remaining 83% "being sent to other parts of the country." Furthermore, the federal government priced Baluch gas far less than gas generated in other provinces, especially Sind and Punjab. Moreover, supplies to the town of Dera Bugti, the location of the gas fields, were only provided in the middle of the 1990s following the establishment of a paramilitary base in the area. By 2014, fifty-nine percent of people living in metropolitan areas were without gas, compared to ninety-seven percent in Punjab (Naheed, 2023). The federal government has not consistently developed the region's basic infrastructure. While the actual amount disbursed noticeably stays lower than the allocations, the average allocation for development schemes carried out through the public sector development plan from 1989–1990 to 2015–16 constituted less than 6% of the total federal allocations and a meager 0.19 percent of the national GDP (Mushtaq, 2022).

Furthermore, the share for Balochistan naturally increased from five to nine percent after the condition for the seventh National Financial Commission (NFC) was changed in 2009 to account for poverty and underdevelopment in addition to population, and it appears that the share for other provinces decreased slightly. Nevertheless, the rise in development money for lawmakers and payments to federal security organizations performing "internal security" duties in the province have "mostly absorbed" these funds (Salim & Asif, 2024).

The Balochistan insurgency directly threatens the federation's ability to govern and is a crucial issue for Pakistan's national security. The rebellion has been caused by impoverishment and disregard for genuine political problems. Instead of addressing Baloch grievances and deprivation, Pakistan has opted for military tactics to silence their voices. They argue for provincial autonomy, political participation, entitlement of development initiatives, ownership of resources, and guarantees against outsiders' influx in Balochistan (Hussain & Khan, 2014).

The historical background contends that unmet expectations, inadequate developmental programs, and inept administration have led to the current scenario. Pakistan focuses on the province's geopolitical significance, ignoring the needs of its people. Such neglect has garnered international support for the separatists, such as the House of Commons and the members of Congress. Positive attention to the genuine issues of the Baloch and their redressal is the only way forward (Lunn, 2011).

The key underlying causes of the Balochistan insurgency focus on its origins, development, severity, and instability. The current insurgency is explored as the interplay of grievances, ideology, and concurrent events. Although Balochistan has been fractured by protracted conflict, nationalism still has flourished and is rooted in the social life of the Baloch people. Islamabad must bring the relevant parties to the negotiating table and address the endemic levels of corruption, inequity, and extrajudicial killings and kidnappings (Jaleel & Bibi, 2017).

The insurgents believe that their legitimate rights and interests are being denied. They hold the military and the administration equally responsible for colonization and resource exploitation. The opposing viewpoint asserts that tribal animosity over government-sponsored infrastructure and

development initiatives catalyzes violence. The administration must immediately alter its strategy toward the dispute by adopting political resolutions (Marzen, 2020).

A military solution to the Balochistan conflict, if it fails, would be more debilitating for Pakistan as the insurgents would be emboldened. Therefore, the state of Pakistan should instead focus on the peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict instead of using military might. A peaceful resolution, they argue, begins with resolving the genuine grievances. With the current levels of interest in resolving the conflict in the province, there are chances of more external involvement and the recruitment of locals by the exiled leaders, which would further put the country's security at risk. Moreover, a separate Balochistan is not viable in a region striven with political, regional, and religious conflicts, thus suggesting that the Baloch separatists should reconsider their options and agree to talks with the central government (Nadeem et al., 2011).

Research Methodology

The method used in this article is explanatory and analytical. This method is grounded in the positivist paradigm. The methodology uses quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analysis methods to investigate the topic of insurgency and its implications. Moreover, the article uses primary data sources, such as relevant government organizations, and secondary sources, including books, articles, and reports. In addition, the paper employs qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions with scholars, military personnel, diplomats, and academicians in established institutions. The interviews are semi-structured and use open- and close-ended questions to investigate different perspectives of the insurgency. The research philosophy is positivism because the article relies on empirical evidence and observation to explain the ontological phenomena.

The explanatory study design was used to test hypotheses, and the sampling process was based on arbitrary and quota sampling principles to finalize the study population. Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative research approaches to gather maximum and accurate information. At the data analysis stage, descriptive, exploratory, and analytical methods were used, while interviews were included to improve the quality of research findings.

The main goal of this article is to conduct a holistic analysis of the Balochistan insurgency and its geographic importance, with the primary intent of more fully investigating the dynamics surrounding it. This article will follow Balochistan's history, from the beginning of the insurgency and development through sovereignty factors and grievances. It would also look at how the insurgency has impacted Balochistan's and, as a whole, Pakistan's economic, social, political, and cultural setup. Moreover, the paper will examine the history of insurgency and how it has been influenced by external factors, including regional factors, juxtaposed between the southern borderline and everywhere else. Overall, the article aims to use practical data, theoretical approaches, and expert analysis to provide a more nuanced view of the Balochistan insurgency and its implications for stabilization and security.

Historical Context

Numerous historical trends, including a weak system of tribal alliances, economic subjugation, and rivalry with adjacent ethnic groups, have contributed to the conflict in Balochistan. Baloch nationalists have been causing periodic uprisings since a definitive resolution to the issue has been unattainable due to the intractable nature of these historical factors. The Baluch national identity emerged pre-colonial times (Imran & Nordin, 2018). The most crucial character in Baloch mythology, Mir Nasir Khan, assembled an army of 25,000 soldiers and established the first

political structure in the area. Nevertheless, Khan's loose tribal connections continued to be unstable. This division has, later on, made the Baloch more susceptible to Punjabi dominance, hampered the province's economic growth, and intensified issues with the Pashtuns who live nearby in northern Balochistan and Afghanistan (Gheorghe, 2014).

Adopting a divide-and-conquer tactic, the British took advantage of this frail tribal alliance system in the late 1800s. Baluch society's tribal character also hindered the formation of a cohesive nationalist movement before Pakistan's formation in 1947, which resulted in the province's annexation. When the British were about to leave the country in the middle of the 1940s, some Baluch leaders hurried to establish an independent Balochistan to create a feeling of shared ethnic identity. The pattern of economic injustice is another factor that fuels long-term conflict. Balochistan has traditionally been the poorest and least developed of all the provinces in Pakistan. Its percentage of the nation's GDP has decreased from 4.9 to 3.7 percent since the mid-1970s (Yasin et al., 2021).

Although the discourse emanating from Islamabad typically centers on economic growth, resource exploitation continues to be the main concern for the Baloch. Since its discovery in 1952, shortly after the British left the province, exploiting its natural gas resources has been a significant issue for the Baluch community. Balochistan, Pakistan's province with the most important natural gas resources, has benefited less from its gas reserves than Sindh and Punjab have. Although Balochistan suffered greatly as a result, they had no other options when the provincial parliament was dismissed in February 1973 (Asif & Ahmad, 2018).

Past disputes have fostered Baluch-Pashtun nationalism, which has been exacerbated by British interventions in the region. The strategic goal of the British wars in Afghanistan was to maintain the country as a buffer against Russian expansion. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made the Baluch people's dread of Pashtun political dominance even more acute.

Another historical conflict catalyst that stems from the colonial era is Punjabi dominance. Because the British preferred Punjabi rule over Baluch sovereignty over the area, they set up a governmental system that served their interests rather than the Baloch throughout the colonial era. The military and administrative establishments were given to Punjabis, while Balochs were left out entirely (Ali, 2005).

Indeed, after the One Unit Scheme was introduced in 1955, mistrust of the Punjabi hegemony led to a Baloch insurrection. Initially, the plan had nothing to do with the Baloch; it was an attempt by Punjabi interests to counter an ethnically homogeneous and numerically superior East Pakistan by uniting the four ethnically diverse provinces of West Pakistan, including Balochistan, into a single administrative entity (Mazhar et al., 2012).

After the one-unit scheme was dissolved in 1970, Balochistan became independent. The reconstituted civilian federal government allowed Balochistan's first provincial elections in 1972, and the strongly ethnonational National Awami Party (NAP) won. However, in the early months of 1973, Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto overthrew the NAP administration by dismissing the Baloch provincial government allegedly because they were plotting with foreign powers. This sparked the most violent Baloch insurgency to date (Heinkel, 2020).

The Baloch's animosity with the federal government significantly influenced their militant response. Bhutto was executed in 1977 as a result of a military takeover that installed General Muhammad Zia in office. With Baloch nationalists, Zia negotiated with Baluch Nationalists, which began with the release of Baloch prisoners, but he made no compromises on the question of autonomy. Although there was a period of peace in Balochistan in the 1980s and 1990s, the

conflict's historical origins remained unresolved, which made scope for new violence to break out in 2004 (Harrison, 1981).

The demands of the Baluch population have been wide-ranging, encompassing increased political, economic, and cultural rights to complete secession and establish an independent state of Balochistan. Balochistan's independence and unification: Under the direction of Islamic universalism, a democratic socialist system, Baluch people also seek the removal of the sardari-jirga system (a jirga is a procedure for resolving conflicts or disputes in which the contesting parties present their case to community elders upon consenting to the procedure), free and compulsory education for them, equality for Baluch women, promotion of Baluch culture, resolution of concerns related to governance, socioeconomic problems, feeling of marginalization, and engagement from outside sources (Rafique & Anwar, 2014).

As a result, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction among the Baluch people, who felt that Balochistan was just nominally a part of the federation and was, therefore, at the mercy of a state that kept abusing its abundant natural resources. The main problems with governance are:

- The absence of the rule of law
- The inadequacy of the political and administrative institutions
- The government's weakened authority

Federal government personnel stationed in Balochistan must share the province's priorities, and the provincial civil services and the local cadre are both ineffectual and inefficient (Mustafa & Kakar, 2021).

The historical waves of insurgency have been closely associated with the demands of the Baloch population. Since the 1950s, the Balochistan insurgency has lasted for several phases, with differing intensities and goals pursued. In the 1950s-1960s, Baluch nationalist movements emerged as a response to the alleged exploitation and political neglect on the part of the central authorities of Pakistan and Iran. The movements, headed by tribal chieftains and political activists, simultaneously aimed at autonomy and complete independence for the Baluch people. It was a phase of sporadic armed confrontations, tribal revolutions, and activism for provincial autonomy (Mirza, 2013).

The insurgency reemerged in the 1970s and 1980s due to socioeconomic factors such as lack of development, infrastructural degradation, and human rights violations. Different Baluch nationalist groups increased their combat with the Pakistani government, resulting in extensive violence and military expansion. The situation became characterized by frequent militant exploits and raids by security forces (Gilani, 2017).

In the 2000s and 2010s, the insurgency escalated, featuring varied militant activities, attacks on security forces, and destruction of infrastructure. The government responded through military aggression and political reconciliations but failed to address the actual problem of Baluch nationalism, exploitation, and marginalization. An insurgency began in the background of continued assertive attempts by Baloch nationalist organizations to air demands for autonomous status or even complete independence (Hashmi, 2015).

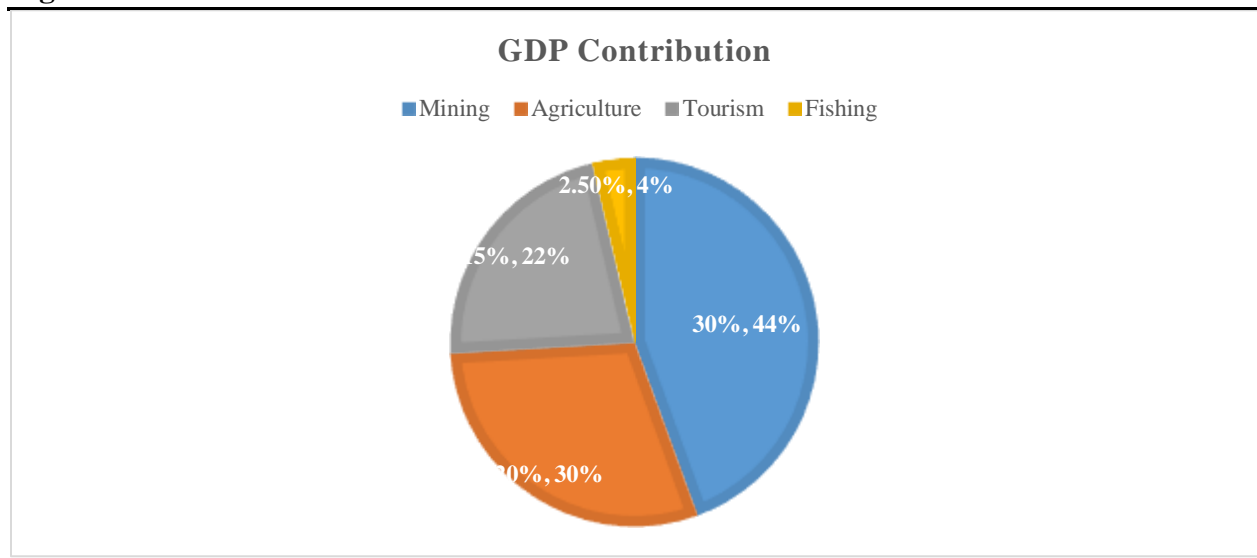
Causes and Motivations

Various historical, socioeconomic, and geopolitical factors drive the Balochistan insurgency. The primary cause of the insurgency is the economic question of long-standing grievances related to resource exploitation and economic disparity in the region. More specifically, despite the region's rich natural gas, coal, and mineral resources, Balochistan is one of Pakistan's most impoverished and underdeveloped regions (Siddiqi, 2012). Local communities feel marginalized and do not see

any economic benefits, as the gains from the rapidly expanding resource extraction activities and agreements tend to benefit the central government and foreign enterprises. Oriented by anti-capital sentiment, the Baluch people question the wisdom of being integral to multinational corporations and buying products in a capitalist market. This feeling of being cheated has driven many Baluch nationalists to participate in or support the insurgency for economic reasons of struggle and justice (Majeed & Hashmi, 2014).

The societal economic structure of Balochistan comprises agriculture, mining of natural resources, business and other service industries, manufacturing industries, and fishing. The data from the World Bank reports Balochistan Development Authority and other business and economic reports and surveys show that agriculture, specifically crops and rich livestock farming, is responsible for about 20-30% of Balochistan's gross domestic product. Another essential segment is the mining and minerals industry because the province has abundant resources; it contributes 30-40% to the provincial GDP. Services, which are trade and tourism, contribute to 20-25%, while manufacturing and construction industries bring about 15-25% of the GDP. Also, fishing and forestry contribute, albeit to a limited extent, 2.5-4% to a country's GDP. These numbers highlight economic diversification in Balochistan, which is still in its infancy, and the province's export economy is heavily based on resource extraction and primary industry crises. Question sessions about the policies adopting the principles of the inclusive economy (Naseer & Gul, 2022).

Figure 1: GDP Contribution of Various Industries in Baluchistan



Moreover, political disenfranchisement and representation are other significant factors contributing to the phenomenon of the Balochistan insurgency. Balochistan has historically been a neglected and abandoned territory within the political structure of Pakistan. It gave limited autonomy and parliament seats to Portman authorities. Centralizing power in the capital has alienated and ostracized the Baluch people. They believe their voices are not heard in the Senate's walls and cannot be represented at any level. As a result, they began to seek self-governing policies and authority, which many historical Baluch nationalists fought for (Muzaffar et al., 2021).

Moreover, the Balochistan insurgency is also motivated by cultural issues and the loss of cultural identity. Because it attempts to preserve its cultural roots and identity, the Baluch people are worried that various government-led federal policies will muzzle their cultural identity.

Balochistan has its language, traditions, and customs distinct from those of the dominant ethnic societies in Pakistan. Still, the people of Baloch feel their culture has been discriminated against at the hands of the central regime, which formulated policies that robbed them of their diverse cultures. The culture bandit is another factor driving the insurgency as communities sympathetic to the rebellion aim to protect their culture and earn their rights to self-determination (Hussain & Kumar, 2023).

External influences and support have been crucial in maintaining the Balochistan insurgency. The strategic geography of the region, located near the borders of Iran and Afghanistan, has made it a battlefield for most local actors advancing their geopolitical agendas. Regional and extra-regional players have heavily funded every Baloch nationalist group and provided them with ample material, financial, and military support, fueling radicalism and sustaining the conflict. Moreover, an expanded external involvement in the region has made it significantly harder to stop the insurgency through negotiations due to varying interests and a different set of priorities, increasing the instability and violence in the region (Nabeel & Asif, 2019).

Dynamics of the Insurgency

The dynamics of the Balochistan insurgency are noted through fundamental rotations of the tactics and strategies by the meaning of which the insurgent groups have been implementing combatant reactions throughout the struggle. Having initially supported sporadic violence and sabotage towards the administration's security installations and infrastructure, the movements managed to develop a wide range of tactics, embracing guerrilla hit-and-run strategies, targeted assassinations, and suicide bombings. The insurgency commanders abide by an asymmetrical warfare doctrine that enables them to enhance their hit potential and reduce the susceptibility of their charges to counterinsurgency measures (Khattak et al., 2022). Moreover, the insurgents have significantly altered their assault and coordination capabilities due to technological evolution. Social media and secret messenger applications enabled the recruiting and radicalizing the province's politically and socially spurned youth. However, despite the technological progress and seemingly strategic advances, the Baloch insurgencies have a tough time maintaining momentum and seeking goals. Internal disharmony and external pressure, alongside brutal federal repression, are the most significant obstacles to the expansion of insurgencies (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015).

National and regional politics are equally central to the insurgency dynamics in Balochistan. The province is known for its complexity in the geopolitical environment, given the numerous tribal, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts manipulated to pursue the interests of state and non-state actors. The central government, through its policy of marginalization and the use of force, has alienated the Baluch population, thus making the region a fertile ground for insurgency (Lieven, 2017). At the same time, regional politics have further quenched this insurgency by infiltrating the neighboring countries that seek to use the region to achieve their political and economic interests. Thus, regarding access to the vital energy supply lines and production fields, the region has become the primary battlefield for proxy wars between major powers. This competition has brought insecurity and instability to the area. Similarly, the internal politics of the province through the Baluch power struggles have contributed to the insurgency (Khetran, 2017).

Furthermore, The Balochistan insurgency has not developed solely due to internal conditions and developments. Instead, it has become highly influenced by a range of geopolitical mechanisms that are being led and supported by various global and regional actors. The region's location, close to Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arabian Sea, attracted many other interested actors. The global war on terror, which started after the 9/11 attacks, made the region a site of tense fight against terrorist

and extremist organizations (Bansal, 2008). The aggressive foreign policy of influential states like the United States, China, and India each has its interests in the region. The goal of balancing the power and maximally increasing the possibilities has made them involved in the development of the insurgency. The activity of many jihadist organizations, including the Taliban, is supported in Balochistan as well (Jilani & Mujaddid, 2020).

As a result, public support and perception of the Balochistan insurgency have become more strained and violent over the years. The general population's attitudes towards the conflict have shifted based on government propaganda, media coverage, and the overall socioeconomic situation. While in the beginning, the insurgency was a popular and relatively well-supported movement, now most of the Baluch population feels tired and disillusioned with seemingly never-ending violence and instability (Rizwan et al., 2014). Additionally, the government's attempts to co-opt or repress dissent have left many distrustful and alienated, further contributing to worsening public opinion. Poll results. However, many marginalized people and individuals still support the insurgents; having been failed by the state, they also feel that they represent them better than the "colonial" and oppressive government (Saleem, 2019).

Key Players and Groups

The Balochistan Insurgency possesses several major insurgent groups with fundamentally different ideologies and goals. First and foremost, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is the most widely recognized insurgent group committed to the struggle for Baluch nationalism and Pakistan secession. The BLA targeted numerous attacks on government entities and infrastructure with a stated mission of destabilizing Pakistani control of the territories. The Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) is another influential insurgent organization (Alamgir, 2012). Thus, they share most of the BLA goals regarding Baluch autonomy but are positioned more to the left and maintain a leftist-secularist doctrine. Throughout the insurgency, the BLF has maintained an active armed struggle against the Pakistani state and its security and infrastructure targets. Furthermore, factions such as the Baluch Republican Army and the United Baluch Army maintain nationalist objectives and insurgent logistics operations. These groups operate with a mercurial, decentralized orchestration that does not facilitate negotiations (Samad, 2014).

The federal Pakistani government and military have used various approaches to combat the Balochistan insurgency, both aggressive and political. After the BLA's rise and bombings in Turbat on August 26, 2006, the government responded violently to the insurrection. The government's brutal reaction, which included eruptions of troops, arbitrary apprehensions, and the revitalization of disregard for human rights breaches in the region, only served to intensify the situation. In recent years, however, the government's processes have seemed more sophisticated, based on the approaches of adroitness, discussion, and development engagement (Ahmed & Baloch, 2014).

The government of Pakistan also established the necessity for good governance and accountability in Balochistan, admitting that ruling communities required more participation in decision-making. Furthermore, the military seems to have directed several procedures at insurgency groups in the area to close their operation and administrative frameworks. Nevertheless, a range of claims of extralegal homicides and enforced disappearances directed at the military currently proceed to appear, undermining the region's faith (Tariq, 2015).

The involvement of external states and non-state actors is another distinguishing feature of the Balochistan insurgency, as different powers struggled to exploit it to advance their geopolitical gains. Iran allegedly supported and trained Baluch insurgent groups, especially in bordering

Iranian provinces, to confront Pakistani influence and enhance the region's instability. At the same time, India used the Baluch nationalist movements to destabilize Pakistani territorial integrity and exert pressure on its enemy (Nabeel & Asif, 2019). There were also accusations of Afghanistan's and Gulf states' backing, which could have been interested in obtaining their new proxies in Balochistan. Additionally, multiple non-state actors were involved in the insurgency, such as different militant groups and criminal syndicates, which profited from the lawlessness of certain Baluchi areas. The continued multi-dimensional engagement of external actors made the compromise increasingly challenging and perpetuated Balochistan's violence and instability (Marzen, Balochistan, Self-Determination, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 2020).

Impacts of the Insurgency

Conclusively, the insurgency in Balochistan has had severe socio-economic implications for both the province itself and the Republic of Pakistan as a whole. Even though Balochistan is endowed with various natural resources, it is one of the country's most underdeveloped and impoverished regions. The insurgency has merely worsened the existing socio-economic disparities in the province, posing numerous challenges to development activities and reinforcing poverty and exclusion cycles. Insurgents have been attacking infrastructure development projects, namely road construction, railway building, and port rehabilitation, which have restricted the influx of trade and investment into the province (Ali & Hassan, 2012).

This has discouraged foreign investors due to fear for their safety and stability and has restricted economic development, thus aggravating the threat of unemployment and poverty. More so, the socio-economic threat of the insurgency is not confined to Balochistan but affects the entire Pakistan adversely in terms of national stability and prosperity. Due to its geographical location and potential to become the gateway to the Arabian Sea and Central Asia, Balochistan is critical to Pakistan and other countries in the region. It is closely tied to Pakistan's plans to develop the area under the CPEC, other connectivity, and other projects. Thus, insurgency and the prevailing situation seriously threaten this effort to refashion Balochistan as an economic hub or a gateway to regional markets. In addition, the necessity of counterinsurgency operations and security measures is an additional burden on government resources, which are diverted from much-needed social and development projects, thus increasing socio-economic disparities and the ratio of poor and wealthy (Baloch, 2016).

It is impossible to ignore that extensive human rights abuses have characterized the Balochistan insurgency. In fact, "extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture allegedly were committed by Pakistani security forces, particularly the Frontier Corps and intelligence agencies, but also by insurgent groups." It is evident that such actions could lead to the rise of fear and lack of trust among the civilians, would further intensify the existing conditions, and foster vengeance and violence. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and other nationalist groups have conducted over 1,000 attacks on security forces in recent years. Additionally, the Pakistani government claims that more than 2,000 insurgents have surrendered, participating in state-sponsored rehabilitation programs (Rineheart, 2010).

Human rights reports from Balochistan have brought international attention and monitoring from across parts of the world; all governments, the United Nations, and other international human rights organizations have demanded that those responsible for human rights violations and murders of innocent humans must be made to face the law. There has also been increasing accordance on investigations and trials of suspected persons beyond the reach of the parties involved. The sufferings of internally displaced people and refugees departing from Balochistan show how it has

become necessary to make rescue a humanitarian mission; finding a mechanism to implement humanitarian aid and protection of the injured is of great importance (Tan, 2014).

In this regard, the internal insurgency in Balochistan is of vital security implications for Pakistan's future and the rest of the region as it undermines the whole South Asian sub-region's stability and peace-making behavior. Second, by exploiting the province's maximized, open, lawless areas and borders, militant organizations, crime groups, and terrorist organizations can further risk via the abovementioned opportunities their influence and harm in the years to come. Furthermore, the "proxy war" between the Taliban and other jihad organizations creates an additional security concern by attempting to grant "sanctuaries" and perform their violent acts on the Pakistani military and civilian citizens (Soherwordi, 2013).

Moreover, the insurgency has broader regional implications for Pakistan, including risks for its neighbors and regional stability. The backing of Baluch nationalist groups by external actors, such as Iran and India, has exacerbated rivalries and interpersonal tensions, intensifying insecurity and instability in the region. Furthermore, Balochistan's critical function as a thoroughfare for power and trade highways has transformed it into the epicenter of regional rivalries and hostilities. As a result, adequate cybersecurity reactions and synoptical strategies to tackle the violence and instability in Balochistan will need productive regional cooperation (Enemark, 2021).

Current Status and Recent Development

Several events and developments over the past five years are worth mentioning, as they influenced the path of the Balochistan insurgency. The most significant include the growing violence and instability in the region and a series of deadly attacks on security forces, government installations, and civilians. This has confirmed the ongoing struggle to end the insurgency and ensure the region's peace. Additionally, international attention to human rights in Balochistan has been increasing, and this has been accompanied by initiatives to organize the legal status of investigating human rights violations and seeking justice for the victims at the global level (Weinbaum, 2009). Moreover, Balochistan remains a strategically important region, and its role as a gate to the Arabian Sea and Central Asia has always interested regional and global actors. The area has also gained attention due to the active development of infrastructure projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Still, security challenges and insufficient transport infrastructure do not allow the region to fulfill its potential as an economic hub and energy supply route (Zaidi, 2010).

Changes have been observed in recent years in the intensity and nature of the Balochistan insurgency, indicating a change in insurgent dynamics and the emergence of new priorities and objectives. Although the insurgency remains a significant security threat, events of overt large-scale violence and coordinated operations have decreased, partially due to responsive counterinsurgency measures on the part of the government and enhanced intelligence capacities. Additionally, however, there is also a trend of increasing asymmetry, which is expressed through targeted killings, bombings, ambushes, or other less risky activities designed to have a maximum effect on the adversary (Shahid, 2016).

Furthermore, the Balochistan insurgency invigorated a cascade of splintering groups and factions, illustrating the divergent goals and contentious organizational structure of nationalist groups. However, the above has impeded the possibility of introducing meaningful discussions and negotiations between different groups as disparate factions competed for acknowledgment. Simultaneously with the purported fact, the criminal activities of extortion, abduction for ransom, and territorial drug trafficking increased in multiple regions (Larsdotter, 2014).

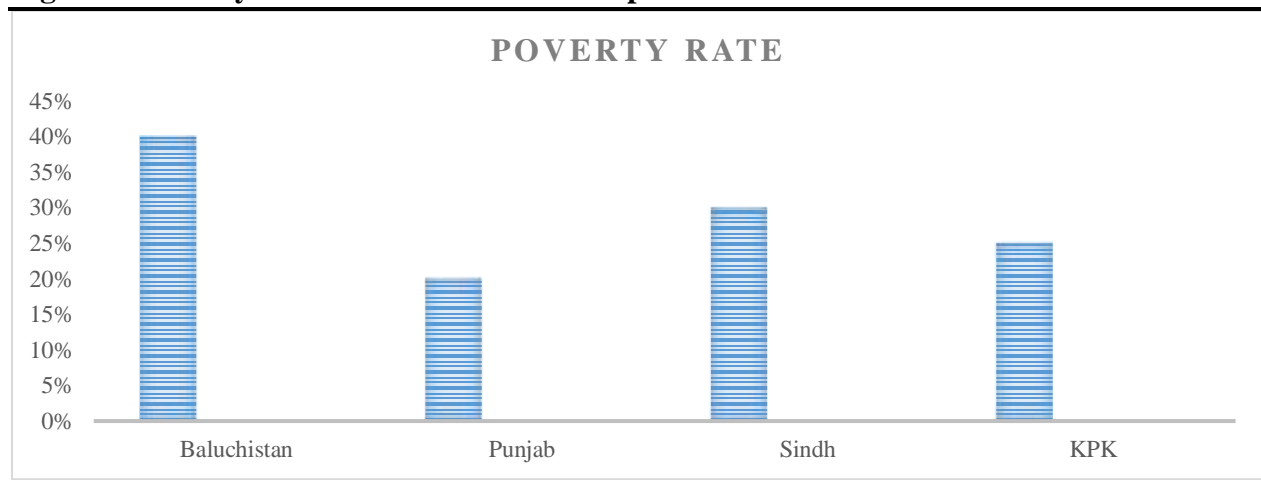
Despite these obstacles, there have also been indications of internal strife and disgruntlement in the adversary's formation. There have been instances of rank-and-file soldiers defecting or surrendering, frustrated by their superiors' activities and goals. As a result, the insurgency has been split internally, losing its coherence and capacity to keep its momentum going. Therefore, government-led efforts to promote peace and unity have been granted a chance (Fair & Jones, 2009).

Over the past few years, the Pakistani government and Baluch nationalist groups have made significant efforts to establish peace and reconciliation. The two parties have acknowledged the importance of talks and discussions to resolve the longstanding issues at the core of the conflict. The government launched several peace talks and confidence-building measures with multiple insurgent groups to remedy past injustices and strengthen political involvement. These measures included the formation of parliamentary commissions and specific committee assignments, special working groups, and table-talk contacts (Mir, 2018).

Moreover, development projects and welfare assistance were undertaken to bridge the socio-economic gap and development deficit in the Balochistan region. Primarily, the Balochistan Package is the hallmark of the incumbent government to fuel economic impetus, raise infrastructure requirements, and establish an education and healthcare system in the province. Otherwise, securities agencies and intelligence outfits in the neighboring state increased their intelligence cooperation to deter the operations of support and facilitation cells of native insurgent outfits (Byman, 2006).

The levels of poverty in various provinces of Pakistan depict a transparent culture of discrimination in the proportional distribution of resources, whereby the province of Baluchistan has been facing the worst decline despite being rich in natural resources. The poverty rate, as per the IMF country report 2023, in Balochistan is about 40%; consequently, it is much higher than that of Punjab, where the poverty rate ranges between 20-25%, Sindh, whose poverty rate is between 24-30% and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, whose poverty rate is in between 30-35%. This disparity proves that provinces such as Balochistan, due to their lack of resource endowment, are exploited by the central government and other provinces in terms of resource rents received from the reserves they provide, further leading to poverty (Hussain M., An Analysis of Factors of Insurgency and Current Episodes of Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan's Balochistan, 2023).

Figure 2: Poverty rate of Baluchistan in Comparison with other Provinces



Baloch nationalist groups have been prepared to resort to talks and bargaining with the government simultaneously but with preconditions and demands. These conditions involve obtaining further regional independence and the right to benefit from Balkan resources, political representation, and respecting cultural rights. Such a movement still resists any efforts to establish conventional frameworks to undertake the process of making peace. Still, the mentioned steps represent crucial progress regarding developing sides' trust and confidence and creating the platform for the peaceful resolution of the Balkan conflict (Hamanpreet, 2019).

According to respondent narratives, the socio-economic consequences of the Balochistan conflict have significantly affected the common public in the region. The prolonged insurgency has only worsened poverty in the resource-rich but least-developed province of Balochistan, which is the most backward region in Pakistan. Respondents argued that Baloch people are often cast aside from the economic benefits of more significant projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as they said that most jobs will end up being filled by nationals, not from Balochistan, leaving the Indigenous population to rear cattle and do menial jobs that would not pay as well as a skilled labor role.

The respondents asserted that the conflict has also affected ordinary life, with frequent violence and instability hampering access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods for the residents. Both the burdens of militarization in the presence of heavy military presence and security operations by the state have further worsened the state-people relations, hence also laying bare the human rights abuses (enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings) that increase fear, alienation, and suspicion among the civilian population. Over time, decades of socio-political exclusion and under-representation have made the Baloch people feel so alienated and disenfranchised that they find themselves angry and helpless in the face of yet another insurgency or unrest.

The respondents maintained that the pervasive violence has severely disrupted daily life, with thousands of people displaced or without a job, education, and healthcare in ruins. The conflict has worsened poverty, with the Baloch population perceiving itself alienated regarding the benefits of the natural resources in the area. Development projects are ongoing initiatives. However, they are primarily out of synchronization with the core demands of the Baloch, such as a fair share of resources and political representation. This has forced Balochistan to become underdeveloped, and the Baloch people experience increased poverty and unemployment, which has nurtured a gap between them and the central government.

Women have been particularly prominent in political organizing, including demonstrations and publicity campaigns for missing persons and there. However, the sociopolitical landscape, in general, continues to be dark, with insufficient development initiatives reaching millions and concentrating on the most critical sets of grievances of the Baloch, hence continuing sociopolitical and economic marginalization.

Conclusion

The Balochistan insurgency is a complex historical, socio-economic, and political issue. Understanding the historical background of the insurgency helps shed light on its development and the various factors involved, both internal and external. This conflict not only affects Balochistan and Pakistan but also has repercussions for the entire South Asian region. External stakeholders and Balochistan's strategic geographic location, providing access to the Arabian Sea and Central Asia, make it challenging to address the root causes of the problem. The roots, however, lie in longstanding charges of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, and cultural marginalization. Balochistan, even though being the most resourceful land for Pakistan, needs to

serve the interests of the people better, resulting in mass poverty, backwardness, and underdevelopment.

However, it is also essential to know that the people fighting beside the government forces are not only the local people but also from other countries. Thus, another factor that has played a role in the prolonged nature of the conflict is the self-interest of various regional and international players, including Iran, India, and the USA. New actors, state and non-state, in the world order made the process of building and sustaining the peace process a multifaceted question of interests and agendas outside of the involved parties. About the nature, history also unveils that the trend of insurgency implies profound change regarding the style and conduct, which proves the capacity of the insurgent movements to learn new trends, including the integration of technology and some exerted warfare tactics such as guerrilla war. Nevertheless, conflicts within the tribes, foreign influence, inter-tribal animosity, and violation of the tribes' rights from the federal government are the major factors that hinder the enhancement of the situation.

Another threat arises from the political environment as national and regional actors rake up internal tribal, ethnic, and sectarian conflict. These region's policies of the central government infringe on the powers and autonomy of this region, along with the fact that the region's proxy wars have engorged insecurity and instability in the area. This insurgency has severe social and economic impacts on Balochistan, and it has intensified poverty and slowed down any advancement towards development. This has also led to increased cases of human rights abrogation and generated fear and disapproval among civilians. However, the leadership of the government of Pakistan and the Baloch nationalist parties should not be mistaken for the end of the conflict.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Addressing the Balochistan insurgency requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that considers the various dimensions of the conflict. Here are some recommendations and suggestions:

1. Resource Sharing and Economic Development

- **Equitable resource allocation:** It ensures that the local community benefits from natural resources in the area.
- **Resource extraction:** Through policy, a substantial share of revenues from resource extraction goes to the Baloch people.
- **Infrastructure development:** It involves investing in infrastructure that serves people's needs, including roads, schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation.
- **Job Creation:** Initiatives must be taken to create significant numbers of local jobs for the people of Balochistan, with proper training and employment in skilled labor-based jobs.

2. Access to Political Power

- **Enhanced Political Representation:** Strengthen the political presence of Baloch people at both the national parliament and provincial government levels. This will give them a say in the decision-making processes.
- **Provisional Autonomy:** Implement policies in Balochistan, giving autonomy in governance (Local Government) and make a plan for self-determination in a few areas.

3. Cultural Reservation

- **Cultural Rights:** Acknowledge and ensure the cultural rights of the Baloch masses. Promote the preservation of their natural languages, culture, and other traditional values.
- **Education Programs:** Create education programs that incorporate Baloch history and culture into the curriculum, making the younger generation proud and aware.

4. Human Rights and Reconciliation from

- Prosecute Rights Violations: Investigate and prosecute alleged human rights abuses by security forces and insurgent groups. Hold perpetrators accountable and seek justice for survivors.
 - De-radicalization and Rehabilitation Programs: Begin de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs for those militants who surrender, providing them with education, better skill development, and reintegrating them into the mainstream.
5. Dialogue and Peacebuilding
- Peace Talks: Pursue and extend various peace talk avenues with other rebel groups to hear their sides of grievance/end play. Use neutral moderators to have such talks.
 - Confidence-Building Measures: These Are Measures in which the government and insurgent organizations declare a ceasefire, exchange prisoners, and undertake developmental activities together.
6. Regional Cooperation
- Engage Regional Actors: We work with local-level actors to counteract the regional facets of the insurgency. Further cooperation within the region prevents external forces from financing insurgent groups.
 - Multilateral Platforms: Harness multilateral platforms, including the United Nations (UN), to generate international solidarity around peacebuilding and to monitor human rights situations.
- Therefore, a comprehensive approach that addresses the multifaceted aspects of the insurgency, including grievances, governance, and reconciliation, is crucial to resolving the conflict and ending the violence. The analysis and findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing the Balochistan insurgency and its geopolitical implications. Policymakers and stakeholders can effectively handle the conflict's multi-dimensional nature by considering various socio-economic, political, and cultural perspectives, as well as the influence and policies of external players involved and regional relationship management. This approach will lead to the development of effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies, ultimately contributing to a more secure and sustainable future for the region. Addressing the origins of the conflict and promoting inclusive development and governance in Balochistan are essential for achieving this goal.

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