

## Security vs. Development: Reconciling Strategic Interests in Balochistan

Ashfaq Ahmed<sup>1</sup>  
Muhammad Adil Iqbal<sup>2</sup>  
Uzma Ashiq<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*This article examines how Balochistan must address the problems of security and development. It investigates how important the region is on the world stage, its economic prospects, its history, as well as the problems that stop it from becoming fully developed. In addition, it examines the impact of the actions taken by regional powers as well as strong international players, such as China and Iran, on the province's future.*

**Keywords:** *Balochistan, Pakistan, Security, Development, Strategic, Regional*

### Introduction

Balochistan is Pakistan's biggest province and is known for its important geopolitical, economic, and cultural influence. Even though it could be very important, it is one of the least developed and most politically troubled parts of Pakistan. Given that it lies at the intersections of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Balochistan is very strategically important. Its key natural resources are oil, gas, coal, and minerals, and because of Gwadar Port, it is very significant in global shipping and the energy industry (Hasan, 2017). Even so, because of its great value, Balochistan still struggles with political insecurity, ethnic divisions, and safety problems that have stopped its advancement (Baloch, 2018).

### Geopolitical and Geo-economic Significance of Balochistan

Balochistan is important in regional politics as it determines the relations between South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The fact that the province is located at the meeting point of these regions adds great value to its position all around the world (Ali, 2021). Balochistan's strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Professor and Chairman, Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR), University of Sargodha, Pakistan. Email: [ashfaq.hameed@uos.edu.pk](mailto:ashfaq.hameed@uos.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of International Business & Marketing, NUST Business School (NBS),

National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [m.adiliqbal@nbs.nust.edu.pk](mailto:m.adiliqbal@nbs.nust.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup> Professor and Chairperson, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan  
Email: [chairman.dsw@pu.edu.pk](mailto:chairman.dsw@pu.edu.pk)

position is based on its routes to world sea lanes, connections for energy, and its location next to major international players. The region's location helps it become important for both trade and energy because it leads right to the Arabian Sea. As an important port on Balochistan's southwest coast, Gwadar is very beneficial to Pakistan (Khan & Khalid, 2021). India's capital is connected to other parts of the country by roads and trains, and its route to the Arabian Sea plays a big role in international shipping. Looked at in the context of world energy flows, Gwadar stands out since it makes transportation of energy supplies from those regions to China and Pakistan much easier. The formation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Balochistan proves that the province is strategically important in the region. The construction of roads, railways, and pipelines, which links Gwadar Port to China's Xinjiang region, is designed to let China avoid the crowded Strait of Malacca and use easier and safer methods for energy and trade (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority, 2020). Therefore, Balochistan plays a major role for China as it helps move energy in and out of the country.

The energy transit of the region depends greatly on the location of Balochistan. Besides, the province is on the routes of major pipelines that might link the rich oil and gas regions of the Middle East and Central Asia to markets in South Asia. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline proposal is very important, as it would move natural gas from Iran's South Pars field to Pakistan (Sattar, 2016). It may help solve Pakistan's energy shortage and make Balochistan a bigger part of the area's energy supply. Yet, because of international sanctions on Iran, the pipeline project has been postponed, which points to the problems of regional cooperation (Rehman, 2020).

At the same time, the presence of copper and gold in Balochistan points to the region's future in energy production (Memon, 2018). Using these valuable resources for economic activities may boost the country's economy and earn a lot of money. Even so, the way politicians manage these resources has led to disagreements, since the local Baloch population says they are not getting similar benefits from them.

### **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Balochistan's Development**

CPEC is one of the biggest and most significant projects seen in Balochistan in a long time. CPEC has the chance to change the province's economy by building roads, railways, and energy pipelines that go all the way from Gwadar Port to Xinjiang, China. Because of this major project, which is

part of China's BRI, Balochistan should become part of major trade and energy routes, increase Pakistan's economy and grant China more access to important markets (Khan, 2020).

### **Economic Potential of CPEC**

The economic benefits of CPEC could completely change life in Balochistan. Since Gwadar port is key to the project, it is likely to increase Pakistan's influence in trade and energy matters in the region. Creating transport and energy networks in Balochistan will allow connections with rest of Pakistan, which will help the province be a part of both national and global markets. In addition, the advancement of Gwadar Port may lead to tons of employment opportunities, strengthening local companies, and improving the living conditions of people (Ahmed, 2019). Nevertheless, CPEC's advantages have not reached all the people there in the same way. Even though the project boosts the local economy, concerns are raised because the Baloch are not getting the same advantages as others. Chinese firms and outside investors have brought many locals to feel isolated, since they perceive that only those connected to the government in Islamabad and the biggest companies are gaining more locally.

### **Local Resistance to CPEC and Political Grievances:**

Balochistan's resistance against CPEC is caused by the fact that it was mistreated and ignored by the government historically. People and leaders in Balochistan think that CPEC will cause them to be marginalized even more financially and politically. They state that the project should help Pakistan economically, but most of the corresponding rewards will go to outsiders and those leading in the capital, without giving the Baloch any major part in it (Baloch, 2018). Some nationalist groups in Balochistan are worried about resources in the region being used mainly for others' benefit. The resources found in Balochistan such as natural gas, oil, and minerals are taken away but not many funds are put back into the province. Because the local people do not receive benefits from resources, they argue, this has resulted in more resentment and activities from insurgency groups.

### **Iran's Interests in Balochistan:**

The fact that Balochistan is on the border with Iran brings extra challenges to the region's geopolitical situation. Because the province of Sistani and Balochistan includes Baloch people,

relations between them on both sides of the border have contributed to the region's politics (Hasan, 2017). Iran is interested in the economic prospects of Balochistan, mainly in the field of energy partnership. Pakistan could address part of its energy shortage with the help of Iran's natural gas through the delayed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which could grow the relationship between Iran and Pakistan (Sattar, 2016). Once built, the pipeline would make sure Pakistan could get energy it can rely on and ease the country's need to purchase more expensive fuel from overseas. Nevertheless, the project has experienced many difficulties because of sanctions that the United States has placed on Iran. The pressure from other countries for Pakistan not to cooperate with Iran over this project has slowed down the project's completion. If the project had succeeded, Balochistan would have received economic help. Still, the region is more reliant on investment from overseas after the failed project (Pasha, 2019).

The closeness of Balochistan to Iran has brought about militancy coming from Iran. Dividing tendencies in both countries, mainly in Sistani and Balochistan, have created more unrest. Iran is worried about the activities of militant groups in Balochistan, because it fears such groups could cause instability among Iran's Baloch citizens. To deal with this problem, Iran has tightened border security, and this has led to stressful conditions with Pakistan (Khan, 2020).

Insecurity in the region of Iranian Balochistan and the arrival of separatist's groups are major security issues for Pakistan. Troubles from militants traveling between the neighboring countries have caused difficulties in managing Balochistan by Pakistan. Because some local separatists and other outsiders have taken part in insurgency movements, it has greatly hindered the government's work in recovering peace and development in the region (Rehman, 2020).

### **Afghanistan's Impact on Balochistan's Security and Stability:**

Afghanistan's unrest influences Balochistan mainly since the border between them is not very secure. Pakistan in Balochistan has experienced security issues because of the presence of refugees, militants, and insurgents coming across the border (Khan, 2020). Because of how easy it is for people to cross the Afghan Pakistani border, militants, refugees, and insurgents have moved freely. For some years, the Taliban and ISIS have managed to launch attacks and bring fighters and weapons into Balochistan through this border. The increase in the number of militants moving to Balochistan has made the province less secure, since Afghan insurgents benefit from the government's weakness to get help and supplies (Khan & Khalid, 2021).

Because of the Afghan Taliban's role in Balochistan, Pakistan is worried about the possible return of insurgencies. Information was received recently that Taliban fighters have moved into Balochistan and there, they have aided the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and other local terror groups. Because of the link between these groups, it is difficult for Pakistan to address the militancy problem in the region (Baloch, 2018).

After the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 2021, security conditions in Balochistan have been changed. Due to the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and their background connection with Baloch rebels, people are worried about a rise in militancy in Balochistan. The government of Pakistan must manage local militants in the country as well as the impact of the Taliban coming from neighboring Afghanistan. Because of this, Balochistan's security situation has become even more serious, since some insurgents might be supported by Taliban and other militants across the border (Rehman, 2020).

### **Economic Potential and Developmental Challenges:**

Balochistan has large natural gas, coal, and oil reserves, and copper and gold deposits that have not been fully explored, yet the region has a hard time economically. Many of the reasons for this situation come from the central government's historical lack of interest and funds for the city of Islamabad. For several decades, Balochistan has been neglected regarding politics and economic support, leading to very little money being put back into its infrastructure, schools, or hospitals. Therefore, Balochistan does not have the right facilities and services to support growth, since it has so much in natural resources (Baloch, 2018).

In addition, issues like poor governance and corruption have stopped Balochistan's resources from being efficiently controlled. Even though the province is very rich, its people often miss out on important benefits. The Baloch people feel more removed from society because the Sui gas and Reko Diq mines have not caused any positive changes in their lives. Besides, constant threats and active insurgency groups in the province have made businesses unwilling to invest there (Memon, 2018). For this reason, Balochistan is still among Pakistan's poorest provinces despite having important natural resources.

### **Natural Resources and Economic Disparities:**

The presence of much natural wealth should, essentially, play a big role in Balochistan's economic growth. For years, Pakistan's other areas have received natural gas from the Sui gas fields located in the province. Though many regions in Balochistan do not have dependable supplies of electricity and natural gas. Just like in the case of large-scale mining, such as at Reko Diq, huge economic benefits can be achieved, yet challenges such as legal court cases and red tape have stopped these projects from developing fully. This problem is one of the main issues affecting the Baloch people, since resources from Balochistan are controlled by others, and the revenues do not reach the locals fairly. A lot of Baloch considers removing resources from their area without returning any profits to the community as economic colonization. Because of this inequality, some groups want to separate from the country and most residents in the region feel isolated from the rest of Canada.

### **The Dispute of Reko Diq**

Reko Diq in Balochistan is an impressive example of how much potential the area has, since it rests on one of the biggest untapped reserves of copper and gold in the world. But there have been legal stresses in the project, mostly involving the provincial government and foreign investors, and in 2013 the Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled the project should not go ahead due to claimed corruption and mismanagement. Even though it holds huge economic potential, Reko Diq has done very little, pointing to the issues in the resource governance of Balochistan and the province's inability to bring in foreign investment.

### **Infrastructure Deficits and Human Development:**

The low development of infrastructure in Balochistan means that the province is cut off economically. Even though the region is important due to its strategic location, it still does not have enough transportation and industrial amenities to fully benefit. Since there is a lack of education and healthcare, the region has a few of the lowest human development figures in the country. Because so many women are unable to read and the healthcare services are not advanced enough, poverty and lack of development have continued in this region.

Because of the less developed state, most people think the Islamabad government does not prioritize Balochistan's interests, which increases local frustration. A sense of frustration and even

anger has developed among Baloch people because the promises of economic and political growth are not keeping.

### **How to Measure Social Development:**

The 2019 report issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) mentioned that Balochistan has some of the lowest levels of human development in Pakistan. As an illustration, about 40% of Balochistan's residents are literate, which is a lot lower than the 60% average literacy in the country. Moreover, there are some of the highest maternal mortality figures in Canada, and people living in rural regions struggle to get medical help. Because of these differences, Balochistan's people need extra funding for healthcare, education, and infrastructure to enjoy a better quality of life.

### **Security and Governance Imperatives:**

Balochistan's progress is being held back by many security-related issues. Ever since several decades ago, Balochistan has witnessed widespread insurgent activity brought about by groups that call for more independence or autonomy for the province. Such groups are motivated by old decades of mistreatment, financial problems, and feelings left out of political matters. The authorities in Pakistan tend to respond with military actions, such as sending security troops to fight opponents and suspending movement in turbulent places.

### **The Role of Militancy and Insurgency:**

For many years, since the 1970s, an insurgency in Balochistan has continued, with different groups asking for more rights or complete separation from the rest of Pakistan. Although the intensity of the revolt has changed over the years, it has continued to affect the region's peace constantly. They say that even though Balochistan's resources are used, the local people still do not have development, and they consider the Pakistani state to be like an occupier.

### **The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)**

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) is one of the biggest militant organizations in Balochistan. BLA has launched many strikes against security personnel and teams working on government and infrastructure projects, as well as those associated with the CPEC in Pakistan. According to what

they say, the group's goal is independence for Balochistan, due to continued complaints of being exploited, neglected politically, and faced with cultural oppression. Both military actions and political dealings have been part of the Pakistan government's efforts against the BLA, but the group still poses a serious security danger in the area.

### **Good Governance and Accountability:**

Because leadership is poor and there is no full accountability, Balochistan's development is still badly affected. With a lot of valuable resources and importance, Balochistan's administration continues to have corruption, ineffective systems, and unreliable institutions, thus hampering the creation of necessary services and infrastructure projects.

Corruption that continues to be present in different parts of the government is a big factor in bad governance. Many times, money meant for assisting areas in need is grabbed by a small group of strong leaders or is not watched closely enough. There are delays in carrying out important initiatives because there are not enough skilled workers and trained administrators in these organizations (Pasha, 2019). Certain infrastructure schemes to great health, education, and travel services never finished or went wrong, which annoys the nearby communities.

Even though the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution aimed to give more authority to provincial governments, including Balochistan, it has not been carried out in its entirety. Mostly, this situation results from the strong resolve of local leaders who seek to keep their authority and from the central government, which takes charge of decisions in the provinces. This situation means that local officials usually can't decide things that meet the needs of their residents, making the problem of marginalization continue (Sattar, 2016).

Overcoming these hardships requires improving the leadership in Balochistan by giving power to local organizations, boosting openness, and keeping officials answerable for wrongdoing. If there is real provincial autonomy and a focus on giving powers to local offices, local leaders can manage Balochistan's affairs in a better way for everyone. Making the right changes, the province would be able to look after its resources, raise the quality of public services, and make growth sustainable for the community.

### **The 18th Amendment and Provincial Autonomy**

In 2010, the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution was created to give more independence to provincial governments. It was meant to allow Balochistan to lead its own affairs and decide on

policies that would help the local people. Yet, the 18th Amendment in Balochistan has not been completely carried out because of quarrels among politicians, poor capacity within the province, and pressure from the federal government. Residents of Balochistan have noted that not being fully in charge of their resources has blocked the province's chance to develop. The provincial government needs to be strengthened, and power should be given effectively to them to face the challenges in Balochistan.

### **Regional Cooperation and Conflict Resolution:**

It is not possible to solve the problems in Balochistan by working alone. It is necessary for countries in a region to collaborate to respond to problems like turmoil over the borders, refugee movements, and linking economies. Balochistan's peaceful environment depends on what is happening in Iran and Afghanistan and on wider regional events.

### **Cooperation with Iran and Afghanistan:**

Since Pakistan and Iran's border in Balochistan is long and unguarded, it is now a common area for insurgent activities and smuggling. Together, they must reinforce border security, address groups promoting violence in the region, and help each other's economy. A better organization of the border would stop insurgents from crossing and help trade between the nations, helping both Balochistan and the area. Balance of the move towards Afghanistan can also be seen in Balochistan in the form of refugee movements and attacks from neighboring countries. Pakistan must collaborate with Afghanistan with the help of international partners, to secure the border and keep terrorists from using it.

### **Pak-Iran Border Cooperation:**

In 2013, Pakistan and Iran reached an understanding to boost their security at the border and deal with illegal militants. The aim of the agreement was to carry out cooperation in border security and to improve the exchange of intelligence information between the two nations. The cooperative work aimed at preventing more insurgents and militants from crossing the border, which increased security in Balochistan. Still, political turmoil, an abundance of armed organizations, and complex ethnic ties among the people on both sides have reduced how effective cooperation is. All things

considered, teamwork between the two countries needs to continue so that security problems in Balochistan can be tackled.

### **The Role of International Actors:**

China, the U.S., and the Gulf States have a major impact on what happens in Balochistan. Even though foreign investments in CPEC can help the region's economy, such projects ought to support the wishes and needs of the local community. The region's economic growth will be both sustainable and acceptable to local people if international investments focus on jobs, improving buildings and roads, and increasing skills among Baloch youth.

### **China-Pakistan Cooperation in Balochistan**

Mostly, China's influence in Balochistan is related to funding and helping develop Gwadar Port and nearby areas through the CPEC project. In 2015, China decided to invest \$46 billion in CPEC, making sure to spend a major part of it on Balochistan's infrastructure. Even though this investment could make the regional economy stronger, it has caused the Baloch people to worry about the future. Some people claim that China's main concern with infrastructure like Gwadar Port and roads might lead it to forget about the welfare of people in Balochistan. The governments of China and Pakistan should pay special attention to local job growth, growing local expertise, and boosting the well-being of nearby communities when implementing CPEC.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

To settle the differences between security and development in Balochistan, policymakers should find an approach that involves many elements and groups. The next set of suggestions seeks to meet security needs and encourage sustainable development in the province.

1. Make sure the profits from resources, building projects, and foreign investments are given back to the local community by offering them share in revenue, a higher number of positions for them, and support for upgrading their skills. No development project can be successful if it excludes people from the community who should play decision-making roles.
2. Remove the focus on military strength, choose community-based patrolling for police, have meaningful talks with moderate separatist groups, and address those reasons that drive

militancy. Such a strategy requires security actions alongside political action, mainly to deal with local issues and earn the trust of the Baloch community for the state.

3. Strengthening the powers of the provinces, addressing corruption, increasing the quality of public services, and ensuring all resources are used transparently to earn people's trust again in government institutions. Help local leaders and institutions take decisions that matter to their communities and guarantee the development benefits go to those who need them the most.
4. Iran and Afghanistan should cooperate to solve common issues such as militancy and large groups of refugees, looking for ways to cooperate economically as well. A strong focus on regional stability is important for Balochistan's growth, so Pakistan needs to coordinate with its neighbors to tackle relevant issues.
5. Collaborations with Other Countries: Adjust foreign investments to support the locals, and guarantee transparency, acceptance by the community, and benefits for many years. All major actors from outside, for example China and countries from the Gulf region, should support Pakistan in sharing the advantages of foreign investments with local Baloch's.

### **Conclusion:**

Security and development challenges have an important relationship to Balochistan's future. For the province to enjoy real peace and prosperity, it is necessary to resolve past issues, improve the way the government works, and encourage local partnerships. If the region's strategic importance is balanced with the interests of its community, Balochistan might become a major economic center, helping Pakistan as well as the entire South Asian region. At this moment, it is vital to act quickly together and ensure inclusive growth, good government, and strong security to let Balochistan use its full potential.

What happens in other conflict-prone regions around the globe gives valuable insight into dealing with the hardships of development related to security. Overall, post-conflict regions in these countries have shown that political talks, engaging the community, and intergovernmental effort help create peace and stability in the economy. Likewise, slow transitions and efforts to empower people have been tested successfully in Afghanistan with a focus on building local skills and making things transparent.

All in all, the success of Balochistan depends on meeting security and developmental goals together so the area, Pakistan, and the area around it are improved for everyone. Supporting sustainable peace is important for all countries, but it is mainly up to local and national groups to come up with a plan that encourages unity, more opportunity, and political stability.

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