
RECONFIGURING IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE: NATIONALIST POLITICS IN POST-MUSHARRAF BALOCHISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This research paper seeks to provide answers related to Baloch hyper nationalism issues. It will explore the relationship between identity politics, nationalism state coercions. Balochistan is the largest province in terms of area, yet least developed and deprived of basic infrastructure. Keeping this fact in mind, an effort has been made to analyze nationalism and conflict in Pakistan by finding research gaps with respect to the social and economic framework of Baloch nationalism. The marginalization issue has been the prime driver of Hyper nationalism in Baloch. Marginalization and alienation of Balochistan from broader modernization initiatives have increased sentiments of alienation and fostered nationalist ideologies rooted in ethnic identity. Centrifugal ethnic, linguistic, and regional pressures have been strengthened by successive periods of authoritarian control. This is seen in the worsening situation since Musharraf's rule and the Baloch nationalists' conflict with the state, which is being viewed as a form of civil war. Additionally, this paper shows that a state-centric strategy is insufficient. Enhancing the socioeconomic situation and the political culture that goes along with it, as well as the conditions surrounding the Balochistan issue, must also receive attention.

KEYWORDS

Balochistan, Pakistan, Nationalism, Securitization, Social & Economic Framework

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Pakistan shares characteristics with many emerging nations, including class, gender, and regional disparities, as well as tensions between nation-building and ethnicity, modernization and tradition. Despite the benefits of systems analysis and model construction, its intricacies and contradictions sometimes become too complicated. The authoritarianism of Pakistan left over from colonialism and the confusing relationship between Pakistani nationalism and ethnic identities during the freedom struggle, limit the state's ability to settle many ethnic conflicts. Ironically, this dual historical legacy that has linked pluralism to a threat to contemporary Pakistani statehood has undermined its legitimacy by creating a divide between the state and society.

The lack of legitimacy and elite fear of subversion of state-building by subaltern and ethnic forces has been a fundamental and unsolvable issue in Pakistan. The fearful state that has resulted from it views pluralism as a source of weakness rather than strength. In reaction to sub-nationalist movements, ruling elites have switched from co-optation to coercion. Ian Talbot discusses the South Asian states' incapacity to settle these disputes and the position of economic dependence in these outlying capitalist nations. (Talbot 1997) Theoretical understandings of Pakistan's instability can yield practical insights rather than comprehensive explanations. While the ideas of ethnic stereotyping, ethnic discrimination, and depoliticization provide some insight into the causes of Balochistan, weak political institutionalization contributes to the explanation of the ongoing legitimacy issues of Pakistan's successive administrations. The emergence of the Baluch independence movement may be somewhat explained by the idea of ethnic activists as proposed by rational choice theory.

INTRODUCTION

Balochistan holds a strategic importance as far as the geographical location of Pakistan is concerned. Unfortunately, it is the most neglected and underdeveloped provinces of Pakistan. It is the most resource-rich area in the country, holding abundant reserves of oil, gas, gold, copper and other minerals, which makes it a key area for exploitative actors. It has been characterized by extreme political instability and prevalent poverty due to the continual ostracization from national development policies. This exclusion has exacerbated the feeling of alienation in the Baloch community.

During Pervaiz Musharraf's rule (1999-2008), the province witnessed the killing of Sardar Akber Bugti, which created unrest and anti-state sentiments reached its zenith. (Ahmed, 2020). The geographical surveys and research carried out by Pakistan revealed a vast amount of minerals, gold, and copper reserves. Recodic,

Saindak projects and announcement of operationalization of Gawadar Port were seen as projects which will deprive Baloch of their rights. Rather, these projects intensified tension with the state. Military action to stop Baluch militancy added fuel to the fire. Military action prompted Baloch nationalists to go to extreme ends as they adopted hyper nationalistic, radicalized version of nationalism. The demand for self-determination was heard in the streets and corners of Balochistan. Since then, the region has been turbulent.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1. How have state-building tactics, colonial legacies, and sociopolitical exclusion influenced the development of hyper-nationalistic movements in Balochistan during Pervaiz Musharraf's tenure?

Q2. How has the Baloch community's perception of the state's social and economic exploitation changed as a result of initiatives like the Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)?

Q3. How has the emergence of hyper-nationalistic attitudes and insurgent activities in Balochistan since the Musharraf era been influenced by militarized state policies and the strategies used to address the difficulties faced by the Baloch people?

Q4. How do Balochistan's nationalistic movements relate to regional geopolitical considerations and alleged foreign intrusions, and how do these factors intersect with Pakistan's national security concerns?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ayesha Jalal (1990) observes institutional degradation and state-society estrangement lack a historical background to describe state authoritarianism. Understanding the autonomy of the state from society requires a historical understanding of the marginalization of Pakistani areas during the freedom movement. She focuses on specific instances where state-building took precedence over political participation. It was British practice to prioritize executive power over representative power. Pakistan inherited the British vice regal tradition. Successive Pakistani rulers have used this practice to stifle political engagement. When these historical facts are combined, the picture becomes clear. State policies regarding Baluchistan have traditionally been characterized by militarization and economic neglect. The 1973 dismissal of the provincial government and ensuing military actions sparked the third significant insurgency, heightening calls for autonomy or independence (Siddiqi, 2012). Tensions rose during General

Musharraf's tenure, particularly with the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti, which became a focal point for nationalist sentiments. The involvement of international entities in the resource-rich areas of Balochistan has complicated the conflict, aggravating tensions between the province and the federal government. (Ahmed, 2012). The conflict between province and Pakistani identities is another significant legacy. After independence, provincialism became a hindrance to nation-building, as expected.

Hashmi (2015) links Baloch nationalism with marginalization and alienation. According to him, Balochistan was the least focused and underdeveloped region during British rule, and nothing changed after partition. The British allowed Baluch sardars to rule the area under their autonomy.

After partition, this legacy was continued but with state oppression. (Harrison, 1981).

Wirsing (2008) explains the reason behind the point of conflict between the state and Baloch nationalists. He links the annexation of Kalat with Pakistan in 1948 as the trigger point. Balochistan was not granted the status of a Province till 1973. It was a princely state during British times. Baloch sardars demanded autonomy and assembly representation. When the demands were not fulfilled, they took to armed struggle. The incorporation into Pakistan, as well as the termination of tribal authority, sparked protests and rallies, which the government routinely suppressed. The premature rejection of Baloch autonomy fostered the seeds of hostility and suspicion toward central authorities.

Army's presence in Balochistan during Musharraf's regime has been viewed as suspicion. It hampered efforts to control law and order situation and civilian supremacy. He dispatched over 80,000 troops to combat a tribal/autonomist insurgency in a territory with a population of less than 6.5 million. (Harrison ,2006). With each passing day. Baloch nationalist demands increased. Some of these were:

- Provincial autonomy
- Natural resource royalties
- Stop Punjabis from exploiting Balochistan's resources
- Generate and spend revenue.
- Revision of the NFC award distribution formula.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two core concepts in Realism theory are Power and security. Realism characterizes the state as the supreme authority. Theorists such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes proposed the security dilemma. Realist philosophers, including Machiavelli and Hobbes, view states as rational creatures involved in a continual

security dilemma, attempting to grow their authority while maintaining their sovereignty. Considering the Balochistan conflict, it is obvious that Pakistan's actions reflect a realist approach, while the Baloch nation took it as a substantial danger to integrity and sovereignty. Using the Realist lens to understand the situation, it is clear that the state does not want other provinces to act in the same manner as the Baloch nation is doing so in order to maintain control. It is the time for state dominance.

Since Balochistan is rich with minerals, natural gas, gold, and copper reserves, it's a significant component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is critical to Pakistan's national power and economic goals. Realism explains Pakistan's actions as measures to protect its strategic interests. Nonetheless, the reliance on coercive measures has entrenched a cycle of conflict, aggravating complaints among the Baloch people and risking long-term stability.

Another important theory to learn concepts like hyper nationalism is Earnest Gellner's Theory, commonly known as Modernization theory. It brings into light wider perspectives, like arguing that the marginalized policies adopted by states compel communities to adopt anti-state policies. Balochistan, as a province is a practical example of the theory, as we witness alienation, exploitation, and non-representation; all these factors played a crucial role in anti-state sentiments by Baloch nationalism. Having insights from Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" will improve our comprehension of how collective mobilization results from shared concerns.

The different theories offer important viewpoints. Nationalism theory discloses the fundamental elements of Baloch identity and resistance, while realism explains the strategic needs and power dynamics of the state. When taken as a whole, these ideas show how Pakistan's realist tactics have heightened nationalist resentment, which is then articulated in a securitized framework to justify more repression. These dynamics emphasize the need for varied solutions and the complex difficulties in dealing with hyper-nationalism in Balochistan. The theoretical framework highlights the intricate relationships between security, identity, and power in the Balochistan conflict. Nationalism theory highlights the complaints and ambitions of the Baloch people, whereas realism and securitization theory concentrate on state-oriented answers.

IMPACT OF GENERAL MUSHARRAF'S POLICIES

Army Chief General Pervaiz Musharraf overthrew Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless military coup in 1999. In May 2000, the Supreme Court upheld the Musharraf government's constitutionality under the guise of Justice Munir's infamous Doctrine of Necessity.

The suppression of Baloch nationalist movements was a defining feature of Musharraf's government. In the pretense of maintaining law and order, prominent political figures and activists were routinely targeted, leading to several arrests, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial deaths. (Siddiqi, 2012) The regime of Musharraf began to militarize Balochistan to a considerable degree. The mobilization of military forces and intelligence services as part of the government's response to dissent increased the regional tensions already present. An important turning point was the 2006 death of prominent Baloch leader and former Chief Minister Nawab Akbar Bugti, which sparked widespread demonstrations and a resurgence of rebel activity. (Shaikh, 2020). The mistrust between the province and the federal government was exacerbated by this occurrence, which was widely denounced as evidence of the state's disregard for Baloch political issues

Musharraf's economic plan was linked to Balochistan's development. His aim was on big developmental projects like Saindak and Gwadar Port. He wanted to incorporate Balochistan into Pakistan's economic structure. However, these programs frequently disregarded local stakeholders, giving the impression that development was more about bolstering federal authority than it was about meeting local needs (GWU IAR, 2020). Because these policies were presented as a direct threat to Baloch identity and autonomy, they aided in the emergence of hyper-nationalistic elements.

(Ahmed, 2020) notes that Baluchistan is significant because of its proximity to Afghanistan and Iran. The conflict between the Army and Baloch militants was intensified once it was confirmed that Foreign involvement was reported. The sentiments of alienation and marginalization grew further with the Indian Secret Agency RAW's involvement, providing training and weapons to Baluch Nationalists. The ongoing battle has been made more complex by claims of outside assistance for insurgent organizations, especially from Afghanistan and India. The area is still plagued by economic exploitation, poor political representation, and a notable lack of real development initiatives, all of which have made the locals feel neglected.

POST-MUSHARRAF ERA AND THE RISE OF HYPER-NATIONALISM

Although Pervaiz Musharraf resigned in 2008, and PPPP won the elections, no decrease was observed as far as anti-state slogans were concerned. Baloch nationalism has been on the rise since 2008 due to a confluence of unresolved issues and changing sociopolitical conditions. Musharraf's departure left a political void that was not sufficiently filled by succeeding civilian administrations, which neglected to address Balochistan's issues. (Wirsing, 2012)

A move toward more radical elements was signaled by the emergence of groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA). Ahmed (2020) observes that the state's failure to start dialogue with hyper

nationalist leadership fueled the growth of insurgencies and a rise in assaults on security forces. According to Siddiqi (2012), perceived challenges to Baloch culture and autonomy lead to an increase in the emphasis on ethnic identity. With guns in their hands and hiding in caves, young nationalistic leadership playing a crucial role in refusing federal authority, chanted rebel nationalist slogans which focused emphasized self-determination and rejected writ authority.

ECONOMIC FATCTORS

Marginalization and the Role of CPEC

Due to decades of resource extraction that have produced little benefit for local development, Baluchistan's economic marginalization has a historical background that goes beyond the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Siddiqi (2012) highlights that although the province is a major natural gas supplier to Pakistan, its citizens still lack basic amenities and infrastructure.

According to Ahmed (2020), successive administrations have consistently placed resource exploitation above the well-being of the local populace, which has reinforced patterns of underdevelopment and fostered hostility. Minerals and natural gas, two of Baluchistan's abundant natural resources, are believed to be used for the benefit of the nation with little benefit to local development. Economic inequality has long been a prominent feature of Baloch nationalism. The militarism that took place during and after the Afghan-Soviet War exacerbates the neglect that Pashtun regions endure, leaving them underdeveloped and susceptible to instability.

CPEC was seen as a game-changer for Pakistan, but Baloch nationalist forces denounced the project, terming it as another tactic by the state to deprive them of their rights. (Shaikh, 2020). The lack of local involvement in the decision-making process has intensified sentiments of exploitation, turning Gwadar into a symbol of broader economic marginalization. Baloch nationalism movements have been more active as a result of the economic policies connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Ahmed (2020) claims that the exclusion of Baloch from important economic initiatives has bolstered calls for greater autonomy or complete independence. Insurgent groups have frequently targeted CPEC-related projects, claiming they are exploitative endeavours that prioritize the interests of foreign investors and the federal government over the needs of local communities (Hashmi, 2015).

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Particularly since the Musharraf period, the role of regional dynamics and the engagement of external institutions in the Balochistan conflict have continuously come to light as significant issues. The complicated character of nationalist movements in provinces and the corresponding responses from states can be

attributed to claims of geopolitical motivations, international influences, and foreign involvement. Groups of Baloch rebels have frequently claimed assistance from international organizations, especially those in Afghanistan and India. India's purported support of Baloch insurgents has been a significant topic in Pakistan's security discourse, claims Ahmed (2020). Evidence of suspected involvement was provided by the arrest of Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was charged with spying and supporting separatist movements. Furthermore, rebel organizations have taken refuge along the unprotected border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, making it more difficult for the government to fight insurgency.

The strategic location of Balochistan, bordering both Iran and Afghanistan, has rendered it a significant area of regional rivalry. Iran's apprehensions regarding the emergence of Baloch nationalism are closely tied to its own Baloch community, prompting a careful diplomatic approach towards Pakistan. In contrast, the volatile political landscape of Afghanistan, coupled with the actions of non-state actors near the border, has intensified the instability within Baluchistan. (Shaikh 2009)

RESEARCH DESIGN

While conducting this research, a qualitative approach was adopted. The purpose was to trace why and how hyper nationalistic elements strengthened, and things got out of control. Another goal was to find interaction between socio-economic, political and sociocultural elements. Both Primary and Secondary sources are used in this research. Speeches, policy documents are analyzed. As far as the secondary source is concerned, various research articles, books were consulted. This was complemented by a literature review that sought to identify relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks within existing scholarship, particularly focusing on realism, nationalism theory, and securitization theory to provide a structured basis for analysis

EVOLUTION OF BALOCH NATIONALIST ACTORS

After the killing Of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006, The Baluchistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) stepped down from all its seats in late 2006, in both the National and Provincial assemblies, in show of protest against the military operations and enforced disappearances. BNP-M boycotted the general elections in 2008 again, pointing out the extra-judicial killings and illegal incarceration of party members by intelligence agencies.

BNP formed the provincial government in 1997 under Akhtar Mengal, and soon after that, in 1998, the party started disintegrating with the formation of BNP-Awami. This fracture in the party structure caused disputes among the leadership and compromised the party's unified stance and its credibility. The following civilian administrations of PPP, PML-N and PTI incorporated middling leaders

from the Baloch community through project funds and tokenism. The result of it was the government swaying away from the main demands (resource control, illegitimate incarcerations inquiries) and left them unanswered. This weakened the parties' oppositional stance. While the party leadership concentrated on the affiliations in Islamabad, the local tribal councils and activists outlined disenfranchisement. This outcry weakened the parties' organization mechanisms and created space for more revolutionary way out (Ahmed, 2020; Siddiqi, 2012)

MILITARIZATION AND SECURITY DYNAMICS

Although Pakistan returned to a civilian form of government in 2008, its policy toward Balochistan remained one of securitization and militarization. Although General Musharraf's era laid the basis for counterinsurgency operations, the successive governments in Pakistan, under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), essentially sustained (and at times, intensified) military presence in the Balochistan region. This was seen in the presence of the Frontier Corps (FC), intelligence agencies, and paramilitary forces in the region, particularly in regions such as Khuzdar, Kech, and Dera Bugti. The civilian governments' limited capacity, and perhaps reluctance, to confront the military establishment led to the deeper entrenchment of the national security approach. This was seen through and under the repeated framing of Baluchistan as a "hub of foreign-funded terrorism", which allowed for the legitimization of military crackdowns, which often came under the facade of counterterrorism operations and in the pursuit of protecting national sovereignty.

Similarly, to militarization, there has also been an arguable systematic crackdown on civil society in the Baluchistan region, under which media organizations have faced censorship, especially when covering issues related to abuses of human rights (including disappearances or even nationalist activism). Further, journalists operating in the region often make use of self-censorship due to the dual threats posed by both state agencies and insurgent groups. This leads to the journalists having to walk a fine line in their presented narrative and reporting. In extreme cases, local news agencies and newspapers have been banned and even forced to shut down operations. Watchdogs of press freedom have frequently listed Baluchistan as one of the most dangerous regions for journalists and journalism in Pakistan. Peaceful student protests, or those by political workers, have also been suppressed through the invocation of Section 144. These peaceful protesters have faced mass arrest and violence at the hands of police and armed forces. In the same manner of suppression, NGOs attempting to work in the region have faced

bureaucratic hurdles, security clearance issues, as well as open hostility from security institutions. Even international organizations have been expelled, or blocked from operation in the region, which not only restricts humanitarian work but also curtails independent reporting and, more broadly, accountability. Such a curtailment has been seen by many as the deliberate suppression of the civil space, whereby peaceful avenues for political expression and advocacy have been limited. As a result, many disillusioned youth have become more susceptible to the sentiments and forces of radicalization and militancy, perceiving violence as the only viable and/or feasible means to assert their identity and demand their rights. The state's persistent securitization of the Baloch identity has led to profound impacts on the political psychology of the Baloch people, particularly the youth. As posited by the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, when an issue is portrayed and framed as an "existential threat", it invites and legitimizes responses including military forces, suspension and/or suppression of rights, as well as the narrowing of political discourse and the political space.

Steps were not taken to address their grievances, rather Baluch nationalism is deemed as a threat to Pakistan's solidarity. A vacuum has been created, and it has been filled by Hyper nationalistic forces. And we have seen the emergence of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and other militant outfits, which aim to defend oppressive actions and enhance the sense of alienation and deprivation among Baloch. Since there is no dialogue between the state and Baloch, therefore violent protests are increasing with each passing day and separatist elements have positioned themselves as vehicles of resistance.

Young Baloch find attraction in joining these groups because they have grown up in an environment where violence, marginalization and ideological emptiness are portrayed by nationalistic elements. In rural areas where unemployment and poverty are widespread, economic desperation and a disregard for education also play a role in recruiting new members for these violent organizations. The radicalization of Baloch youth is therefore a political reaction to securitized persecution and systematic marginalization, not merely a result or byproduct of extremist ideology.

ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION AND CPEC DISILLUSIONMENT

Approximately 20,000 acres of coastal land of Gwadar have been purchased for port-related development and infrastructure since of start of 2000. Many smallholders are unable to buy replacement land because "rate fixation" committees set compensation rates 40–60% below the going market values, according to locals. For instance, a 2018 survey of 120 expropriated families found average payouts of

PKR 50,000 per kanal, against market rates exceeding PKR 120,000. Further, the influx of Chinese workers, alongside contract labourers from Punjab and Sindh, has transformed the social fabric of Gwadar. Baloch fishermen and traders, who were once the majority, contend with rising rents and competition in retail and services. This rapid change has also intensified a sense of economic dispossession among indigenous communities.

Moreover, roughly 85% of CPEC civil-work contracts in Balochistan have gone to large Chinese SOEs or Karachi-based conglomerates, sidelining local contractors who perhaps lack the capital to meet stringent performance bonds. In the same sense, although CPEC pledged a “Chinese-Pakistan partnership”, Balochistan’s 12% share of federal revenues has not been augmented to reflect its contribution in the strategic realm. In the years 2021-2022, only about 8% of CPEC-related employment in the province went to low workers, mostly in low-skill roles; however, 90% of taxable revenues generated by the Gwadar Port remain remitted to Islamabad, with little earmarked or allocated for development of the province itself.

Then, launched in August of 2018, the Aghaz-e-Huqooq program was reintroduced by the PTI government, pledging roads, schools, and health centres across all 34 districts of Balochistan. In this relaunch, the program retained PKR 200 billion for its promised development; this contrasts with the previously proposed program, which was broadly political. By 2024, though, only about 56% of the proposed road schemes had been completed (which is 106 of the proposed 190 projects), less than 40% of allocated funds for educational infrastructure had been disbursed, and health centre construction stood at only 45% progress (according to 2024 data by the Planning Commission). In terms of public perception, many among the Baloch citizens viewed the package as a political manoeuvre, rather than a sincere effort for the upliftment of the region. A 2023 opinion poll showed 62% citizens believing that “little will change until locals control decision-making” (Ahmed, 2023). Such skepticism deepened and was exacerbated by disappointment related to the CPEC project, as many saw the promise of prosperity to “flow past” Balochistan rather than “to” it.

MILITANT NARRATIVES

Economic Colonialism

Armed groups such as the BLA and BRA have weaponized economic grievances to formulate a powerful ideological tool; recasting state-sponsored development projects as “economic colonialism.” In this weaponization, the groups systematically demonize CPEC initiatives, in particular the Gwadar Port, as instruments used by the external actors to extract wealth and resources from

Baluchistan, while leaving the locals in a state of impoverishment and dispossession. This militant messaging stresses that the true purpose of the Gwadar Port (and adjacent offshore exploration), is not for local upliftment, but for the rapid exporting of minerals and hydrocarbons to distant markets. BLA leaflets and audio broadcasts highlight this belief to prove that Baluchistan's seabed is being stripped without its consent. According to Achakzai (2019), this supports the myth that links costly (development) contracts to the deliberate exploitation and robbery of Baloch resources. This "siphoning" off of wealth is narrated by militant organizations as "going into the pockets of generals and foreign investors", demeaning Baloch prosperity, integrity, and autonomy. Such a narrative and depiction cast the state and private developers as "co-conspirators", fueling resentment among the labourers in Baluchistan who feel as though their work yields no local dividends (this includes local fishermen and miners).

The BLA and BRA portray the government land-grab in Gwadar as an act of "ethnic cleansing" that is being done under the pretext of "national interest". Posters of nationalist organizations depict, for example, bulldozers uprooting ancestral homes, insisting that entire villages have been "bulldozed" to pave the way for infrastructural development that would not provide benefits to the locals. This rhetoric depicts a sense of the forced removal of the people, and even entire communities, transforming compensation disputes into threats of existential nature. Further, such sentiments of "population engineering" promote the narrative of the exodus of the Baloch people from the homeland, in order to make way for infrastructure, luxury hotels, and factories. This highlights the increasing fear among the Baloch people that demographic change will seek to permanently marginalize them from political and economic life in their rightful homeland.

The development work done in Gwadar has been denounced by BLA, as the militant wing expressed in a statement which read that, "Gwadar is not our gateway to progress, but merely a means to extract our fish, land, and our future - profit for the few at the expense of many." This demonstrates how ports and highways are frequently framed as instruments of exploitation that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the forces occupying the Baluchistan region, pushing the Baloch people to the outskirts of their own society rather than as symbols of modernization. This framing is widespread and militant.

Regional & External Influences

Pakistan was aware of the activities and espionage of other countries' secret agents, and a remarkable achievement was made in this regard. In 2016, Pakistan arrested an Indian agent, Kulbhushan Jadhav, entering in Balochistan. He confessed in his

recorded statement that he was creating unrest in Balochistan by providing financial and technical support to Baloch separatist militants. He confessed before Pakistan officials that he belonged to the RAW Indian Secret Service Agency.

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a 2649 Km long border known as the Durand Line. The porous border has been used by smugglers, agents. With the Taliban's return to Kabul in August 2021, it was hoped that relations would be better between the two countries. During the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan guerrilla fighters used Baluchistan as their hideouts. Two major ethnic groups are Baloch and Pashtun, having a 1468-kilometer border between Balochistan and Afghanistan. Tribesmen engage in daily minor chores to provide food and shelter for families in remote, non-irrigated regions of both nations. Being linked and interdependent, the border is still a thin one.

When neighborhood interactions, like those with Iran, fail, Balochistan's security concerns are also cited as the reason. An example of how projects become politicized fault lines in regional conflicts is the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline, which has been proposed since the early 2000s and crosses Balochistan. However, security concerns originating from the Balochistan region have been cited as the reason for its delays. Furthermore, Iran sees Pakistan's Baloch rebellion with caution, straddling the line between calls for Pakistan to crack down harsher and covert assistance for like-minded groups, as its own Baloch minority has suffered under Tehran's centralization policies. Pakistan's reputation and its handling of the Balochistan region are further complicated by this.

Moreover, great-power stakes have also been seen in the region, specifically under China's CPEC guarantees. Since 2016, China has insisted on a committed and dedicated security apparatus, jointly fielded by the Pakistan Army and the FCs, in order to protect Chinese nationals and China's investments in Baluchistan. This heavy invocation of security not only signals China's strategic stakes in Gwadar but also deepens local perceptions (on the part of the Baloch people) of Baluchistan as an occupied territory (under the guise of security). Hence, China's priority lies in the protection of its operations, while Pakistan must manage the blowback as every added checkpoint or fortification fuels hyper-nationalistic sentiments due to the increasing perception of foreign colonization.

Hence, constitutional design, skewed and cloudy electoral process, failed attempts at reconciliation, and entrenched security clauses have limited genuine civilian governance in the Baluchistan region, while cross-border politics and great-power stakes only exacerbate the province's hyper-nationalistic sentiments and dynamics.

THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS & INTERPRETATION

REALISM

State Security & Strategic Imperatives

As far as the theory of Realism is concerned, Pakistan's policies are focused on securing key strategic control over Gwadar and asserting state control. Gwadar, having a seaport and providing China and Pakistan to Arabian Sea, holds strategic importance to Pakistan. Two key dimensions illustrate this logic:

- Gwadar, being one of the most strategic locations in Pakistan with its deep-sea port, offers direct access to the Arabian Sea to Pakistan and China. By controlling Gwadar port, it bypasses the Karachi port, which is vulnerable and congested. Pakistan's dependence on the Strait of Hormuz route for its imports can be reduced by making Gwadar functional, which improves the state's strategic adaptability and energy security. In the realist viewpoint, by establishing a naval presence in Gwadar, the state is securing "choke-points" to show power and enhance its ability to deter rival states and influence the Indian Ocean to protect its western flank from swarming from Afghanistan and Iran (US Army War College Press, 2008)
- Balochistan has an abundance of gas fields (e.g., Sui, Uch) and also extensive mineral reserves. These resources are crucial for the country's industrial and power-generation needs. The state's efforts to install pipelines and new extraction sites often come at the expense of local approval. The state's actions in this regard can be seen as reflecting a zero-sum approach to resource control, conventional of power politics under a realist lens. Despite the 18th Amendment in the Constitution, the federal government's assertion on management of royalties and revenues highlights the importance placed on preserving a monopoly over strategic resources of the province, rather than handing over meaningful authority and autonomy to the province.

Balochistan shares its borders with Afghanistan and Iran, both regions which have been used previously by revolutionaries as safe havens throughout history. From a realist viewpoint, securing these borders is of foremost importance. Islamabad has mobilized thousands of troops to isolated border posts and built fencing along the vital stretches of border to prevent cross-border movement of revolutionaries and insurgents (GWU IAR, 2020). These measures by the state are often justified as counter-terrorism and also double as exhibitions of sovereignty and deterrence against external involvement, solidifying the state's image as the supreme authority and guarantor of territorial solidarity.

MILITARY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Securing Corridors through Force

After the introduction of the CPEC in 2013, Pakistan has formed a special “CPEC Security Division” under the Corps Commander at Quetta. The force comprises army, navy, and air force personnel along with the Frontier Corps. Their objective is to protect the Chinese personnel, the infrastructure and the convoys along the whole CPEC route from Gwadar to Khunjerab Pass at the China border. Regular “clearing operations” are required to build major roads and pipeline projects in nearby tribal areas. The military relocated or swept the communities perceived to be a threat to security, creating a forceful buffer zone for development activities (Shaikh, 2009). The reasoning is straightforward: without the presence of military forces, economic development cannot be protected nor advanced. This strengthens the idea that development projects justify militarization, which legitimizes state authority.

Realism posits that when important assets of a state are concentrated in an unstable region, compelling actions will escalate. In Baluchistan, the areas where these high-value targets are present (ports, gas plants, highways) are all fenced by fortified check-posts and routine surveillance from the air. These actions can be projected as counter-insurgency, but also serve the broader goal of power projection. The consequent securitization of development projects not only protects infrastructure but also communicates to both foreign and local audiences that the state will take any actions necessary for safeguarding its strategic interests.

Anderson’s Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson argues that nations are “imagined” through shared symbols, narrative and print media, enabling people who will never meet to perceive themselves as part of the same community. For the Baloch community, tales of tribal bravery, historical accounts of pre-colonial Baloch sultanates and the uprising against the Pakistani integration in 1948 became legendary benchmarks. These accounts were standardized, collected and dispersed across the region to form a shared history.

Political exiles from Balochistan to Iran, Oman and Europe played a pivotal role by establishing magazines like ‘Azadi’, radio broadcasts and dispersed associations that propagated news regarding the human rights abuses and cultural events in Balochistan. This broadcasting and print media held together dispersed Baloch people into an “imagined” transnational polity. Speech Acts Framing Baloch Demands as “Existential Threats”

Political leaders, military personnel and pro-state media in Islamabad labelled demands for more control over resources and cultural rights not as political endorsement but rather as “fanatic” or “terrorist” threats to the sovereignty of

Pakistan. Grouping Baloch activists with revolutionary groups shifts the issue from the sphere of politics and diplomacy to a state of emergency, thus legitimizing militarized response.

The narrative gains traction through constant mentions in the parliament, press briefings and debates on television, giving birth to the perceived idea that the “Baloch threat” should be neutralized by extraordinary measures from the state.

JUSTIFICATION OF EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES → FEEDBACK LOOP OF RESISTANCE

The state undertakes harsh measures once securitized, military operations, enforced disappearances, and restrictions on digital and print media freedom are increased significantly to tackle the threat and protect the nation. Continuous suppression is a real problem for Baloch as it is generating anxiety, fear and hatred in Baloch. They have moderate political leadership who are open to dialogue. By neglecting those sections, it is the state’s antagonism which is instilling an extremist attitude in hitherto apolitical people, leading them to support or join violent networks.

CONCLUSION

Since 2008, hawkish and strict policies have persisted, witnessed by the securitization of governance, curbing civil society and enforced disappearances. Elected governments of PPP, PML (N), and PTI adopted a tight security policy that increased militancy and deepened feelings of alienation rather than dialogue. Developmental projects like Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) were hailed as representations of modernization, progress, and development, their execution resulted in top-down enforcement, local exclusion, and economic disparity. The province's armed organizations and militias then presented these programs as tools of "economic colonialism," inspiring disenfranchised and disillusioned youth to pursue more extremist avenues.

The 18th Amendment and even the Aghaz-e-Huqooq program's political promises of sustainable autonomy and development could not satisfy rebel Baloch. Adopting a thorough and multidimensional strategy based on inclusivity, transparency, and equity is necessary to end this cycle of mistrust and insurgency. This can be accomplished through the implementation of policies aimed at fostering transparency and reconciliation, as well as by fortifying law enforcement organizations to advance the rule of law through accountability measures. Further, the people of Balochistan must be provided royalties for their natural resources, with transparent mechanisms that aid this deliverance directly to the provincial government. In the same way, legislative authority must be granted to the provincial institutions, limiting federal overreach under Article 245, and similarly, provisions

regarding provincial and federal areas of control. Moreover, employment quotas for residents may help aid the climate of economic and social disillusionment among the Baloch population, particularly in key projects such as CPEC and the Gwadar Port.

This research, although grounded in theoretical frameworks, aims to provide insight into the development of hyper-nationalistic elements in Balochistan after General Musharraf's administration; however, it must be kept in mind that due to the security-sensitive nature of the topic at hand, as well as the restricted access to sources of primary data, the study remains limited. As analyzed in the study, the rise of hyper-nationalism in Baluchistan is not merely an inevitable outcome of ethnic identity politics; it is a consequence of actions, policies, and legislation made use of by state actors over decades. Hyper-nationalism in Baluchistan requires not just the management of symptoms on the surface, but the confrontation of the root causes of the phenomenon - including historic exclusion (across political, social, and economic realms), injustice, and the denial of provincial autonomy. The state of Pakistan can mend its strained relationship with Baluch by implementing a transformative change, based on decentralization, bringing Baluch into mainstream. These positive steps will pave the way for a durable and successful peace.

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