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Evaluating Role of International Actors in the Balochistan's Unrest

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Abstract *This paper attempts to analyze the role of international actors in detail and how these states have contributed to the existing situation in the province. Overall, the research is an effort to categorically analyze the domestic as well as international factors behind the instability in Balochistan. Balochistan prominently configures the foreign policies of different states due to the interests and stakes involved in the volatile province. In terms of the transnational factors, there are few factors which have enhanced the significance of the province in the contemporary times, like War on Terror and the emerging economic and geostrategic importance of the province. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has increased the significance of Balochistan, also. At the same time, this increased significance has posed internal challenges for the inhabitants of the province who are of the view that the effects of the development should be visible across the board and the locals should be given their due share. The nationalist movement in Balochistan has developed greater contacts with their co-ethnics in the neighboring countries. Among the foreign powers, the role of India, Afghanistan, China, USA and the Middle East are of great concern.*

Key Words:

Balochistan, Instability, International Actors, CPEC

Introduction

In International Relations, both domestic and international factors play significant roles in the formation of any state identity. One of the most influential and prominent writer Alexander Wendt, presented the concept of 'systemic constructivism' in which he combined both domestic and international factors in the overall realm of constructivist school of thought. According to the scholar "…in order to analyze the state behavior in the field of international relations,

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both domestic and international factors should be taken into account (Copeland, 2000).

It is quite essential to analyze the state's domestic and international surroundings because in most of the cases, the culture of these environments has an influence on the identity of the state. There is an attempt by the states to institutionalize their identities not only locally but at the international level as well (Buzdaglioglu, 2009). Similar is the case with Balochistan which throughout its history has been significant to the international powers due to its geostrategic and geopolitical importance.

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan. At times, it has become obscure and at times prominent, but its geostrategic importance has never changed. Balochistan's geography not only makes it vital for Pakistan but also for the global powers who have tried number of times to exert their influence in the region (Javed and Jahangir, 2015).

The abundance of mineral and natural resources is one of the major reasons behind the province being attractive to the international world. Not only this but the location of Balochistan also makes it vital for the construction of pipelines and railroads connecting the regions of Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia (Murtha, 2011). The province serves to be in the limelight as it joins the Persian Gulf with South Asia and Central Asia.

The proximity of Balochistan to the Indian Ocean multiplied its significance manifold. The foreign powers have become involved in a competition to control their sea routes which are vital for trade at the global level (Javed and Jahangir, 2015). The Indian Ocean is the world's busiet sea route as 70 per cent of petroleum in the world crosses its borders and it is hosts to 50 per cent of the container traffic. Both India and China are competing for influence in the Indian Ocean. The US is also involved in this competition making it a platform for future conflicts at the international level (Ali, 2015).

It has an immense geopolitical importance as it is located in the middle of the Central and South Western Asia. The province is mountainous and shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan. It also provides an access to the Strait of Hormuz, with the Arabian Sea on its Southern boundary and the Gwadar port on the Makran Coast. Balochistan has huge reserves of oil and gas and mineral resources. Coal, gold, copper and gas are some of the most important reserves in the area. This makes it more lucrative for powers such as the US, Iran, UK, China and the Middle East.

Besides being naturally endowed, events at the international level have also increased the importance of Balochistan. One such is that of 9/11 which generated a renewed interest in the area. As Balochistan shares border with Afghanistan, it becomes strategically important for the US and the NATO forces. This was not only due to the presence of terrorist networks along the border of

Pakistan and Afghanistan but it also served as an access route for the international forces (Sial and Basit, 2010).

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have given a new dimension to the relevance of Balochistan. As far as Pakistan is concerned it faces many challenges and opportunities from this venture. The CPEC has immense importance for Pakistan as it is going to link Pakistan with the rest of the world through Gwadar port. On the other hand, the corridor passes through Balochistan, a province which has a history of grievances against the state. The Baloch people are apprehensive of the development projects in Gwadar as they perceive that they will not be given their due share and will be overshadowed by people from other provinces and foreigners.

Role of Foreign Powers in Balochistan

China

The Chinese involvement in Balochistan has increased with the initiative of the CPEC. This has great potential of benefits for both the countries and when completed, it has prospects of boosting Pakistan's economy by connecting Western, South and Central Asia (Sial and Basit, 2010). Besides that, it will also provide China an access to the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea (Sial & Basit, 2010). The Gwadar port is an extremely important access for China as it is situated at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz and can serve as an economical energy corridor and also the Central Asian countries. The Chabahar Port in Iran is also very close to this location and it is being developed with the help of India. Both the ports have great economic and strategic importance.

However, increased Chinese economic and construction activities in Balochistan have implications for the stability in the province. The Baloch nationalists view the CPEC as a threat to the native Baloch and believe that they will be marginalized besides would impact upon their culture. It is also perceived as a major transfer of Baloch resources to outside elements. There is a fear in the people of Makran Division that the people will lose their identity once the port becomes functional. The growing Chinese involvement in Balochistan after 2000 is viewed by the Baloch nationalists as "Chinese Imperial Designs" to consolidate their power against the US and Russia (Kundi, 2017).

The attacks on Chinese engineers in the province have raised concerns about the security of the province. The recent suicide attack on Chinese engineers working on the CPEC project in Balochistan is a challenge to the government (Chaudhry, 2018). The attempted suicide bombing by the BLA on a bus carrying Chinese engineers in Dalbadin is a witness to the fact that the separatist

movement in Balochistan has now brought China into the conflict because of the presence of its engineers working on the project (Chaudhry, 2018). Smooth implementation and operationalization of the CPEC will have an impact on the current Sino-Pak relations.

One of the separatist groups in Balochistan known as the Baloch Republican Party (BRP) has objected to the deal between Pakistan and China claiming it to prove detrimental to the interests of the local Baloch. According to Ashraf Sherjan, a member of the BRP in Germany, he argued that "Pakistan's economic agreement with China over the resources of the Baloch have put the local people in an uncomfortable situation and increased the intensity of military operations, disappearances and killings" (Boone and Baloch, 2016). The President of the BRP UK chapter, Mansoor Baloch is of the view that both Pakistan and China will exploit the resources of Balochistan. According to him, "Pakistan gets finance from China and uses it to kill the Baloch. China developed the Gwadar Port, but Pakistan recruited labor from Punjab and the Baloch remained without jobs" (Boone & Baloch, 2016).

India

The policy of India has been one of interference in the issues of its neighboring countries (Kheran, 2017). With the aim of establishing hegemony in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, India has been following an Indo-centric strategy (Mukharjee and Malone, 2011). India has indulged in conflicts with Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka due to its interventionist policies. Most of the times India has supported insurgencies and secessionist movement in these regions which has served as a threat to regional stability (Kheran, 2017).

The interference of India in the province cannot be neglected while keeping in mind the changing geopolitics of South Asia (Fazl-e-Haider, 2015). India has reservations regarding the increasing Chinese involvement in the Gwadar Port and perceive the Chinese presence as a threat to India's ambition of being dominant in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. According to Kaplan, "A very important factor behind the economic rivalry is that the military presence of China in Gwadar (part of the Chinese 'string of pearls strategy') is a threat to Indian naval superiority in the area" (Ahmed, 2015).

The Indian government's support to the Baloch sub-nationalists has been on the rise (Ahmed, 2018). Throughout history India has employed the strategy of supporting dissident elements within and providing them financial support (Hanif, 2018). India is supporting the separate Balochistan movement by using newly-created platforms like the Hind-Baloch Forum to create unrest in the region of Balochistan and propagate the issue at the international level to cause obstacles in the CPEC project (Hanif, 2018). Recently, India inaugurated the office of Free Balochistan in New Delhi on June 23, 2018. (Hanif, 2018). The

Free Balochistan Movement members decided to speed up Indian support to the Baloch cause.

India has been trying to destabilize Balochistan in two ways; by aiding terrorism using Afghanistan and by helping the Baloch dissidents abroad to carry out a movement for the separation of Balochistan from Pakistan (Hanif, 2018). Regarding the first, Pakistan is concerned about India maintaining 26 consulates along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan and Iran. Out of these 14 are located in Afghanistan while the rest are in Iran There are allegations by some of the Pakistani officials that India is using its consulates in Iran and Afghanistan as headquarters of Baloch insurgents and their operations. India's strong presence in Afghanistan is creating security challenges for Pakistan.

The situation is further complicated by the claims made by the Baloch separatist leaders in exile. The 'Sardars' occupy a much esteemed place in the Baloch society. Some of the tribal leaders have openly admitted that India is providing funds to them. India's renewed game plans to provide aid to the Baloch dissidents against Pakistan is clear from the recent fact that India is about to give Indian citizenship to Bramdagh Bugti and his fellows, presently located in various European countries (Hanif, 2018).

Recently, the Indian spying network was found in Pakistan, as a result of which eight members of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad were expelled in November 2016 from Islamabad (Kheran, 2017). They were accused of creating trouble and social instability and were working for the intelligence agencies. The meetings between India and Pakistan have also time and again discussed India's support to the Baloch separatists and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to destabilize Pakistan through India's presence in Afghanistan. Arrest of a serving Indian Naval officer Kul Bhoshan from Baluchistan is proof of Pakistani hawks perception of Indian interference in Balochistan.

In June 2015, the Indian prime minister Modi, in a visit to Bangladesh openly admitted that India was involved in the activities to destabilize Pakistan (*News,* 2015). He added that India had no regrets for helping the Mukhti-Bahini movement for creating Bangladesh (*News,* 2015). On 15 August 2016, during the Independence Day speech Modi raised the issue of Balochistan causing concerns in Pakistan (Haqqani, 2018). Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi, also submitted a dossier on India's interference and terrorism in Pakistan. It contained all information and evidences of the interference of RAW and its involvement in the terrorist activities in Balochistan (*Dawn,* 2017).

Afghanistan

The relationship of Pakistan with Afghanistan has been marked by proxy wars, political disagreements and border disputes since its creation (Liuhto, 2018).

Especially in the recent years, the relationship has been on hostile terms. With the ongoing war in Afghanistan, this region is the most challenging issue for Pakistan to address (Hussain, 2018).

Afghanistan, due to the weak government writ and Taliban's existence close to the Pakistani border has the main source of inflicting pain to Pakistan by conducting and sponsoring terrorism activities inside Pakistan, especially Balochistan. The Trump administration has resolved to fight the Taliban by raising the number of troops in Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan has severe implications for the province of Balochistan, which has borders with both Afghanistan and Iran (Weinstein, 2017). Between 2004 and 2016, there have been 3,580 recorded civilian deaths in Balochistan as a consequence of the war (Weinstein, 2017). The geographical proximity and porous borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan cause the instability in either region too have spill-over effects.

The lawlessness in Balochistan which is a consequence of the conflict in the province not only benefits the Baloch separatists but also creates a safe haven for the Taliban and encourages drug trade (Weinstein, 2017). It was also common for Taliban infiltrators into the Afghan National Army to escape to safe houses in Balochistan after conducting attacks (Weinstein, 2017). The capital of Balochistan, Quetta, simultaneously serves as the base of the Baloch separatist movement and the Taliban's senior leadership (Weinstein, 2017). There are also allegations referring to the Indian intelligence agency RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) of providing training and material support to the Pakistani Baloch separatists in Afghanistan (Weinstein, 2017).

In order to restrict the flow of terrorists between the two countries, Pakistan is spending around $483 million to build chain-link fences along the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistan Army has already completed work on a 5km-long fence on the border near Panjpai. In total 1,268 km-long fence will be built along the Pak-Afghan border. According to Chief of the Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa the fencing of the border will control the number of terrorists from Afghanistan and improve the security situation in the province of Balochistan. (Shahid, 2018).

Moreover, some of the Balochi separatist tribal leaders are living in exile in Afghanistan, and through their organizations causing instability in Balochistan. One such example is of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) which is being funded through weaponry from foreign elements. A large number of the weapons are supplied to the militants across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (*Pakistan Defense*, 2012). Other weapons are obtained from the past conflicts in Afghanistan (*Pakistan Defense*, 2012). Major General Ubaidullah Khan, former Director General Frontier Constabulary (IG FC) Balochistan said that there are around 121 militant training camps in Balochistan and 30 in Afghanistan which are causing unrest in Balochistan (*Express Tribune*, 2012). According to him the

camps are being supervised by Hyrbiyar Marri, Bramdagh Bugti, Allah Nazar and Javed Mengal (*Express Tribune*, 2012). Afghanistan has been used as a launching pad by the Baloch militants in order to undermine the stability in Balochistan (*Vision 21*). One example includes Bramdagh Butgti, the head of the banned Baloch Republican Party (BRP), who found refuge in Afghanistan after accusing Musharaf regime of trying to kill him (Qarar, 2017). The military and civilian leadership in Pakistan has pressurized Afghanistan to eliminate the safe havens provided to the Baloch militant groups.

United States (US)

The US raised concerns regarding the human rights violations in Balochistan. This caused worries in Pakistan as it was perceived as a sign of US interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. On February 8, 2012, there was a bill presented in the Congress by three Republican Congressmen including Dana Rohrabacher, Louis Glomert and Steve King which stated that, "Balochistan is currently split among Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan with no independent rights of its own. In Pakistani Balochistan the people are suffering from violence and extra-judicial killings" (Shaukat, 2015). The bill was in favor of the rights of self-determination of the Baloch, having an independent state. Baloch Republican Party's self-exiled chief Bramdagh Butgi supported the US Congressional Bill urging Pakistan to acknowledge the right of self-determination of the Baloch. He further invited foreign aid in the region whether it be by the US, NATO or India. In his words, "America must interfere in Balochistan and put an end to the ethnic cleansing of the Baloch. The Baloch community including women, activists, political leaders and intellectuals are being subject to torture and forced disappearances since years. In such a scenario, we will welcome the support of foreign powers. We will welcome help for our autonomy" (Baloch, 2012). Pakistan expressed serious concerns over the bill and reacted at all possible diplomatic and political fronts (Zain, 2016).

Iran

Pakistan has also been skeptical about Iranian role in airing unrest in Balochistan especially in those areas which are bordering Iran. Pakistan is cautious of Iran's growing relations with the India especially in development of Chahbahar Port. The arrest of an alleged RAW operative, Kulbushan Yadev has further reinforced the perception as he entered Pakistan from Iran. There have been allegations about Iran providing aid to the Baloch separatists who are fighting against Pakistan. This is linked to Iranian concerns regarding the Gwadar port. Gwadar (located 75km east of the Iranian border) will be a competitor to the Iranian Chabahar Port by giving trade facility to land-locked Afghanistan and Central

Asian states (Shah, 2013). Today Pakistan-Iran cooperation is being replaced by competition (Notezai, 2018). One of the reasons behind competition is over their twin ports: Gwadar in Pakistan and Chabahar in Iran. Both Pakistan and Iran are developing their ports with the involvement of China and India respectively. The Gwadar Port serves as an obstacle to both Iran and India. Therefore, both the countries are perceived by the Pakistani think tanks to have been involved in covertly fueling instability and ethnic militancy in the province of Balochistan.

The Iranian security forces have often found to be trigger happy thereby carrying out rocket attacks (Baloch, 2013). In 2013 and 2014 the firing of mortars across the border, incursion of Iranian military personnel and infringement of Pashtun airspace by Iranian helicopters occurred along the border of Iran and Pakistan (Rehman, 2014). A procession was carried out in the Mashakil town in Balochistan by the people of the town to protest against the Iranian border guards who fired mortars into populated areas. According to reports, in mid- October a number of Iranian security personnel were kidnapped along the border with Pakistan's Balochistan province. In reaction Iran fired mortar shells into a bordering town in Chaghi district called Talaap (Notezai, 2018).

On April 26, 2017, eleven Iranian border guards were killed on the Pakistani territory by the Baloch militants (Notezai, 2018). The violations on the part of the Iranian border have caused tensions in Pak-Iran relations. In order to understand the above incidents, some important factors regarding the issue of Balochistan between Pakistan and Iran should be taken into account. First of all, there are ethnic tensions pertaining to the Baloch, both in Pakistan's Balochistan and Iran's neighboring Sistan and Balochistan province. The Baloch living on both sides of the Pak-Iran border have political, economic and cultural ties with each other. Second, Iran has always kept an eye on Balochistan since the very beginning. During the regime of Ayub Khan, several bordering areas of Pakistan were handed over to Iran, including Mirjaveh, which is a town in Iran which shares borders with Pakistan. Iran has also made territorial claims over parts of Balochistan throughout history. Furthermore, the historical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has become worse. This has an impact on Pakistan and the Balochs in particular. Iran has blamed Pakistan of proving refuge to Saudi-sponsored jihadi Baloch militants, who supposedly carry out attacks on both Iranian security forces in the border region and on the state infrastructure inside Iran (Notezai, 2018).

Policies of Co-ethnics

While analyzing the role of the international factors in Balochistan, the importance of the Baloch co-ethnics living in different countries cannot be

neglected and this has considerable implications for the stability in Balochistan (Ricks, 2017).

It is not only in the contemporary time that the Baloch nationalists made a claim to their separate identity. It was in the nineteenth century that the Baloch scattered along Iran, Afghanistan and British India border areas found their ambitions and desires perturbed by the existence of national boundaries and the extension of the rule of the central administration over their region (*Global Security,* 2011). For centuries, a large number of the Baloch have been migrating or living in close proximity with Balochistan. A substantial number of the Baloch have also been living in UAE, Oman and other parts of the Persian Gulf. Many of the Baloch militants involved in separatist tendencies have sought refuge with their ethnic kin in Afghanistan (Siddique, 2014). Pakistan also has a large number of Afghan refugees. The migration of the Afghans to Pakistan accelerated after the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan. The recent phase of migration to Pakistan was in the wake of 9/11 when the US mounted attacks against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The attacks led to migration of the Pashtuns as they found a sanctuary in the Pashtun belt of Balochistan.

A very few Baloch community residing all over the world has a pseudo feeling of unity and solidarity among themselves. One of the examples is the BSO-NA (Baloch Society of North America) whose president is Dr.Wahid Baloch. He is known to be close to many of the Baloch leaders in Iran and Pakistan. This movement has organized many protest demonstrations across Chicago, Canada, New York and Washington. The aim of this organization is to make the American people aware about the condition of Balochistan. Another organization is the American Friends of Balochistan (AFOB) which brings to attention the so-called plight of the Baloch in Pakistan. Therefore, it can be observed that the Baloch are rallying for support at the international level as well (First Post, 2017).

The Iranian Baloch people also have very close links with the Baloch in Pakistan. They strongly identify themselves with their kin in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Baloch nationalists living in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan often affiliate themselves with the idea of "Greater Balochistan" (Javaid, 2010). The Baloch nationalist feel that they have a separate identity comprising of tradition, language and culture which provides them with a feeling of "uniqueness" (Breseeg, 2004). They feel that the colonial legacy has divided them and deprived them of a separate homeland.

A large number of the Baloch migration has been to the Middle East. There are a number of reasons behind this (Ahmad, 2016). First of all, most of the youth has migrated in search of labor and employment. Most of the Baloch are well settled in the Persian Gulf with good job opportunities. Apart from this, the historical, religious, racial and cultural affinities are the reason behind the

migration. The Baloch are united by a similar identity all over the world which keeps them interconnected and interrelated at all times.

Another reason behind this is the geographical proximity with the Middle East. This makes patterns of migrations easier and more accessible. The cost of living in these countries is also low as compared to other countries which makes it more lucrative. Balochistan, being one of the backward provinces of Pakistan has been marginalized in terms of job opportunities. Most of the Baloch started to migrate to other regions from the 1950s. Mostly they were employed as security guards, truck drivers, gardeners and in commercial and industrial jobs (Ahmad, 2016). Most of the Baloch were also recruited in the military of the Gulf Arab states during the 1970s and 1980s.

The presence of the Baloch in various countries carries implications for the separatist movement in Balochistan. For example, it has been alleged by the government that the Baloch nationalists are being funded from abroad (Ahmer, 2016). The existence of the Baloch co-ethnics in other parts of the world makes it easier for the transfer of military, economic and financial aid from the countries into Balochistan (Kashani, 2017).

Implications for Pakistan

The unrest in the province of Balochistan has implications for the integrity and stability of Pakistan. While the Balochistan unrest has international strings attached to it (ethnic Baloch reside in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan), the recent years have witnessed an unprecedented internationalization of the instability issue in the province (E. Ricks, 2017).

The instability and insecurity in Balochistan has implications for the development of economic projects in the country. The militants in Balochistan have complicated and slowed down the pace of fully operationalizing the CPEC project (*Dawn*, 2018).

The unrest in Balochistan could prove to be a catalyst in disturbing Pak-Iran bilateral relations. The issue of CPEC inside Balochistan is unknowingly and silently becoming a source of concern between the two countries as each suspects the other of interfering in its internal affairs (*Dawn*, 2018). This will also cause obstacles in the development of the Iran Pakistan India (IPI) gas pipeline which is important for the promotion of security in the region by increasing economic ties between the two (Bhutta, 2016). In addition to the pipeline, Iran is also making additional investments in finalizing a deal with Pakistan to provide electricity to Balochistan. Pakistan and Iran are all set to sign deal for supply of over 3000 megawatts of electricity to meet energy needs (Bhutta, 2016). The unrest in Balochistan will prove to be detrimental to the above projects and thus cause hurdles in the economic development of Pakistan.

The Baloch unrest is also perceived to be source of continued and perpetual source of destabilization between Pakistan and India. India's aspirations to secure hegemony in the region, old grievances against Pakistan and the vital project of CPEC are the key factors which force India to adopt an aggressive attitude towards Pakistan (Kheran, 2017). The Indian involvement in Balochistan is a witness to the fact that India does not want Pakistan to prosper politically and economically. The Indian spying network is also engaged in the promotion of terrorist activities in Pakistan which aim to destabilize Pakistan (Kheran, 2017).

Way Forward

The foreign powers crisscrossed strategic interests in Balochistan are causing unrest and instability (Shahid, 2016). It is in the interest of Pakistan to sincerely tackle the issue and found viable way forward.

According to Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa the way forward for Balochistan is through bringing development and stability in the province (Express Tribune, 2018). The emphasis is on the socio-economic reforms in Balochistan. By introducing reforms and provincial autonomy in the province, the unrest can be undermined to a great extent. With development in Balochistan, the elbow room for foreign powers involved in playing proxy-wars in the province, would automatically diminish (Pakistan Today, 2016).

At the political level the government should involve the militant outfits in dialogue. They should be engaged politically in order to minimize and neutralize the extremism. The Baloch militant groups such as the BLA, the BRA and the BLF have a major role to play in the Baloch unrest. The state should de-hyphenate the militant from the terrorist groups functioning from within Balochistan. On the parallel, militants should be welcomed to come into the national fold by tackling with their lawful demands (Khan, 2018).

The failure at the state level to address the reservation of Baluchi people has provided an opportunity to the international powers and the agencies to ingress (Khan, 2017). Efforts need to be made to address the challenges of instability and divisions in the province in particular and the country in general (Khan, 2017). These include promoting political reconciliation, encouraging regional trade, greater provincial autonomy and addressing past grievances (Khan, 2017).

Steps should also be taken to counter the Indian moves which are playing a destabilizing role in Balochistan. Issue of interfering in Balochistan should be one of the lead agenda points whenever Indo-Pakistan strategic dialogue resumes. At the counter intelligence level, effective measures should be undertaken to control the influence of RAW. The security measures in the province need to be enhanced tangibly in order to control the flow of foreign aid and weaponry. At the international level, Indian involvement be highlighted with all relevant states and institutions including the US and the United Nations.

Due to the presence of the Baloch on both sides of the border, the Baloch unrest is a cause of concern for both Pakistan and Iran. Instability on one side will invariably have a spill-over effect on the other side too. Therefore, both Iran and Pakistan should address the Baloch unrest as a common challenge rather than perceiving it as a source of contention between the two.

Conclusion

Balochistan is strategically important due to its geographical location and abundance of natural resources. The province carries special interest among regional and international states such as India, the US, China, Iran and Afghanistan. The present instability and militancy in the province can largely be attributed to the foreign involvement in Balochistan which has dire implication for the state of Pakistan.

There is substantial evidence of Indian and Afghan involvement in the region. Both these powers have a history of interfering in the resource rich province. This intrusion has been through intelligence agencies, militants and providing moral and financial support to the Baloch separatists. This aid is strengthening the Baloch separatist movement and causing instability through violence and militancy.

In the context of an emerging Indo-US-Afghan nexus, Pakistan has reasons to worry about the foreign interference in the province. As the ties between India and US are getting stronger, it is more likely that India will increase its activities in Balochistan knowing that it enjoys the support of the US. Furthermore, the US has once again become more assertive in Afghanistan. Both Indian and American presence in Afghanistan will make it easier for the countries to interfere in Balochistan due to the geographical proximity between Balochistan and Afghanistan.

Foreign involvement in Balochistan has implications for the Pakistan. Unrest and instability in Balochistan could turn into a drag upon the image and development of the country. Therefore, Pakistan should address the issue of foreign interference in Balochistan at the top-most priority at all levels including political, diplomatic and military. Lowering of guards could be detrimental to the success of CPEC's operationalization and trust building exercise of the foreign investors.

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