



Balochistan's Secessionist Struggle and Quest for New Geopolitical Consequences in South Asia

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The Balochistan secessionist struggle, rooted in decades of ethnic and political marginalization, has emerged as a significant factor reshaping South Asian geopolitics. This research examines the historical and contemporary drivers of the Baloch insurgency in Pakistan, including grievances over resource exploitation, lack of political autonomy, and state repression, alongside its regional implications. The study highlights how the insurgency, led by groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), has intensified since 2004, with recent escalations marked by sophisticated attacks targeting state infrastructure and foreign investments, notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). By analysing the interplay of internal factors - such as tribal dynamics, economic deprivation, and governance failures - and external influences, including alleged support from regional actors like India and Afghanistan, this research underscores Balochistan's growing strategic importance due to its geographic location and resource wealth. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating historical analysis, geopolitical frameworks, and empirical data to assess how the Baloch struggle influences regional stability, China-Pakistan relations, and the broader South Asian security landscape. It argues that without addressing the underlying political and socio-economic grievances through dialogue and reconciliation, the insurgency will continue to destabilise Pakistan and complicate regional power equations, posing challenges to both the South Asian and global order.

Keywords: *South Asian Geopolitics, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Regional Stability.*



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1. Introduction

Baloch separatism has persisted in Pakistan since its formation in 1947. Its origins can be

traced to the turbulent period of independence, when more than 500 princely states were required to choose between joining India or Pakistan. Most

princely states acceded to either dominion based on geographic and political considerations, the states that now form Balochistan posed significant challenges for Pakistan's nation-building process. Although some accounts suggest that the Khan of Kalat - the ruler of the region central to present-day Balochistan - considered aligning with India, there is no concrete evidence to support this claim. What is historically clear, however, is that Kalat maintained its autonomy for several months after Pakistan's creation. It was only in March 1948, amid mounting political pressure, that the Khan agreed to sign the instrument of accession, formally integrating the territory into Pakistan. (Roychowdhury, 2022). The Baloch population is 3.6% of total populations of Pakistan but they occupy almost 43% of total territory of Pakistan (Nandy, 2016). Rich in minerals but economically weakened, this province has been described by some scholars as economically neglected and resource-exploited by the Pakistani government since independence. The majority Panjabi participation in Balochistan's higher ranks in bureaucracy and military administration give fuel to the Baloch sentiment. The ethnic sentiment, like own values, tribal affiliation, and the sardar system of Baluch was also against the state institutionalization. In Balochistan, both "humanitarian law" and "international human rights law" (Zumpani, 2014) have allegedly been violated by the Pakistani government, government officials, and military personnel, reflecting the existence of an armed conflict between the Pakistani state and the Baloch people, recurring insurgencies since 1948.

The Balochistan secessionist movement, deeply rooted in prolonged ethnic exclusion and political marginalization, has become a key force influencing the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia. The key issue of the conflict between the Pakistani government and Baluch was related to the development issues. The representation of the Baluch community to national and regional politics was so poor and they felt deprived and demanded the government for the reorganization of the political system by giving the importance of rapid regional autonomy. As a result, they were directly involved in the militant groups, insurgents and started protests against the Pakistani military in 1973 and 1977 and finally in 1977 Bhutto strictly suppressed this movement. This movement burst in 2003-04 when General Parvez

Musharraf decided to establish additional military cantonment in the sensitive places as Gadar, Dera Bugti, Kohlu of Balochistan and the Baloch separatists aimed as their target for the government projects. In the 2000s a well-equipped militant separatist group, namely Balochistan Liberation Army, emerged to separate Balochistan from Pakistani rule and were considered as a terrorist organization by Pakistan and several western countries. Their main targets are railway, gas pipelines, various government projects and military. The Pakistani army strongly curbed these violations and was accused of extrajudicial killings by human rights organizations. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan strongly condemned this incident (Nandy, 2016). After that this movement was calmed but recently this movement started more aggressively and Pakistan claimed that the Baloch's attack under India's provocations but India denied this. Pakistani state claimed that Afghanistan, Iran, the USA, and, according to Pakistani media, Russia also were involved in this external interference (Ejaz et al., 2023).

Figure 1: Geopolitical Position of Balochistan



Source:

<https://share.google/MuppTu7fRujD0gf8>

This study investigates the historical roots and contemporary developments of the Baloch insurgency within Pakistan, focusing on long-standing grievances such as resource exploitation, the denial of political autonomy, and ongoing state repression. The resurgence of militancy - spearheaded by groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) - has escalated notably since 2004, with increasingly coordinated attacks targeting state institutions and major foreign investments, especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Through an exploration of internal variables like tribal structures, economic underdevelopment, and administrative failures, along with external dynamics including alleged strategic involvement by regional actors such as India and Afghanistan, this research highlights Balochistan's rising geopolitical relevance due to its coastal access and resource reserves.

Adopting a multidisciplinary methodology that combines historical inquiry, geopolitical analysis, and empirical data, the study evaluates the broader implications of the Baloch conflict for regional stability, Sino-Pakistani cooperation, and the wider security environment of South Asia. It contends that, unless core political and socio-economic issues are addressed through inclusive dialogue and meaningful reform, the insurgency will persist, threatening both Pakistan's internal cohesion and the balance of power in the region.

2. Literature Review

South Asian countries have long faced challenges related to democratic deficits and poor governance, and Pakistan is no exception. In the book *Understanding Pakistan*, Dr. Debasish Nandy highlights several critical issues, including democracy, the military, religion, identity, and human rights in Pakistan. The first chapter of the book discusses various dimensions of Pakistani democracy, including weak governance, terrorism, and constitutional crises across multiple provinces. The second chapter explores the role of the military in shaping Pakistani society, politics, and the economy. The third chapter focuses on the internal socio-political challenges faced by different ethnic communities, such as the Muhajir, Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun populations. Due to the biased and exclusionary policies of the Pakistani government, the Baloch community continues to suffer from socio-economic

marginalization, which has driven sections of the population towards separatist movements. The fifth chapter emphasizes human rights issues in Pakistan, particularly the neglect of minority groups both religious and ethnic by the federal government (Nandy, 2017).

Since its independence and partition, Pakistan has consistently struggled with issues of national identity and inclusive nation-building. The governance structure has struggled to integrate all segments of society. The Punjabi community is often described in the literature as a disproportionately influential power, leading to feelings of alienation among muhajir migrants and other ethnic groups. This exclusion has contributed to ongoing social, economic, and political crises. Furthermore, Pakistan's exclusionary policies toward the Baloch community have relegated them to one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the country, as highlighted in the book *Mapping South Asia* (Nandy, 2019).

Ethnic nationalism surged globally post-World War II, intensifying after the Cold War, challenging liberal and Marxist assumptions of its decline. In Pakistan, Baloch nationalism, rooted in colonial grievances, crystallized post-1947, driven by perceived neglect and oppression by central and provincial governments. Balochistan, Pakistan's largest yet least populous province, faces ongoing ethno-nationalist conflicts fuelled by resource disputes, particularly over Gwadar port, and foreign influences from India, Afghanistan, and the US. The Balochistan Package, aimed at addressing grievances, has been criticized as inadequate by nationalists, failing to grant full autonomy. Historical centralization, broken autonomy promises, and external interventions exacerbate tensions, posing significant threats to Pakistan's stability and regional security (Akhtar, 2013).

Balochistan's geo-strategic significance, due to its proximity to the Arabian Sea and vast mineral resources, positions it as a critical region for regional and global powers. Its history of ethnic fragmentation, rooted in colonial border agreements like the Durand Line, has fuelled tensions since Pakistan's inception. The disputed accession of Kalat in 1948, coupled with the powerful Sardari system, has perpetuated Baloch grievances against central governance. Federal policies, marked by neglect and military

interventions, have deepened distrust, fostering demands for autonomy and resource control. Pakistan has alleged external involvement by India and others exacerbate the conflict, while projects like CPEC highlight Balochistan's economic potential yet underscore local marginalization (Khan et al., 2021).

Many scholars have analysed the Baloch ethnic crisis in terms of oppression, underdevelopment, exploitation, lack of governance, and domination. However, none has interpreted the necessity or relevance of the Balochistan secessionist movement, or examined the alleged political interests of India in Balochistan and the future geopolitics of South Asia in light of those interests.

3. Objective of the Study

After a general exploration of the ongoing unrest in Balochistan, the primary aim of this research is to delve deeper into the underlying causes of the Baloch separatist movement. This includes examining the historical, ethnic, and developmental grievances that have fuelled the region's long-standing demand for autonomy or independence. Moreover, this study seeks to assess the broader geopolitical interests of both India and Pakistan in Balochistan, including how strategic considerations, security concerns, and regional rivalries influence their respective positions. Ultimately, the research aspires to uncover the evolving geopolitical consequences of the Baloch struggle in the wider South Asian context, particularly in relation to energy routes, cross-border tensions, and the shifting alignments among regional and global powers.

4. Research Questions

The primary objectives of this research are to examine the following questions:

- What are the historical, ethnic, developmental, and geopolitical factors underlying the Baloch separatist movement?
- What are India's and Pakistan's overall interests in Balochistan?
- What are the emerging geopolitical consequences in South Asia?

5. Research Methodology

To investigate Balochistan's secessionist struggle and its geopolitical consequences in South

Asia, this study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure comprehensive and original analysis. The qualitative component begins with an extensive review of secondary sources - such as academic journals, books, and digital newspapers - to trace the historical evolution of the conflict and its broader regional implications. This phase establishes the contextual foundation and identifies key drivers of the struggle, including resource exploitation, political marginalization, and alleged or perceived external influences.

The quantitative component involves the collection and analysis of data on insurgency-related incidents from 2000 to 2025, focusing on patterns of violence, casualty trends, and their correlation with major geopolitical developments, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Additionally, a geopolitical analysis will adopt a comparative perspective, assessing Balochistan's role within Pakistan-Iran-Afghanistan relations and its perceived influence on South Asian power dynamics. The study will draw on theoretical frameworks such as geopolitical realism, ethnic nationalism, and relative deprivation theory. Through this integrated methodology - combining historical depth, empirical rigour, and theoretical insight - the research aims to provide a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of Balochistan's secessionist movement and its regional implications.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study explores Balochistan's secessionist struggle through the lens of ethnic nationalism, relative deprivation theory, and geopolitical realism to understand its broader implications for South Asia.

First, ethnic nationalism theory offers insight into the Baloch desire for self-determination, rooted in a distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical identity. The theory explains how ethnic consciousness can evolve into political mobilization when a group perceives its identity as suppressed or unrecognized within a larger state framework (Khan et al., 2020; Wani, 2014).

Second, relative deprivation theory underscores the economic and political marginalization of the Baloch population within

Pakistan. This perceived and real disparity between expected entitlements and actual access to resources, power, and opportunities feeds grievances that energize separatist sentiments (Smith et al., 2020).

Third, geopolitical realism helps contextualize the conflict within South Asia's strategic environment. Balochistan's location rich in resources and positioned near critical sea lanes attracts regional and global interest. The perceived or actual involvement of external powers, whether through economic investments or strategic alliances, adds complexity to the internal conflict and poses challenges to regional stability (Ali et al., 2025).

Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for analysing the origins, persistence, and geopolitical consequences of the Baloch secessionist movement. The intersection of identity politics, structural inequalities, and strategic competition makes Balochistan not only a domestic issue for Pakistan but also a site of regional contestation with broader implications for South Asian security and order.

7. Findings and Discussion

7.1. The Roots of Balochistan's Secessionist Struggle: Historical Grievances and Political Exclusion

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest yet least developed province, is home to a persistent secessionist movement driven by historical grievances and political exclusion. Despite its strategic significance and vast natural resources, including gas, copper, and gold, according to scholars and reports, the Baloch population faces systemic marginalization, fuelling persistent demands for greater autonomy or outright independence (Baloch, 2024). This overview examines the historical and political roots of the Balochistan conflict, highlighting the forced annexation of the Khanate of Kalat, ethnic marginalization, and systemic exclusion, and their implications for South Asia's geopolitical landscape.

7.1.1. Historical Grievances

The Baloch secessionist struggle traces back to the 1948 forced annexation of the Khanate of Kalat by Pakistan, despite a brief period of independence following British withdrawal in 1947. The Baloch, a distinct ethnic group with a

unique language and culture, resisted integration, viewing it as a betrayal of promises for autonomy. This sparked the first of five insurgencies (1948, 1958, 1962, 1973-77, 2004-present), with groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) targeting state infrastructure. (Sharma, 2023). The lack of reparative justice and continued resource exploitation - Balochistan produces 17% of Pakistan's gas but consumes only 7% of the total national gas supply (Chaudhury, 2020) - has contributed to the persistence of separatist sentiment.

7.1.2. Political Exclusion

Political marginalization exacerbates the conflict. The Baloch are significantly underrepresented in national institutions, where Punjabis hold an overwhelming majority of military and bureaucratic positions. Balochistan suffers from widespread poverty and underdevelopment in stark contrast to Punjab's relative prosperity, and large parts of the province still lack reliable electricity access compared to most of the rest of the country.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), particularly the Gwadar port, has intensified tensions, as Baloch communities fear demographic shifts and economic exclusion, perceived as a collaboration between Punjabi elites and Chinese investors (Baloch, 2024). State repression, including enforced disappearances reported cases of enforced disappearance exceeding 7,000 since 2004, further alienates the Baloch, fuelling insurgency (Ng, 2024).

The Baloch struggle impacts South Asia's geopolitics. Pakistan accuses India of supporting the BLA to disrupt CPEC, a charge India denies, while India raises human rights concerns. A successful secession potentially destabilizes Pakistan and Iran's Sistan-Balochistan, inspire other regional movements, and disrupt China's Belt and Road Initiative, altering India's strategic calculus.

Balochistan's secessionist struggle stems from historical grievances, notably the 1948 annexation, and systemic political exclusion, compounded by resource exploitation and state repression. These factors drive insurgency, contributing to regional instability and influencing South Asia's geopolitical dynamics. Addressing these underlying causes necessitates inclusive

policies and equitable development to mitigate conflict and foster stability.

Table 1: Roots of Balochistan's Secessionist Struggle

Factor	Description	Impact
Historical Grievances	1948 annexation of Khanate of Kalat	Sparks ongoing insurgencies
Political Exclusion	Punjabi dominance, 58% poverty rate	Fuels resentment, BLA attacks
Resource Exploitation	40% of Pakistan's gas, minimal royalties	Deepens economic marginalization
State Repression	Over 7,000 disappearances since 2004	Intensifies separatist sentiment

Source: (Jain, 2018)

7.2. Socio-Economic Causes (Poverty and Inequality) of the Insurgency

Balochistan holds strategic and economic importance for Pakistan, primarily due to the substantial revenues the state derives from the region's oil and gas resources. Despite this, government investment in the welfare of the local population—such as healthcare, education and essential infrastructure—remains far below what the region's resource contributions would justify. This imbalance is particularly pronounced among ethnic Baloch communities, leading to widespread frustration and a sense of neglect, as many perceive the government as prioritizing state revenues over local welfare (Jain, 2018).

Balochistan exhibits the highest levels of poverty, the lowest literacy rate, and the greatest infant and maternal mortality rates compared to other provinces of Pakistan. Over time, the province's contribution to the national GDP has declined significantly - from approximately 4.9% in the 1970s to around 3.7% in the early 21st century. Moreover, Socioeconomic disparities within Balochistan are profound: while a small elite comprising provincial ministers and government officials possess extensive landholdings, luxury vehicles, and business interest, a substantial portion of the population continue to live in poverty and deprivation (Jain, 2018).

The people Baluchistan are in urgent need of an economic revival. Approximately 70% of the Baloch population lives below the poverty line, and nearly 1.8 million children remain out of school. Educational infrastructure is severely underdeveloped, with over 5,000 Schools functioning inadequately, many consisting of only a single classroom. The healthcare situation is equally dire: while Pakistan's national mortality rate stands at around 278 per 100,000, in Baluchistan it rises to approximately 785 per 100,000. Additionally, around 15% of the province's population is affected by Hepatitis B and C, and chronic water scarcity further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis (Khattak et al., 2022).

Another major concern pertains to the inequitable distribution of revenues derived from the extraction and utilization of Balochistan natural resources. The natural gas produced in the province is sold at a significantly lower price compared to that from Punjab and Sindh. Despite this, the federal government has largely withheld the provincial share of gas revenues, often justifying the shortfall by referencing high operational expenses. Moreover, the profits generated from natural gas production rarely reach the ordinary population of Balochistan, largely due to Deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities (Jain, 2018).

7.3. Balochistan's Struggle and Its Implications for Regional Stability and Cross-Border Security

Balochistan, Pakistan's resource-rich yet underdeveloped province, is at the heart of a persistent secessionist movement driven by historical grievances, ethnic marginalization, and economic exclusion. The Baloch struggle, led by groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), not only poses challenges to Pakistan's sovereignty but also has profound implications for regional stability and cross-border security in South Asia. This overview examines how the conflict affects Pakistan, India, Iran, and broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly through the lens of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and regional alliances.

7.3.1. Implications for Regional Stability

The Baloch secessionist movement threatens Pakistan's territorial integrity, with the BLA targeting CPEC projects such as the Gwadar Port, a vital source of revenue for Pakistan. A potential Baloch independence could potentially resemble the 1971 Bangladesh secession, weakening Pakistan and inspiring separatist movements in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan, where Baloch militancy is also active. Cross-border skirmishes, such as the 2024 Iran-Pakistan strikes, heighten regional tensions, increasing the risk of broader conflict. Pakistan has alleged Indian support for the BLA, a claim India denies, strain India-Pakistan relations, complicating frameworks like the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative. The massive CPEC investment faces serious disruption, potentially undermining China's broader Belt and Road ambitions, while India's strategic considerations regarding Pakistan are moderated by potential regional instability.

7.3.2. Cross-Border Security Concerns

Balochistan's proximity to the Arabian Sea and borders with Iran and Afghanistan makes it a hotspot for cross-border security issues. Attacks by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) on Chinese personnel and cross-border smuggling exacerbate local insecurity. Pakistan's military operations, reported cases of enforced disappearances exceeding 7,000 since 2004, exacerbate local unrest, leading some militants to operate across Iran and Afghanistan borders.

Balochistan's secessionist struggle, rooted in historical and economic grievances, poses significant risks to regional stability and cross-border security. It poses challenges to Pakistan's territorial integrity, disrupts CPEC, and escalates tensions with Iran and India. Addressing the conflict requires inclusive policies, equitable resource distribution, and diplomatic engagement to mitigate violence and stabilize South Asia's geopolitical landscape.

7.4. Geopolitical Ramifications of the Baloch Conflict: South Asia's Energy Corridors, Maritime Access and Great Power Rivalry

The Balochistan secessionist struggle, driven by ethnic marginalization and resource exploitation, reverberates across South Asia, impacting energy corridors, maritime access, and great power rivalry. As Pakistan's largest province, Baluchistan's strategic location near the Arabian Sea and its role in the approximately \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) make it a geopolitical flashpoint. The conflict, led by groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), poses challenges to regional stability, with implications for Pakistan, India, China, and Iran, and shapes energy and maritime dynamics.

7.4.1. Energy Corridors

Balochistan occupies a strategic position as the transit route for the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, designed to supply natural gas from Iran to Pakistan and ultimately to India. In response to perceived economic marginalization and resource exploitation by the federal government, Baloch insurgent groups have targeted gas pipelines and terminal facilities in protest against perceived economic marginalization. These assaults have resulted in prolonged power outages across major cities and have also posed serious challenges to diplomatic negotiations with Iran and India regarding the IPI project (Kupecz, 2012).

The Baloch conflict disrupts CPEC, a cornerstone of China's Belt and Road Initiative, connecting Gwadar port to Xinjiang. BLA targets this corridor, which handles \$2 billion in annual trade (The Economic Times, 2015), threatening energy supply chains, including gas from Sui.

7.4.2. Maritime Access

Balochistan can be classified into four major geographical zones: the northwestern highlands of upper Baluchistan, the central uplands, the central plains, and the coastal and desert regions. These zones exhibit variations in elevation, terrain ruggedness, and water availability, supporting a diverse range of flora and fauna. The region is also endowed with significant natural resources, including minerals and other valuable materials (Ahmed et al., 2020). Balochistan's 770-km coastline, including Gwadar, is critical for maritime trade. The BLA's opposition to CPEC's port development, fearing demographic shifts, disrupts Pakistan's goal of becoming a trade hub. Iran's Chabahar port, supported by India, competes with Gwadar (Sardana, 2022), escalating tensions post-2024 Iran-Pakistan strikes. Control over these ports influences Indian Ocean access, critical for 80 percentage of global oil trade.

7.4.3. Great Power Rivalry

The conflict intensifies rivalry among China, India, and the U.S. China's \$2.1 billion investment in Bangladesh (Jacob, 2025) and CPEC's strategic value face BLA threats, leading Pakistan to allege Indian interference, a claim India denies. The U.S., wary of China's regional dominance, may be perceived as indirectly supporting Baloch grievances, Complicating India Pakistan ties.

The Baloch conflict destabilizes South Asia's energy corridors, maritime access, and great power dynamics. BLA attacks threaten CPEC's viability, challenge Pakistan's control over Gwadar, and escalate India-China rivalry. Addressing the conflict requires equitable development and diplomacy to stabilize energy trade and ensure regional security.

7.5. Future Geopolitics in South Asia Based on Balochistan: India's Interests

It can be argued that Balochistan holds significant importance for India due to its strategic geopolitical position. India's interests in the region can be examined from two angles: (a) Pakistan's internal political and security challenges, and (b) the wider India-focused geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

- As discussed earlier, the Balochistan crisis has been a major problem for Pakistan

since the partition. But it is a surplus issue for a country if its neighbouring country becomes weakened [Kautilya's theory of Mandala] (Pradhan, 2020). Moreover, an anarchic or conflict-ridden situation in a neighbouring country can adversely affect its economic, political, social, and cultural spheres.

- The Baloch secessionist movement is geopolitically significant for India. Since partition, India has maintained cultural and historical links with the Baloch region. Two important Hindu pilgrimage sites - Hinglaj (one of the 51 Shakti Peethas) and Kalateshwari - located in Balochistan hold deep religious significance for Indians.

However, India's official position maintains a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. In contrast, Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of instigating and supporting the Baloch movement. But if Balochistan becomes separate from Pakistan, the region could emerge as a significant economic and strategic partner for India, given its abundance of minerals and natural resources. Such an outcome could weaken Pakistan economically and geopolitically, while simultaneously enhancing India's capacity to compete with China at both regional and global levels. Moreover, India would acquire substantial diplomatic leverage within South Asian geopolitics.

Nevertheless, it is questionable why India has not supported the Baloch in their struggle for self-determination. Some arguments explaining this are:

- India's official stance is that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.
- Pakistan has strongly suppressed the Baloch movement.
- The Baloch movement has not gained significant international support so far. In fact, Pakistan has attempted to designate the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a terrorist organization at the international level.
- The BLA has claimed that it seeks to establish a separate state, including areas of Afghanistan and Iran where Baloch populations reside. From a geostrategic perspective, this makes it difficult for India

to take any action that could conflict with the interests of Afghanistan and Iran.

8. Conclusion

The Balochistan secessionist struggle, rooted in historical grievances, ethnic marginalization, and economic exclusion, poses a significant challenge to Pakistan's territorial integrity and carries implications for South Asia's geopolitical dynamics. As Pakistan's largest province, Balochistan's strategic location near the Arabian Sea, coupled with its resource wealth - contributing 17% of Pakistan's gas and significant copper and gold reserves (Ahmed, 2024) - makes it a critical flashpoint. The ongoing conflict, led by groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), not only disrupts domestic stability but also reshapes regional energy corridors, maritime access, and great power rivalries involving Pakistan, India, China, and Iran. This conclusion synthesizes the multifaceted drivers of the Baloch struggle, its implications for South Asian stability, and the pathways forward for mitigating conflict and fostering sustainable regional cooperation.

The historical roots of the Baloch conflict trace back to the 1948 forced annexation of the Khanate of Kalat, which sowed seeds of distrust and sparked five insurgencies, with the current phase ongoing since 2004. The Baloch, a distinct ethnic group comprising 5% of Pakistan's population, face systemic political exclusion, with Punjabis dominating military (75%) and bureaucratic roles - a phenomenon referred to as the 'Punjabization of Pakistan' (Nandy, 2016). Economic disparities have exacerbated tensions in Balochistan. Baloch nationalists perceive Chinese projects as exploitative, fearing demographic changes and further marginalization. State repression, including widespread enforced disappearances since 2004, has fuelled the insurgency, strengthening demands for autonomy or independence (Samad, 2025).

The geopolitical ramifications of the Baloch struggle are far-reaching. For Pakistan, the conflict threatens CPEC's \$60 billion infrastructure - a linchpin of China's Belt and Road Initiative - with BLA attacks like the 2024 (20th March) Gwadar bombing targeting Chinese assets (Gwakh & Bezhn, 2024; Mohanane, 2024). Pakistan's allegations of Indian support for the BLA, though denied, strain bilateral relations, complicating frameworks like the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-

Nepal (BBIN) initiative. India navigates a delicate balance, raising human rights concerns in Balochistan to counter Pakistan's Kashmir narrative while avoiding overt involvement to prevent escalation (Ashok & Tripathi, 2019). The conflict's spillover into Iran's Sistan-Balochistan, marked by 2024 cross-border strikes, risks broader regional instability, potentially inspiring separatist movements elsewhere. China's strategic interests are challenged, as disruptions to CPEC could undermine its regional influence, while the U.S. may see opportunities to counter China by tacitly supporting Baloch grievances, adding complexity to South Asia's great power rivalry.

Regionally, to advance its strategic interests and counter the influence of China and the United States in South Asia, India should develop "liquid alliances" (Katz, 2025) beyond traditional alliances, particularly with Pakistan and Bangladesh, in light of Bangladesh's \$2.1 billion Chinese investment in 2024.

Globally, the Baloch struggle highlights the intersection of local grievances and great power rivalry. The U.S. and other Western powers should encourage Pakistan to address human rights concerns transparently to avoid fuelling proxy conflicts. China, as a major stakeholder in CPEC, should engage local Baloch communities to ensure inclusive development, mitigating opposition to projects like Gwadar.

Addressing the Baloch conflict requires a multi-pronged approach rooted in inclusive governance, equitable development, and regional diplomacy. Pakistan must address historical grievances by granting greater autonomy to Balochistan, ensuring fair resource distribution, and halting repressive measures. Investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare can reduce economic disparities driving unrest.

The Balochistan secessionist struggle, if left unresolved, risks destabilizing South Asia by disrupting energy corridors, maritime access, and regional alliances. A successful Baloch independence movement could potentially impact Pakistan's territorial cohesion, inspire separatist movements in Iran, and reshape China's strategic ambitions, forcing India to recalibrate its regional strategy. However, addressing the conflict's roots - historical, ethnic, and economic - through inclusive policies and equitable development can pave the way for stability. By leveraging regional cooperation frameworks, South Asian countries

can transform Balochistan's challenges into opportunities for integration and resilience. Pakistan, India, and their neighbours must prioritize diplomacy and development to ensure that Balochistan's struggle becomes a catalyst for cooperation rather than conflict, fostering a stable and sustainable future for the region.

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