

An Analysis of Factors of Insurgency and Current Episodes of Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan's Balochistan

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ABSTRACT

Study Background: The Baloch ethno-nationalist rebels represent a chaotic situation in the province of Balochistan and elsewhere in the country. They pose significant security challenges to Pakistan's security forces, including joint development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These events highlight a long-running conflict between the state of Pakistan and the Baloch ethnic minority. Previous research has primarily focussed on multiple causal factors of insurgency. Most of them are socio-economic deprivation, oppression, exploitation, alienation and poor governance. However, the role of an educated middle-class youth is a significant factor in the recent resurgence ethnic insurgency.

Aim of the Study: The purpose of this article is to answer the question of what explains the recent resurgence of ethnic Baluch insurgent mobilization.

Methodology: Using qualitative content analysis technique (CAT), the study investigated factors of insurgency and current episodes of ethnic conflict in Pakistan's Balochistan.

Findings & Conclusion: The study found that state's monopoly on resource exploitation, indiscriminate use of force prompted an organization of urban middle class youth that changed scope and intensity of insurgent mobilization. An Active strategy that engages Baloch youth on various platform like social media and political representation can be helpful to making path for issue mitigation.

Keywords: Civil Conflict, Violence Insurgency, Grievances, Socio-Economic Deprivation, Rebellion.

Introduction

Pakistan Balochistan located in the southwest has been experiencing three types of small wars but of different natures: trans-terrorism violence, a religious sectarianism and an organized ethnic insurgency (Khan, 2019). Conflict in Balochistan also influenced developmental projects including China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a major investment in Pakistan (Wani, 2021). According to a report, The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), two active rebel groups, have carried out 42 recorded attacks and killed dozens of security personnel and several civilians in 2020

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alone (PIPS, report 2020). The increasing militant attacks threatened the viability of Gwadar port construction and many other mega infrastructure projects running in the province (Wani, 2021). According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), overall fatalities in Balochistan increased from 215 in 2020 to 311 in 2021, up to 44.65 percent. In a recent suicide attack, four Chinese nationals came under attack in Karachi claimed by BLA (*Pakistan Attack: Chinese Tutors Killed in Karachi University Bombing - BBC News*, n.d.). Cross-border terrorism, arms trafficking, illegal trade, and smuggling facilitated the resurgence of violence in Baluchistan's rugged mountain territory.

There had been episodes of ethno nationalist's conflicts with the government of Pakistan in the past. However, the latest violence began in 2003 when Akbar Khan Bugti (a tribal leader) and his tribe men were stand up against state and alleged for rocket attacks on various government installations. Since his killing in 2006 by security forces, violence has been resurfacing with amazing regularity (Bansal 2008). Some media and political analysts account governmental policies chief factors for Baloch nationalist uprising. Use of force has been for years while ignoring deep-seated socio-economic and political conditions that provide grievance factor an ethnic minority. In the recent years, various militant groups took advantage of the deep cleavage persist for long and increased attacks under the pretext of ethnic, sectarian and ideological claims.

The government of Pakistan attributes Baloch ethnic insurgency an outcome of a primordial tribal system and international geopolitical game (Tanner, 2019). The government also allege, conflict is externally driven and some great powers do not want to see the stability and development of the area (Samad, 2014). However, Tribalism is a primordial political system that bestows Sardars overwhelming respect and loyalty to subjects coming through generations. Tribal chiefs known as Sardars dominate the Baluch tribal system. A struggle for power and resources among political elites coupled with global powers competition furthered the complexity of the situation. So far, the government of Pakistan has remained unsuccessful in resolving conflict and bringing stability (Gattani, 2021). However, armed insurgency in Balochistan attributed to Baloch's long struggle for independence, secession, greater provincial autonomy or power share in the federal and provincial set-up. There have been also cases of state oppression, enforced disappearance and human rights violations. This highlights a protracted battle between the state of Pakistan and the Baloch ethnic minority.

Balochistan is abundant in natural resources like Gold, Copper, and natural gas (Noraiee, 2020). The majority of the population lives under extreme levels of poverty and socio-economic conditions are hard. Drivers of conflict in Balochistan are various. The province is the largest in the territory and least populated in Pakistan. The terrain is largely mountainous and geographically very important. Multi-ethnic populations inhabit the area, although Balochi's are the largest among them. The province has the lowest in poverty, education, health care and other socioeconomic facilities (Majid & Memon, 2019).

An active Baloch middle class educated youth organisation has been mobilised against policies of the government vis-à-vis the prevailing poor socio-economic conditions in the recent years. Interestingly, this middle class movement was supported across the society (Nabeel & Asif, 2019). Over the years, they well organized themselves and provided intellectual, motivational and dynamic to the ethnic conflict. In result, insurgency has spread across the region in both urban centers and rural areas. Past insurgencies were limited to certain areas and upheld by few elites (Sardars), however, with the rise of educated class, ethnic conflict gained a new movement. A unique aspect of this phenomenon is using of digital media platforms and provision of intellectual rational (Gattani, 2021).

The Baloch middle class youth has played a significant role in insurgent mobilization. A phenomenon known as the Balochistan youth mobilization has recently arisen as young Balochs have been more actively participating in the insurgency (Wani, 2016). These young people frequently feel disenchanting with the Pakistani government and its oppressive policies toward Balochistan. The high rates of unemployment and poverty in Balochistan, as well as a feeling of isolation from mainstream society, have all contributed to the youth movement. Many young Balochs believe that the Pakistani government has

not done enough to address their complaints and that armed conflict is the only option to effect change (Rana, 2014). The wider Baloch ethnic population is resentful of Pakistan's policy approach toward the province. This paper attempts to analyze Baloch insurgent youth mobilization and its role in current episodes of conflict. The role of youth mobilization is crucial factor broadening the scope of conflict horizontally and vertical plane. Explanations on role of youth mobilization in current ethnic conflict is understudied in the literature. The paper aims to answer the question of what explains the current ethnic resurgence and violence in the Balochistan province of Pakistan.

In the first section, relevant literature has been reviewed followed by a brief historical evolution of insurgent mobilization in Balochistan. Next, critical factors of ethnic armed insurgency were analysed. In the third section, theoretical explanations of insurgent mobilization and principal causal factors are discussed. The fourth section discusses the implications of ethnic power relations and states' response, policy toward the province and rich abundant resources critically explained and in the last a brief conclusion.

Literature Review and Principle Factors Influencing Baloch Insurgency

On Baloch nationalism, Fredric Grare contends the armed violence in Balochistan is a struggle between central states versus nation that Pakistan's central authorities have not been dealt with appropriately. Baloch nationalism is a broader national question and a political reality, which aspires full national autonomy within Pakistan's federation. Pakistan's central government refuted the idea of broader Baloch nationalism, which is misleading. Military and authoritative regimes tended to assimilate a broader national struggle into a mere question of feudalism led by Sardars (local head of tribe) is convenient but inaccurate (Fredric, 2013). In a similar fashion, S. Fakhruddin Shah maintains that armed struggle in Balochistan is the result of a centralization policy that alienates nationalist aspirations and sensitivities of minor units in Pakistan. The central states' incorporation of four states into Baluchistan's state union was reacted and rebelled by the local elites. The local ethnic and regional actors are skeptical and apprehensive of central states' policies which turned counterproductive (Shah, 2016). Alok Bansal argues that ethnic violence in Balochistan highlights the fragility and rigidity of Pakistan. The central state suppressed the true spirit of federalism, which central state elites believed prelude to separatism and disintegration. The pursuit of national unity and nationalism by central elites eludes ethical considerations and sensitivities in the strongest manner. For central government elites, regional ethnic aspirations could lead to the disintegration of polity and replace it with a religious identity that excludes all other ethnic identities. Granting rights to the province on an ethnic basis per federal arrangement is challenging and does not rightfully belong to them (Bansal, 2008).

Rabia Aslam illustrates that violence and Baloch ethnic mobilization are intertwined with relative political marginalization, economic deprivation and resource exploitation. Ethnic deprivation among Baloch is more intense and strongest for various historical and economic reasons. Effective governance of these embedded issues needs careful consideration from the central state (Aslam, 2011). Yunus Samad evaluates that violence and rebellion in Balochistan are an outcome of the state's suppressive policies and ignorance toward minority rights. Military force has been used to suppress Baloch grievances that polarized society and motivated rebel against the central state. While the issue of Balochistan is more political than military. The gross human rights violations of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killings, and abductions indicate the kill-and-dump approach. This has resulted in sectarian, religious and ethnic hatred towards other settlers in the province. The central government has poorly managed differences that is a consequence of insurgency in the province and fuels armed violence (Samad, 2014).

Political patronage and elite capture are prevalent in the province in particular public institutions. Manzoor Ahmed examines the political and bureaucratic elite's misappropriation of public funds and resources for personal gains, which promotes political patronage and clientelism in the province of Balochistan. Massive corruption and bribery fuel disparities and socio-economic underdevelopment that cause public resentment towards government and institutions respectively. Elite capture of public wealth

and resources bears direct consequences for the state and is a motivational factor for ordinary Baloch citizens to adopt alternative behaviors such as criminal practices and illegal activities. Bribery by public officials and corruption within public institutions are massive buys of political patronage and cause public outrage and feelings of alienation, which prompt violent crimes (Ahmed, n.d.). Similarly, Adeel Khan examines more critically the issue of insurgency in Balochistan. Insurgency and mobilization are an outcome of Punjabi dominant army's approach towards the impoverished periphery. The militant nationalist groups perceive military action in their area as an attempt to control and colonize local communities and maximize their influence over resources. This will strengthen their power and control while weakening local ethnic minorities to who the region belongs. The central government exploits natural resources for their benefit and locals' loss. An ethnic Punjabi-dominated establishment is persistent in a policy of suppression of ethnic minorities in the region (Khan, 2009). Anatol Lieven views Pakistan's insistence on the colonial strategy of divide and cooption policy as giving longevity to the insurgency. This pre-colonial approach proved insurgent mobilization a determinant factor. For a credible approach, Pakistan needs to buy legitimate action, which it lacks that failed to eliminate insurgence motivations altogether (Lieven, 2017).

Unlike previous literature that largely focused and held Pakistan's policy approach causing Baloch insurgency, Hoshang Noraiee takes tribal structures and external geopolitical environment surrounding the region influenced Baloch nationalism. The external environment and politico-tribal rivalry principal factors the resulted from Baloch ethnic resurgence. Pakistan remains to be a weak state in the face of countering external pressures and internal conflicts. Geopolitical tensions in surrounding neighboring countries highly influenced Baloch tribal society that culminated in a culture of aggressiveness, exclusionary and more puritan. Taking advantage of state weakness the locals involved in drug trafficking, arms and banditry to achieve their desired objectives (Noraiee, 2020). Examining the external surrounding geopolitical environment and crisis in Afghanistan that results in huge migration to border country Pakistan, Akbar S. Ahmed investigates its impact and interaction with a larger society. A large pool of Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan during the Afghan war and the War on terror. Already impoverished and scarce resources and public infrastructure, an afghan refugee has intensified the local ethnic milieu. Their interaction and economic activities intensified the Baloch ethnic mobilization in a new way that is challenging for the weak state of Pakistan to manage (Ahmed, 1990). In addition to all these factors, local migration also affected Balochistan's local population. Local migration largely cause by development projects in Gwadar port and mineral extraction in the area (Wani, 2021).

The Baloch middle class youth has played a critical role in insurgent mobilization by providing intellectual and organizational leadership to the Baloch nationalist movement. They have used social media and other online platforms to mobilize and organize protests and other forms of resistance against the government. The Baloch middle class, which includes educated and professional young Baloch people, has become disillusioned with the government's policies, which they believe have marginalized Balochistan and its people. One of the main reasons the Baloch middle class youth has become involved in insurgent mobilization is because they feel that their political and economic rights have been suppressed. They believe that the government has failed to provide them with equal opportunities and access to resources, and that the benefits of development projects in Balochistan have not been distributed fairly.

Methodology

This study is based on the Content Analysis Technique (CAT), which is an inductive approach to qualitative research, which involves collecting data from a variety of sources, such as research articles, books, magazines, newspaper articles, and other related documents, and analyzing it to draw conclusions. This approach has been used since the 19th century to explore a wide range of topics in the social sciences, such as communication, culture, language, relationships, and society (Harwood & Garry, 2003). Through this technique, one can gain an understanding of the meaning, structure, and implications of the content collected. This method is particularly useful for uncovering underlying patterns, trends, and

themes that may not be immediately apparent from the raw data. As such, it can provide invaluable insights into a particular topic or phenomenon.

Results and Discussion

Ethnic Profile of Balochistan

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan. Geo-strategically, the province borders with Afghanistan to the North West and Iran in the southwest. It has a coastal line of nearly 750 kilometres on the Arabian Sea and a developing (Gwadar port) 70 km away from the strait of Hormuz. Ethnically Balochistan has a diverse population where Baloch are the largest, Pashtuns, Hazara and Punjabis are minor ethnic populations. Baloch comprises 45 per cent population of Pashtuns 38 per cent and other communities 17 per cent in the province. Ethnically, the population of Balochistan province is composed of Baluch, Pakhtuns and other communities. Baloch is 45 per cent, 38 per cent are Pakhtuns and 17 per cent are other communities (Number, 2005). The Baluch have a primordial social structure, and Sardars have traditionally had great political and social influence to the tribe. In fact, the Sardar's system exists for a long the province but some areas remained not under Sardars. While in some parts, there is a non-existence of the Sardar's system. The fact of the matter is Baloch's argue that they do not oppose development and do participate in the democratic system under Pakistan's constitution. However, there are fears on states monopoly in power relations and resource exploitation and royalties. The Baluch sardars have considerable authority and connections to the rank and file (Bansal, 2008; Fakharuddin Shah Government College D I Khan & Fakharuddin Shah, 2016). Traditionally Sardars are criticized for keeping 'the subjects illiterate, and backwards, unaware of the developments in the modern world, so that they could never challenge the elite rule in the province.' (Aslam, 2011).

Historically, Balochistan had a fragmented society. Balochistan was divided into four states: Kharan, Makran, Kalat and Lasbela (Kundi, 1994). Tribal chiefs known as Sardars dominate the Baluch tribal system. The three major tribes inhabit the province: The Bugtis, the Muris and Mengals. It was during 18th century when Khan of Kalat - Nasir Khan (the sixth Khan of Kalat) organized the state under a military and administrative system with its own army of 25,000 personnel and 1,000 camels. Nasir Khan, established a bureaucratic system, appointing administrative officers for the management of external and internal affairs. , collection of revenue, tribute and blood compensation (Khan 2003, 282-83). However, the system suffered from internal structural weaknesses. It owed much more to his strong personality than to the institutionalized structure. Soon after his death, the system collapsed (Khan 2003). The British colonial administration annexed Balochistan in 1884 to give a safe passage from Sind to Afghanistan (Khan 2003). The Khanate (the Khan of Kalat) guaranteed safe passage but lose control over anti-British tribes, which provided an excuse to the colonial administration to breach the treaty, subsequently, Nasir Khan refused to surrender and killed (Titus & Swidler, 2000).). Later the British restored the state of Kalat but had a subordinate position to the colonial administration. He received a subsidy of Rs 10,000 on the condition to check any outrage against the British forces and cooperate with the administration (Khan 2003). After the partition of India and Pakistan, non-Baloch areas merged into the newly independent country – Pakistan on August 14, 1947. Interestingly, the Khan of Kalat declared independence and offered Pakistan special relations in the areas of defense, communication and foreign affairs (Khan 2003). However, Pakistan rejected that offer and forced Khan to accede to Pakistan. The Khan of Kalat had reluctantly acceded to the merger of the princely state of Kalat into Pakistan but his younger brother rebelled against the forceful action. This led to the first armed insurgency in Balochistan followed by insurgencies in 1958, 1963-69, 1973-77 and 2003. As a means of maintaining control over the tribes, "the government of Pakistan forged an unwritten agreement with the tribal chiefs, whereby they would be deemed de facto rulers of the territory as long as they did not oppose the writ of the state of Pakistan." Baluch Sardars preserved powers with themselves not shared with the people. Sardars, the local rulers, claim underrepresentation in various governmental and political positions in the newly independent state of Pakistan. Most Baloch never wanted to join Pakistan but when the non-Baloch areas merged into Pakistan, the Khan of Kalat was forced to sign the merger document and accede to the newly independent

country – Pakistan. Baloch claim that they have been underrepresented in different government and political positions. In the first three decades, only 4 out of 179 who joined the federal cabinet were ethnic Baloch (Bansal 2008). Mir Zafar Ullah Khan Jamali was the only person who became prime minister (was called a puppet PM by the opposition under power military dictator) during the Musharraf period. In 1970, 70 % of army officers were Punjabis, 15 % were Pathans, 10 % were Muhajir and 5 % were Sindi and Baloch (Bansal 2008).

The merger of princely states into the state of Pakistan and subsequent episodes of regional and local conditions fuelled an organised armed conflict against the government of Pakistan. Interestingly, it remains one of the most volatile provinces since the birth of Pakistan in 1947 (Aslam, 2011). Balochistan produces 40 per cent of the country's energy including half of the country's gas (Aslam 2011). Among 50 mineral mines, 40 are in Balochistan (Aslam 2011). Gas was discovered in Balochistan in 1952, which supplies 38 per cent of the residential and commercial requirements of Pakistan but is available only 6 per cent to the Baloch Population (Bansal 2008, 187). Opposition to the major developmental projects such as Gwadar port, Saindak copper project and Mirani dam is one of the most significant apprehensions for Baloch people (Bansal 2008). They (Baloch) allege that on the one hand, they do not get benefits from these mega projects while on the other this will lead to a major influx of outsiders which will colonise the coastal region of the province (Khan, 2013).

People, both from Pakistan and elsewhere, would swarm to Gwadar if there were employment opportunities. They would eventually be able to vote. The issue is that, like Karachi, Gwadar has enough population to make Baluchistan's whole population a minority. We will lose our identity, our language, everything; Gwadar would wind up sending more representatives to the Parliament than the whole of Balochistan. Because of this, we are unwilling to embrace these massive initiatives (Bakhtiar). Balochistan produces 40 per cent of the country's energy including half of the country's gas. There are 50 mineral mines in total in Pakistan, out of which 40 are in the Balochistan province. (004). Baloch nationalists allege that major development projects have not been for economic development per se but to gain strategic superiority over insurgents (Bansal 2008). The lack of opportunities and underdevelopment resented local Baloch at large. Baloch Sardars maintain that they are not against development but against the exploitation of natural resources, which deem not to benefit the local communities (Aslam 2011).

On the other hand, Islamabad alleges that insurgency in Balochistan is supported by external actors. They reason that 'the monthly expenses of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)'s operations costs approximately 40 to 90 million rupees (Khan 2004). According to the Pakistani Urdu press, "There is a plot to force Balochistan to break away from the union." The immediate motivation for the massive oil deposits that are anticipated to be found in the province is the fact that a sizable body of individuals is being groomed for terrorism against the Pakistani state. Instead of Pakistan, foreign powers want that an independent Balochistan administer this resource.

Theoretical Explanations of Ethnic Insurgency and Violence

Civil wars and insurgencies have remained a recurrent phenomenon in the 21st century. The existing literature has focused on the grievances, state weaknesses and opportunities for insurgents. Earlier scholars including Azar demonstrated, inequality and political oppression over meagre resources generate grievances and escalate violence (Gurr, 2016). Gurr further says that economic disadvantages associated with poverty, discrimination and limited political rights lead to demand for rights that are more political. Hegre and his colleagues contend that rebellion is an outcome of political grievances and weak democratic structures that make civil war more likely (Wucherpfennig et al., 2012). However, later scholars (Collier 2000; Collier & Hoeffler 2002; Fjelde & De Soysa, 2009). Other scholars emphasized greed factors like, lootable resources are a more relevant causal factor in civil war occurrence (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002b). argue that an abundance of lootable resources, rather than conflicts over scarce resources, could explain the incidence of civil wars (Ross, 2003). maintain that lootable resources explain civil war onset and duration. Collier and Hoeffler's (1998) utility theory argues that rebels conduct civil

war 'if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs of rebellion.' For instance, pressure on land in Rwanda and the contest for natural resources in Angola were the main reasons for the civil war. In addition, the availability of finance, the cost of rebellion and a dispersed population also increase the risk of rebellion. Collier and Hoeffler argue that acute grievances of people contribute to rebellion and violent protest while economic opportunities are not the sole motive but atypical circumstances generate profitable opportunities. An Economic approach, therefore, suggest that greed and opportunities not grievances per se more relevant in causing rebellion (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002a). Greed-based models interpret 'low income per capita as a measure of the opportunity cost for participation in rebellion: the lower one's income, the less one has to lose by participating in an armed rebellion and, therefore, the more likely one is to choose to participate in an armed rebellion' (Gurses and Mason, 2010, 140). Similarly, the opportunity-based model suggests, not frustration and motivation that motivates civil war, but the material gains during the war are the main contributing factor to civil war. If the cost of civil war is more than the benefits, civil war becomes less likely even if grievance exists. Collier and Hoeffler note that the greed and opportunity argument predicts civil war more than the grievances argument (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002b).

There is a lack of consensus in economic theories regarding the outbreak of civil war and insurgency. However, the relation between low levels of income (as a measure of poverty) appears the most robust finding in the economic literature (Perry & Moffat, 2004). Similarly, Doyle and Sambanis view resistance and insurgency as 'a rational decision, influenced by the economic opportunity cost of violence, which are weighed against the net expected utility of using violence.' Economic theories suggest that 'ideology and ethnic or religious identity need not explain the onset of civil war, and rebels are essentially indistinguishable from criminals' (Ross, 2004). Collier and Hoeffler (1998) find that greed is an important predictor of insurgency than grievances. Despite clarity in the 'greed (economic)' and 'grievances (political) models, in practice, both models offer complementary or overlapping explanations of rebellion (Perry & Moffat, 2004). Baloch people maintain that local people are not getting a fair share in various developmental projects initiated in the province. State authorities and elites dear to bureaucracy are taking the lions share from the mega developmental projects such as Gwadar Port became operational on May 31, 2021. 'Islamabad and the foreign company are taking 50% and 48%, respectively, leaving only 2% profit for the Balochistan province'. The local people allege that non-Baloch's have been given more jobs. The ethnic Baluch also fears that the population of another ethnicity, i.e. Punjabis and Sandi's might change the ethnic makeup of the province (Aslam, 2011). The Baloch nationalists allege the basic purpose of the major projects is not the economic development of the people per se but to gain strategic superiority over insurgents (Bansal 2008). The underdevelopment and lack of opportunities for locals have created resentment among the Baloch. The fact or matter is local heads of the tribe Sardars maintain that they are not against the development but against the exploitation of natural resources, which do not benefit the local communities.

Factors causing Baloch Insurgency

Widespread Socio-economic inequality

Literature on ethnic insurgency shows little support for the extreme level of grievances and triggering of ethnic conflict. However, some literary works also emphasise on widespread political and economic grievances as causal factors motivating conflict and violence. Some explanations suggest that a direct relationship between an ethnic insurgency and socio-economic grievances hardly hold empirical ground, as socio-economic factors are widespread. However, grievance-based accounts might hold a lump of truth by suggesting motivational factor for insurgent mobilization. For instance, Robert Ted Gurr's theory of relative deprivation maintains that individual's unfulfilled aspirations can motivate for rebellion and material well-being (Gurr, 1993). Later scholars contend opportunity-based mobilization causes internal conflict rather than grievances (Cederman et al., 2010). Balochistan is natural resource abundant and strategically potential for economic opportunities. However, the socio-economic conditions are bleak and under stress. Much of the social sector like education, health and job opportunities are lower than other

provinces of Pakistan. Relative deprivation and grievances in the province are record high and the majority population lives below the poverty line (Ahmed et al., 2020). Economic growth Indicators and per capita income shows the lowest performance over the last decade's depreciation (Kakar et al., 2022).

Balochistan is the least populated province and nearly seventy-two percent of the population lives in rural areas. According to the National population census 2017, school-age children are 4.34 million out of the 12.34 million total population. The province has a young population and needs of quality education, skill development and job opportunities. The majority of youth complain under development and the risk of losing rights to education owing to growing poverty and ever-decreasing job opportunities. Policy analyst's view dire socio-economic conditions in Balochistan and overtime may turn into an uncontrollable challenge that is already unfolding. Public service delivery and public goods available to privileged classes. Pakistan economic survey (2021-22) indicates discouraging private and public sector investment. Literacy rate and labour force, skilled workers are the lowest (Pakistan, n.d.). The deteriorating security situation is the chief reason behind low private investment in Balochistan. Potential investors are reluctant and largely invest money in the real estate business which is not affordable for a low-income Baloch society. Besides low investment and low economic growth, the lack of education and health facilities worsened the situation. Water security is another factor, where increasing climatic conditions exacerbated scarce water resources that much of the mountainous, scattered population use for daily consumption (Omer Siddique, 2022).

Insurgent attacks and Political Repression

Scholars of armed conflict pointed out some of the conditions under which civil war or ethnic conflict occurs. As rebels demand from the incumbent government certain reforms claiming to correct perceived injustices. These demands range from reforms in the current political structure, transfer of public goods, larger political autonomy, regime change, toppling of government or secession from the state (Cederman et al., 2013). Over time grievances evolve large, turn into collective action, and go violent. The central government respond and use various strategies depending on the nature of demands. Civil war literature suggests conditions incumbent government to respond and resort to the use of force to quell the challenger's demands. For instance, social and economic injustices may become politicized and thereby a basis for collective action. Incumbents also refuse through the sustained exclusion of the rebel groups from state power and make violent outcomes. Refusal to grant powers takes radical form and groups struggle for power. Chronic exclusion and outright discrimination is a forms of state repression and leave little choice but to respond with violence for challengers. Third, indiscriminate violence may bring counterproductive outcomes and undermine moderate leaders (Cederman et al., 2013).

In the wake of the Killing of (Akbar Khan Bugti) in 2006, subsequent episodes of ethnic violence increased. As a result, incumbent governments took strong action both military and economic to eliminate violence and bring peace. Under the circumstances of Gwadar Port construction, and initiation of various natural resource explorations, the local leaders, Sardars and middle-class youth resented over. Besides these movements, some rebel groups also increased their deadly attacks on security personnel and international workers in the area. Insurgent groups and civil society raised concerns over possible resource exploitation either exaggerated or actual. To mitigate the government of Pakistan in 2010 introduced a special legal and economic package for the province to mitigate long socio-economic and political grievances. The government of Pakistan also showed a willingness to negotiate with rebel groups but with certain conditions. However, owing to various structural and geopolitical conditions, violence in Balochistan continued and taking a surge in recent years. The government of Pakistan blamed for its policy toward the insurgent groups and the province. However, implementation of the 18th amendment and granting powers to the provinces and a special package to the province, the government has not so far been successful in resorting to peace. The government of Pakistan has been also blamed for its indiscriminate policy of repression, forceful abduction and widespread enforced disappearance and human rights violations (Balochistan: A Land of Neglect and Exploitation, n.d.; Bansal, 2005; Gattani, 2021).

Resource exploitation and developmental projects

There has been a strong association between a state's natural resource exploitation and ethnic armed conflict (Ross, 2004). An armed conflict between the government of Pakistan and an ethnic Baloch minority group has been for the last five decades over allegedly natural resources. The tribal political structure is both a curse and a blessing providing opportunities for tribal chiefs to remain in authority and a curse for the underdevelopment of resource-rich provinces (Lieven, 2017; Noraiee, 2020). Balochistan occupies 44% of the land territory and its natural resources; geography attracts central importance for Pakistan and in the region. Pakistan's political economy share comprises of Baluchistan's natural gas, minerals, copper, gold, and Gwadar port on the coastal line beside agricultural potential. Gwadar ports potential benefits and leasing of gold and copper mineral exploration to foreign and domestic companies highlight potential benefits and losses for the province (M. Ahmed & Baloch, 2015). Although, from a developmental perspective, investment in hard infrastructure would generate market and employment for unemployed youth. Notwithstanding, foreign direct investment and domestic investment of multiple projects also contend the resentment among common Baloch. Baloch's are fearful of the provinces' potential resource exploitation.

Pakistan's peripheral sector opportunities monopolize by the state's elite-patronage network. Patronage network is extensive and an embedded social reality that determines market structure what William Reno rightly puts 'social domination' through provisions of access to weapons and protection against rivals (Reno & Reno, 2002). Elite clientelism in particular, states central bureaucratic elite who favours bribery and favouritism indicate the case. Sardars, political party elites, businesspersons and bureaucracy nexus show the hard reality of resource exploitation and corruption prevalent in the areas over the decades. Despite the province being full of natural resources, it is ironic that the majority of the population lacks basic facilities for modern life. Patron's aid to the client, protection, security, economic incentives and coercive elimination can explain the relationship and observable implications in Balochistan. Influence flow from patron to clients is the case. The client's degree of dependence on economic and security and patrons influence determines by power differential exploitation, unfair resource distribution and access to power in Balochistan (Khan, 2009). Gas was discovered in 1950s but large parts of Balochistan are denied of their right. They contend that the rapid development catch attraction from wealthy and educated youth from developed cities of other provinces of Pakistan and Balochi is deprived. Besides common fears, Baloch youth resent that corruption, and clientelism from state authorities, Bureaucracy would loot and plunder their natural assets. Gwadar port and adjacent areas were their earnings deprive spots for local fisheries who make their livelihoods. Migration and settlement of wealthy people from other parts of the country capture the marine fishing and local's economic position becomes worse. Taking advantage and blame game, ethnic rebel groups exploit the situation and ignite hate and emotions against the state culminating in rebel behavior and created law and order situation. In fact, peace and development become a rare commodity.

External Factor and ethnic mobilization

Islamabad believes Baluch insurgency is externally driven. Although, evidence has been not so far substantiated. An estimate suggests that 'the monthly expenses of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)'s operations range from 40 to 90 million rupees respectively' (Khan 2004). The acts of sabotage and a multitude of arms, funding to Baloch Liberation Army and support for social media campaigns show that there is a secret geopolitical game hatching in Balochistan. Pakistan state authorities allege that foreign powers do not want to see developing Gwadar port run and accrue benefits to Pakistan. According to an estimated year 40 to 90 million budge of BLA and that money comes two possible sources; from external powers and internal illegal business. There are also some media outlets that run campaigns against the government of Pakistan. Some political analysts assume that foreigners have trained BLA recruitment forces. BLA and other Banned militant organizations are actively involved in activities harmful for the developmental project (Bansal, 2008). The trained men of these militant organizations move from place to place and take refuge in neighboring countries. Some scholars of the view that possibly foreign powers

and regional powers want to spoil the gas. From the Pakistan's view, during military operations, insurgent groups used advance weapons of USSR. The lethal attacks on governmental infrastructure leave short space for dialogue. Pakistan's state authorities blame on Iran, Afghanistan and USA. These powers do not want to see others power to be there. Because Gwadar port and other mineral resource potential attractions gathered global powers interest. The United State of America does not want China to invest in Balochistan. There is a great conspiracy hatching to sabotage interests of Pakistan. Pakistan's authorities indicated, Indian and other foreign powers are behind the insurgents and want to independent Balochistan for doing their nefarious business.

Strategically positioned, Balochistan shares its western border with Iran and northern border with Afghanistan. With the construction of Gwadar Port, Balochistan has also attracted the interest of China, Central Asian governments, and the United States. Given that India and Afghanistan had long-running territorial conflicts with Pakistan, it was clear in the 1970s that they were aiding Baloch nationalists. But things have since changed. The Taliban are once again posing a threat to the international forces occupying Afghanistan.

In Balochistan, India has openly and repeatedly condemned Pakistani army activities, but in this case as well, India's goal is to win the support of Baloch nationalists for potential economic rewards, not to topple Pakistan. Economically, India is also interested in Afghanistan and the Central Asian nations; hence, Baluchistan's stability is crucial. Rehman Malik, the prime minister's adviser on interior affairs for the new civilian government, claimed, "Russia and India were supporting the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) in its secession bid," raising the rhetoric that the previous Musharraf regime used about Indian support for Baloch nationalists without providing any evidence of such involvement (Alvi, 2009).

Due to the large Baloch population (1.2 million) living close to the Iran-Pakistan border, Iran has long been on the lookout for any nationalist revolt in Balochistan. In fact, to put an end to the Baloch armed rebellion in the 1970s conflict, the shah of Iran gave Pakistan \$200 million and US-supplied combat helicopters, some of which were flown by Iranian pilots (Khan 2005). Balochistan's economic stability also enables Iran, one of the world's top producers of oil and gas, to supply gas to India and Pakistan.

The United States does not want the Pakistani army to deviate from its given task of actively participating in the so-called War on Terror. In the absence of a communist danger, the United States need not be concerned about secular Baloch nationalism. Although there is no love lost between Baloch nationalists and the Taliban, political instability and Balochistan's dire law and order situation have made it easier for Islamic extremists to recruit and train new members. That bothers Baloch nationalists just as much as it does the United States.

Another worry for the U.S. is the building of Gwadar Port with the help of China, which will naturally facilitate a strategic superiority in the Indian Ocean for the emerging economic giant. Washington is also opposed to the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, believing that it will boost the Iranian economy and "reduce the West's economic leverage over Tehran—economic leverage that is necessary to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions" (Khan, 2009).

Middle Class Youth Mobilization: A Crucial Factor in Recent Episodes of Conflict

In addition, the Baloch middle class youth has also been influenced by the Baloch nationalist movement, which seeks greater autonomy and self-determination for Balochistan. This movement has gained momentum in recent years, as Baloch people have become increasingly frustrated with the government's policies and the lack of progress towards achieving their demands. They have also been involved in armed struggle and have carried out attacks against government targets, including security forces. Furthermore, the Baloch middle class youth is also motivated by a sense of cultural identity and pride in their Baloch heritage. They view themselves as defenders of their culture and traditions, which they believe are being threatened by the dominant Punjabi and Urdu-speaking elites in Pakistan. In conclusion, the Baloch middle class youth has played a significant role in insurgent mobilization in Balochistan. Their

involvement has been driven by a sense of economic and political marginalization, cultural identity, and the Baloch nationalist movement. Their leadership and activism have contributed to the ongoing struggle for greater autonomy and self-determination in Balochistan.

The youth mobilization has been particularly effective in recruiting new fighters for the insurgency, as young people are often more willing to take risks and engage in violent activities. The use of social media and other forms of communication has also played a role in mobilizing young Balochs, as it allows them to connect with like-minded individuals and share their grievances with a wider audience. However, the youth mobilization has also been met with resistance from the Pakistani state, which has cracked down on Baloch nationalist groups and their supporters. This has led to increased violence and instability in the province, and has further fueled the sense of alienation and resentment among Baloch youth.

In conclusion, the Balochistan youth mobilization is an important phenomenon in the ongoing ethnic insurgency in Balochistan. While it has helped to galvanize support for the insurgency among young people, it has also contributed to increased violence and instability in the region. Addressing the underlying grievances of the Baloch people, including their economic and political marginalization, will be crucial in finding a lasting solution to the conflict.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Balochistan is experiencing rise in ethnic violence, driven by multiple factors. However, the latest episodes of violence that spread across breadth and width of the insurgent landscape supported by an emergence of middle class educated youth. Although, it is not clear the number of youth joined actual warfare but it is clear that current support base of insurgency is from middle class youth. Taking advantage of overt support from middle class, transnational terror networks are reorganizing with a number of active rebel groups that sought refuge in neighbouring nations. Although the ethnic mobilization of the Baloch has gained strength since 2003. The poor socioeconomic circumstances of the Baloch people and the pervasive inequality have long given political entrepreneurs fodder for finger-pointing. Since ancient times, tribalism and authority have deteriorated, leading to the development of hatreds and feuds against the centre. Baloch ethnic nationalists accuse Pakistan of having a suppressive foreign policy toward the area, which has led to insurgency as a side effect. In addition, the region's pervasive socioeconomic inequality, a result of internal migration, fuels Baloch resentment and fears of turning into a minority. The construction of Gwadar Port and other developmental projects got attraction from regional and international powers' attention that has political and economic implications. Political instability is the biggest issue for Pakistan and needs to be resolved through dialogue with Baloch youth and Sardars make concessions willing to assimilate in the system and accept constitution of Pakistan. Baloch youth are resentful of pervasive bureaucratic corruption and ethnic Punjab's dominance and resource exploitation. Analysing the prevailing security, socio-economic and geopolitical circumstance, this paper suggests some policy recommendations.

1. Middle class educated youth are very actively using social media platform digital and non-digital across the national boundaries. Some of the members are providing intellectual, philosophical and motivational base. The state of Pakistan can respond these youth through actively involving and responding from public institutions and mitigating their grievances and concerns.
2. In the past, state is alleged of using force and violence against these active members of the Baloch organisation. This fuels insurgency. Negotiation and provision of political democratic platform can involve participation and responsibility.
3. These concerns need urgent attention. Negotiation and civil authority might help to assimilate those angry Sardars and loyalists who went rebels. In this regard, the 18th amendment and Balochistan special package is a positive development and strict implementation.
4. On the question of cross-border terrorism, Pakistan's security forces must deal separately with the issue and must enhance its intelligence. Education and skilful jobs should preferentially give to

Baloch youth and must control corruption, illegal smuggling of arms, and trafficking. The central government must also stop intervention in provincial government affairs and ensure provincial autonomy. Provincial autonomy and stability will trickle down the true benefits of democracy, bring awareness, and control the poverty gap. The widespread cases of enforced disappearances and human rights violations stoppage will heal the societal cleavages and ensure confidence among resentful Baloch.

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Conflict of Interest


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