

CPEC: A Discourse on Space, Security, and Development in Balochistan

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ABSTRACT

After seven decades of armed rebellion and systematic violence, Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, has become so vulnerable today that any phenomenon –be it resource extraction, megaprojects, influx of migrant workers, real estate development, a parliamentary session, or a bus of pilgrims passing through- or any other regular human activity can spark violence. How this level of vulnerability can be explained or resolved?

In an attempt to explain what has gone wrong, this article is an exploratory research on building a multidisciplinary discourse on Balochistan in concurrence with the concepts of space, dispossession and communist geography. The study initially provides the major narratives and overviews of theoretical approaches that place the Baloch problem in the purview of spatial studies, and then puts forth determinants of vulnerability. Thematic findings include that: (a) Balochistan has become a geography of resistance –which is defined here as a space struggling to find its meaning in resistance; (b) its problems are rooted in the structural manipulation of space and the politics of spatial development; (c) the future of CPEC is wedged with the future domestic policies toward Balochistan. This discourse attempts at introducing two new concepts: the Dialectics of Asymmetric Force and Cyclical Radicalism.

Keywords: Balochistan, CPEC, space, spatial discourse, dialectical radicalism

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Introduction

Baluchistan, the southwestern frontier province of Pakistan bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is a hotbed of conflicts. It has been a cesspool of identity politics, ethnic persecution, state-sponsored sectarianism, human rights violation and gross injustice for far longer than a geographical space and its human components can endure. For every human space, there is a limit of endurance and mishandling of affairs; after that limit has been reached, spaces become hostile, rebellious and self-destructive. It is in this context that Balochistan is being discussed as its overall space is caught in a fragility trap (Hasan, 2013). According to this study, Balochistan is a multidimensional space: a Baloch space, a federal space, a space of insecurities, and a broken space; and, the contemporary conflict of Balochistan is a struggle for space.

The majority of inhabitants of the province are ethnic Baloch and this paper would discuss the past, present, and future of their relationship with their space; their long-held fears of the resource curse, military intervention, and demographic engineering among other fears.

Major Narratives

In Pakistan, there are four major narratives about the Balochistan problem: the local narrative, the military narrative, the official narrative, and the human rights narrative.

The Local Narrative. The local narrative is divided into indigenous and settler accounts. The indigenous Baloch consider themselves protagonists of the tragedy in which Pakistan annexed their princely state in 1948 and has been controlling their territory by sending Punjabi¹ troops, mercenaries and proxy sectarian radicals since then; and the Pashtun and other non-Baloch settlers intend to downsize them to a minority in their land. The settlers are non-Baloch permanent and temporary residents ranging from laborers and travelers (Shah, 2017)—who think Baloch insurgents kill them unjustifiably—to Afghan refugees, Pashtun politicians, Punjabi bureaucrats, and members of state-sponsored sectarian outfits like Lashkar-e-Jhanghvi—which justifies its persecution of the indigenous Baloch as “defensive actions against people supported by foreign intelligence services” (Hasan, 2012).

The Military Narrative. This considers Baluchistan as a third front—other two being India and the Taliban—and advocates elimination of the Baloch nationalists, insurgents and their supporters by military operations and perpetual presence of the *khaki*² in Balochistan. It takes the insurgency as a foreign instigated phenomenon funded by RAW³ and NDS⁴ (Mann, 2015; Ahmed, 2017; Fatimi, 2017; Jalalzai, 2017) or, quoting a Pakistan Army Lt. General, “elements sitting in London and Geneva hatching conspiracies against the stability of Pakistan” (Jalalzai, 2017, p.65). This narrative doesn’t believe in holding negotiations with Baloch leaders.

The Official Narrative. It holds that the natural resources of Balochistan are indispensable for Pakistan and the Baloch are as much Pakistanis as any other ethnic group. Every civilian government that comes to power blames Balochistan’s underdevelopment and marginalization on the outgoing incumbents. This narrative believes in negotiating a peaceful solution with insurgents,

bringing moderate nationalist leaders into mainstream politics, and redressing grievances of the Baloch masses by creating jobs and student allowances.

Human Rights Narrative. The human rights narrative is expounded mainly by the liberal middle-class urbanites of Karachi and Lahore, the provincial capitals of Sindh and Punjab respectively. It is vocal against the atrocities committed by Pakistan Army against the Baloch people and paramilitary corruption of the FC which, combined, becomes a formula for human rights violation in Balochistan –including forced disappearances, the kidnapping of dissidents, Habeas Corpus, torture, extrajudicial killings, and the brutal kill-and-dump operations which are being carried out since 2009 (Grare, 2013). Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) has been voicing the case of those “thousands” of missing persons with help from liberal university activists under the larger campaign of Unsilencing Balochistan (Malkani and Rajani, 2017) –numbers vary from 55 to 21,000 according to different estimates and Pakistan’s security and intelligence agencies have been declared responsible (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2012; UNHRC & UNPO, 2016).

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Towards the Fifth Narrative

Beginning with Foucault(1984, p.253), who said that “Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power”, this study provides a framework to build a fifth narrative that situates Balochistan in a matrix of spatiality and expands it further in the trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality (Soja, 1996; Soja, 2008). The framework will feature ideas and themes related to space including the organicist view of social order (Williams, 1989; Harvey, 2016); application of David Harvey’s Black Mountain analysis on Balochistan – which interprets the history of any particular space as a story of wave after wave of migratory influences and colonization and its spatiality constituted by the flows and movements pulsing across local and regional milieus (Harvey, 2016); and understanding Balochistan as geography of terror and resistance that induces an assortment of fears among the residents.

Another feature is the interpretation of post-1947 events in Balochistan as a flow of situations in a given interval of time and the resultant socio-psychological implications (Toffler, 1970) –which includes the recent “shock” of fishermen at the sudden transformation of their fishing village into an economic hub. The economic environment of Balochistan is to be discussed under the politics of spatial development with a focus on Gwadar.⁵

The secondary discussion on vulnerabilities has been supplemented by interviews/personal communication with the natives over the past year. The discourse on security has been expanded on the overall insecurity dilemma of the province including the threats to CPEC-related labor; and afterward, it is surmised that spatial development will lead to human development and security for both the locals and the Chinese working in Balochistan. Finally, the framework provides a practical guide for China (CPEC) to gain a diplomatic foothold in Balochistan by filling in the current power vacuum in that pivotal province while providing much needed public works and infrastructural plus economic development.

Further elaboration on methodology will be made in each section as the application of the framework progresses throughout the article.

A Baloch Space

When the late Nawab Akbar Bugti, *Tumandar* of the Bugti tribe, proclaimed that, “I have been a Baloch for several centuries. I have been a Muslim for 1400 years. I have been a Pakistani for just over fifty” (Jones, 2002, p.109), was he just making clear his priorities in the matters of identity or was it a declaration of war with the state? A state itself ideologically and arbitrarily created in the name of Islam and identity politics wasn’t comfortable with his statement of ideological and ethnic superiority; and so, the struggle that had begun with Khan of Kalat and Prince Karim in 1948, ended with the Tiger of Balochistan in 2006—leaving behind the debris of leaderless separatists (Bansal, 2006).

What exactly means to be a Baloch for thousands of years? Hitherto this question was answered by the aforementioned four narratives. The fifth narrative examines this question in geographical and tribal spatiality as a specialized elaboration of culture.

Terrain, Tribalism, and Space

Geographical space is a combination of culture and nature (Harvey, 2004; Harvey, 2016). The geography and ecology are directly related to the settlement pattern, which affects political development and prospects of outside influence. Balochistan has had a rough mountainous terrain and a stratified tribal society (Spooner, 1988; Matheson, 1997). Being a Balochistan for centuries implies a principled existence in a space that, over the years, became one with its inhabitants: the Baloch became Balochistan and Balochistan became the Baloch. This metamorphosis matured into ideas of ownership of territory, undying love of homeland for which human life could be sacrificed or taken, and space that had to be defended against outsiders. A tribal space has fragmented geography with boundaries drawn between the lands of various tribes; feuds occurred whenever boundaries were breached or blood was spilled—and so the defense had become two-pronged: securing the greater space and securing sovereign tribal spaces. Gradually, the greater space became an ideology and sovereign spaces emerged as 'realities' or identities in the Baloch social space. These socio-spatial identities can be equated with Foucault's "heterotopias" or "singular spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others" (Foucault, 1984, p.253). This evolution transformed Balochistan’s spatiality into a Third Space or a Representative Space: “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre, 1991).

Traditionally, every Baloch has had revered the decrees of the Baloch moral/tribal code which include: (a) the relationship of the Baloch to his land is that his territory is the ideal country; (b) unquestioning loyalty to his *Sardar*; (c) honor; (d) to avenge blood with blood (Spooner, 1988; Matheson, 1997).

After an epoch of principled existence and spatial sovereignty, when the Baloch space was forcefully integrated into Pakistan (Harrison, 1981), the Baloch rebelled. Since then Balochistan

has been a turbulent place. In 2005, the fifth and current conflict erupted when a lady doctor Shazia Khalid was allegedly raped by a military man in the Baloch town of Sui (Grare, 2013; Kumar, 2012). The alleged cover-up of the rape by military establishment resulted in attacks on security personnel by the Bugti tribesmen. The army forced Akbar Bugti, the chieftain, into the mountains and eliminated him. This assassination sparked an internecine series of insurgency (Bansal, 2006) and counter-insurgency measures that gave Balochistan such shocks that were beyond its spatial capacity to absorb.

The emergence of sovereign spaces within the Baloch social space also gave wind to the rivalries inherent in the tribal structure. There are about 18 tribes in Balochistan with three major tribes: Marri, Mengal, and Bugti. Leaders of these tribes have rarely been on the same page in matters of struggle with the state as a few tribal elites were co-opted by the military (Lieven, 2016). But the issue is not in the hands of patriarchs anymore as the struggle has been devolved from sardars to society (Chima, 2015).

A Federal Space

Political spaces are organized into units mainly in two patterns: federal and unitary. A federal setup is generally considered more prone to unit-center and unit-unit conflicts on matters of redistribution, resources, revenue, national and local jurisdiction, marginalization, separation of powers, emergency provisions etcetera (Sharma, 2015; Sharma & Swenden, 2017). This section rethinks a federation's vulnerability: Conflicts erupt in a federal space due to the contradictory pressures from spatial integration and differentiation (Harvey, 1990/2016), and spatial underdevelopment (Allen, 1997).

A nation occupies a certain space and a nation-state emerges; afterward, the state overshadows and controls every aspect of that space. It is fascinating how space turns into the state. Take space as the *base* and the state, the government, people and power relations as *superstructure*. In this superstructure, the more influential groups of people either align their interests with the state or find that they have conflicts of interest with the state and turn into separatists, rebels, anarchists or ethno-nationalists. According to Grare (2013), the state of Pakistan has been compressing the Baloch national space for seven decades now. Within the federal space, this province is, borrowing from Fanon, a compartmentalized world marked by racial segregation and architectures of control and surveillance.

Federal Space Problems

A federal space often finds itself exhausted in the struggle between diverging heterotopias –which in Pakistan's case are a multitude of competing for ideological and physical spaces. In the backdrop of the Balochistan problem is the Partition of 1947 (Siddiqi & Kakar, 2010). When the affairs of partition were being settled and Pakistan was to emerge as a hybrid of communalism and federalism, the princely state of Kalat (now central Balochistan) declared its independence as a bluff for gaining maximum autonomy (Grare, 2013). In response, the Baloch space was annexed

to Pakistan and troops were deployed to counter the budding separatists. Once the Baloch was seen as against the imploding federation, like East Bengalis after them, the federal-military elite left them struggling in underrepresentation and their space underdeveloped.

Denial of Rights and Rejection of Autonomy. The natural gas resources of Balochistan are the property of the Baloch people and the federation has been exploiting these resources located in Sui and near Dera Bugti without giving the due royalty to the original owners. Almost the entire country uses Sui gas for cooking and heating purposes; yet, Balochistan in general and those areas from where gas is extracted are particularly the most underdeveloped spaces within the federal space (Figure 1). There is not a single hospital in Dera Bugti, no clean drinking water, and NGOs are not allowed to work there.⁶ The majority of the population is living in multidimensional poverty and infrastructural development has only been concentrated around resource extraction sites; this spatial underdevelopment has had augmented the sense of right to space among the natives. Additionally, the Baloch demands for autonomy are considered as separatism at large and overridden by the use of unnecessary force –and demands for more autonomy, if left unattended, lead to demands of secession which results in violence against the national government (Ezcurra, 2017).

Separatism and Use of Force. Balochistan movement has two factions: the nationalists and the separatists. Nationalism came primordially to the Baloch as per their reverence of culture and tribal code; separatists are the militant avatars of nationalism –both factions demand the right to space but tactics are different (Wirsing, 2008). Separatism emerged only after considerable and recurring use of force by the federation which resulted in massive human loss and deepening of ethnic crises (Atarodi, 2011). With violence being perpetrated by both the separatists and security forces, the whole space has been perpetually radicalized and militarized. Currently, more personnel are being deployed for the security of Chinese nationals working on CPEC –a project between China and the Federal Government- which means the Baloch space is being federalized to the maximum. Without curbing the undue use of force the battle for space will continue with federal infringement into the Baloch space and the Baloch space resisting hostility. It can be termed as the *dialectics of asymmetric force* that makes a space resistant to any kind of symmetry or normalcy. Any development within the Baloch space done without taking the locals into confidence would then bring, if not secession, more alienation (Wani, 2016). It is not therefore only a matter of alienation of the Baloch space from the federal space; but, also of the Baloch from the Baloch space –this adds up to this asymmetry.

Structural Governance Problems and Asymmetry. Balochistan is at the crossroads of governance problems which leads to civil-military strife, center-provincial discord, selective development, and paramilitary corruption on each side. The structure of governance is flawed due to ad hoc culture and overlapping of powers. Due to a general lack of initiative by the national government and the military establishment's power to overthrow a civilian regime, the military is in charge of strategic decision making.

In addition to controlling tax-payer money, as the highest budgetary allocation goes to the defense sector every year, the military dominates the foreign policy process for India and Afghanistan–Balochistan portrayed as a third front, is virtually governed by the army. It controls large swathes of developed and undeveloped land throughout the country where it has been involved in real estate business, making golf-and-country clubs, and building vast cantonments. The federation has yielded peripheral spaces to Pakistan Army so it can secure the borders but despite having absolute control in conflict zones, those spaces are showing no signs of sustainable peace. Frontier districts in northwest and Balochistan are infested with Taliban and sectarian outfits which are used to radicalize secular spaces (Kumar, 2017a).

Civilians have no power in conflict zones. Military directly or indirectly controls the opportunistic provincial politicians and there is a nexus of military-bureaucracy-militancy that is responsible for ongoing corruption, target killings and contraband trafficking (Hasan, 2016). There is also the issue of manipulation of the electoral process (Kumar, 2017b). If all these problems are structural flaws then how to explain the role of agents who are manipulating both space and society (the base and superstructure)? This very manipulation has kept the Baloch space fragile and the civil society in infancy (Changezi & Tareen, 2018). When both the base and the superstructure become fragile, asymmetry or "temporariness in the structure of public and individual value systems" (Toffler, 1970) and volatility come into motion (Harvey, 2016); which in turn hinders long-term planning (Harvey, 1989/1999) and without long-term planning, complemented by judicial intervention, all the militarized spaces, including Balochistan, would continue to backfire because spaces rebel upon reaching their breaking point.

In the face of this chronic asymmetry, does CPEC –a federal government project that would increase military control- have a chance of success in Balochistan? The military establishment is expanding its role of security provision into project management; China has welcomed this expansion to secure project delivery (Syed, 2016) and this will further accentuate the contours of asymmetry as the Baloch wants the security forces to leave the Baloch space–but ultimately the army's preferences dominate (Fair 2017).

A Space of Insecurities

The infrastructure of Insurgency and Geography of Resistance

The spatiality of a conflict zone can be divided into the infrastructure (agency, actors, and dynamics) and the geography (effects on space). Previously, in the Federal Space section, space was taken as the base and the actors as superstructure. Reversing it: the infrastructure of conflict is the base and geography of conflict is the superstructure –production of space determined by the drivers/agents of conflict. The flow of events in the Baloch insurgency has turned the infrastructure of insurgency into the geography of resistance⁷ which is continuously generating resentment and radicalism. Both the agents and space have lost control over the conflict and insurgency, as Kupecz (2017) suggests, has become autonomous of its traditional and modern drivers.

A Mosaic of Insecurities

When space becomes a mosaic of insecurities, it turns self-destructive. Since long the State of Pakistan has turned against the Baloch people. Initially, the targets of force were the separatists and insurgents, then Baloch nationalists and their supporters, and now, the urban upper-middle-class human rights activists and dissidents who voice their concerns about the Baloch missing persons. Due to the absence of problem resolution mechanisms, the federation has left the province under military control as it sees no other way to keep Balochistan from seceding and staying in line with national security; as, the federal space depends upon the Baloch space for natural, mineral and strategic resources. Oppression by the State and resultant civil war has made life in the Baloch space highly insecure and the inauguration of CPEC is adding to it.

Labor Killings and Recent Attacks. There has been a reign of terror in Balochistan for more than a decade now and things are becoming worse as Chinese nationals are being targeted along every other local and non-Baloch connected to the CPEC construction. A few labor killings and recent attacks, recorded mostly through the local correspondents of Dawn, the largest independent English daily in Pakistan, were as follows:

- 3 May 2004: 3 Chinese engineers were killed and eleven injured when a remote-controlled car bomb hit their van on their way to Gwadar⁸ (Haider, 2005). The attack was carried out by the Baloch Liberation Front [BLF] (Ramachandran, 2018).
- April 2015: 20 laborers were killed while working for a private construction company near Turbat.
- April 24, 2017: Security forces were attacked in Pasni near Gwadar.
- May 2017: 4 Sindhi laborers were gunned down in Balochistan's Kharan district.
- May 13, 2017: 10 laborers were killed in Balochistan's Gwadar district (Shah, 2017).
- May 19, 2017: 3 laborers working on a major highway in the Hoshab area of Turbat, which links the port city of Gwadar to Quetta (Shah, 2017).
- May 25, 2017: 2 Chinese were abducted from Quetta (Shah, 2017).
- May 2017: Mastung bombing killed 28 (Shah&Sheerani, 2017; Shah, 2017).
- June 2017: The Chinese missionary couple, abducted in May, was killed in Balochistan (Masood, 2017).
- October 19, 2017: Twin grenade attacks in Mastung and Gwadar injured 38 (Ahmad 2017).
- January 9, 2018: 7 killed and several injured in a blast near Balochistan Assembly, Quetta (Zafar, 2018)
- July 13, 2018: At least 200 people, including Siraj Raisani, Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) candidate for PB-35 (Mastung), were killed and nearly 200 injured

in a deadly suicide blast in Mastung. The Islamic State claims responsibility for the attack.

There has been a tactical shift in the shape of attacks. The insurgents have shifted focus from military targets to civilian targets –it is a trickledown effect of the State's targeting of the civilian population in Balochistan. What Pakistan has been doing to the Baloch, the Baloch are doing the same to Pakistan; this is where insurgency becomes domestic terrorism (Ghatak and Prins, 2016; Ezcura, 2017).

Human Rights Violation. Human rights have been systematically violated in Balochistan by the security forces (Human Rights Watch, 2011; HRCP, 2012; UNHRC; UNPO, 2016; Malkani and Rajani, 2017) and Pakistan's intelligence agencies (Kumar, 2012; Grare, 2013). The violations include forced disappearances or the missing persons (VBM; Kumar, 2012; S. Baloch, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2015) abduction and killing of activists and dissidents (Waghmar, 2017; Malkani & Rajani, 2017) torture, extrajudicial executions, and the kill-and-dump –which leaves mutilated corpses at random locations to generate fear in public and to weaken the resilience of the targeted community (Kumar, 2012; Grare, 2013; UNPO, 2016; Kumar, 2017b). The establishment of military courts in Pakistan by the 21st constitutional amendment (preceded by the 20th that had lifted the moratorium on the death penalty) had evoked fears that private trials would be used to hang the Baloch separatists under the pretext of terrorism (Wolf, 2015).

The radicalization of Space and Cyclical violence. Time, military operations and repressive tactics have eroded any social structures there were in Balochistan capable of containing the rise of radicalism (Grare, 2013). In 1977, General Zia released the Baloch leaders and political prisoners (arrested in 1973 on charges of conspiracy to create an independent Balochistan) that lead to a decade of peace in the province. Meanwhile, under his deranged but subtle Islamization policy, he began injecting radicalism in Balochistan around 1979 through jihadi organizations and hardcore sectarian outfits –since then these outfits have been protected by the State and used as leverage against Afghanistan, India, and the secular Baloch nationalists (Akbar, 2009; Alam, 2018). Radicals were sent to counter secularists which turned them into separatists and insurgents; and further on terrorists were sent to battle insurgents and also the death squads (including Baloch guns-for-hire) have been unleashed on moderate Baloch nationalists to create confusion within the nationalist movement (Akbar, 2009; Riikonen, 2012; Kumar, 2017). Using radicalism against nationalism resulted in a process of radicalization of Baloch nationalism and space and now this radicalized space is breeding more radicalism. This fragility⁹ trap and cyclical violence can be termed as *Cyclical or Dialectical Radicalism*.

Every aspect of human life is either radicalized or terrorized. Beyond the original core-periphery tension or federal space problems, the Balochistan conflict has grown into pure chaos, devoid of any ideological struggles.

Fear. Exposure to violence can be direct and indirect –experiencing and witnessing in public, through media, or oral narration. The Baloch space, being a mosaic of insecurities and

geography of terror, has been under a state of continuous fear and people have been traumatized. The security agencies drag people from public places; on suspicion of association with insurgents, the locals are arrested from their homes without any warrant and the families have no knowledge where they are being taken; police officers who make arrests deny having made any arrests and people just disappear, and mostly the dead bodies of the disappeared are found in grain sacks, tortured and mutilated. The pain and fear of the relatives of the missing persons warrant a separate study.

Violence is a matter of routine for the Baloch space and daily life for its people who have no channel to express their fears. Adult men have the option to join insurgent ranks and avenge the state crimes (although not all adult Baloch men want to end up militants) but the women, children, and the old have to live with their fears. This information has not been gathered only from human rights organizations or activists but also from the locals. Separatists and insurgents live in remote places or mountains; then why security forces are raiding residential areas? Either to hunt the nationalists or to create an environment of fear, terror, and silence (S. Baloch, 2014).

CPEC and the Politics of Spatial Development in Balochistan

Most of China's neighboring countries have either been turbulent or economically weak and that makes them dependent on the regional hegemon. China's one-size-fits-all message to the neighbors is: whatever are your problems, Chinese investment is the solution. For China, it is methodical geopolitics and "a spatial fix to its surplus problem" (Harvey, 2016) but it may exacerbate sociopolitical problems in the recipient countries. The host national governments benefit politically, as delivering infrastructural and energy megaprojects improve their developmental rhetoric, but real socioeconomic benefits are debatable (Jacob, 2018; Xiangming, Joseph, & Tariq, 2018). Geopolitics is beyond the scope of this article but political geography is relevant as it is a link between the social space and the economic space. The above discussion on Balochistan explained sociopolitical dimensions of space concerning geography; the following is a discussion on the economic dynamics of CPEC and the phases of spatial development in Balochistan.

A Broken Space

Balochistan is a tri-state space with porous borders (Figure 1). It is the biggest and most sparsely populated province of Pakistan within hospitable deserts and dark granite mountains which make the terrain naturally rough and hostile. There are large swathes of ungoverned and undeveloped space which, other than topographical constraints to development, is due to decades of economic marginalization, and insurgency.

Making room for geopolitical applicability in the Broken Windows theory of criminology, as in Mitchell's (2010) work on political geography, it is plausible to surmise that Balochistan's neglected and unmonitored spaces breed insecurity; as the insurgents are familiar with that rough terrain and use the topographical features to the advantage of their guerilla tactics as Willem Marx

(2007), a journalist who had field meetings with Baloch insurgents, observed, "Five hours' hike up a narrow ravine, they live with their donkeys and their aging rifles, occasionally venturing out of their craggy maze to attack military checkpoints." Up to a few years back, Baloch insurgents rode camels into the mountains and became outlaws wanted by the security forces; currently, the use of motorcycles in ambush is being reported. As already mentioned that a tactical shift from military to civilian targets has occurred and now infrastructural projects and workers are under attack so the terrain has strategic implications for the operations of CPEC.

Economic Problems of Balochistan

Resource Exploitation and Underdevelopment. It has been a long-held fear of the Baloch people that investors may take their resources away (Haider, 2005) –and this apprehension is not unwarranted. Since the 1950s natural resources have been extracted from Balochistan and domestic sectors plus local markets throughout the country have become dependent on Sui gas – the massive natural gas deposits located in the province (Figure 1). It was only fair that in return Balochistan' sinfrastructure and economy had been developed; but, it is the poorest province of Pakistan (Dost, 2017; Notezai, 2018) and has been deprived of royalty on natural gas.

The economic perception of trickledown benefits has not worked for Balochistan. Gold and copper reserves at RekoDiq did not bring economic prosperity. Chinese companies have a hold on gold-copper mining in the province. Since 2002, the Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) has been taking 50% of the profits and revenues from Saindak –mining almost 600 million tons of copper ore and annually yielding 25 tons of gold and 12-15000 tons of copper (Muhammad, 2013; Notezai, 2018); the Federal Government gets 48% while Balochistan, where Saindak is located in the Chaghi district, gets only 2% (Ahsan, 2015; Dost, 2017). If Balochistan is the most underdeveloped province in Pakistan, Chaghi is its most underdeveloped district and Saindak residents are the last to benefit from the sale of its minerals: copper ore bodies have been exhausted, development is nonexistent, native labor is in bad health, and water is contaminated with chemicals from the mines (Notezai, 2018).

Balochistan is facing infrastructural development disparity as:

- There is a dire shortage of water and none of the planned hydropower projects are operational;
- there is no drinking water even in the areas in the vicinity of natural gas deposits;
- Gwadar, the port town of CPEC, lacks drinking water (Ali, 2018; Nizar, 2018) and the crisis is worsening (Mahmood, 2017; Baqi, 2018);
- most districts lack hospitals and medical facilities and the locals have to travel a long way in case of medical emergencies (Yaqoob, 2018);
- the condition of roads is abysmal which hinders the progress of trade and communications (Yaqoob, 2018) and is a problem for locals (Notezai, 2018).

Poverty and Unemployment. Balochistan is the poorest province of Pakistan with the highest rate of child mortality (Sattar, 2018; Ahmed and Mumtaz, 2018). The majority of its population is living in multidimensional poverty due to economic deprivation, underdevelopment, and absence of job and business opportunities for the common people as contracts and bids are controlled by the civil-military elite –Balochistan has a top-down corruption pattern which can shift to bottom-up in case of military business. For example, a fertilizer depot in DeraBugti which is supposed to be subsidized for the locals is controlled by a low-rank army officer who oversees the depot and controls price/commodity in the name of his superior ranking officer.¹⁰

A popular assumption about tribalism in Pakistan is that the sardars (*waderas* in Sindh) have kept the masses from education so that they stay unemployed and in service of the chieftains, and the Baloch sardars have been resisting state interference for poverty alleviation to maintain financial control over locals and seek rent on natural resources from the national government. It is a misleading analysis as the tribal control of resources has long been replaced by redistribution – although influential sardars became a part of provincial governments to retain their lands and rule. If the state had coerced the sardars to a ceasefire, it sure could have forced them to apply state-sponsored reforms on education and development. A considerable educated middle class is present in Balochistan which has denounced Balochistan’s traditional rulers and also Pakistan’s national government (Chima, 2015) for no measures have ever been taken for poverty reduction.

CPEC and Economic Struggle in Balochistan

In the projects planned under CPEC, Balochistan’s share is 0.5% (Shafqat, 2017). With the inauguration of CPEC, the creation of jobs for the Baloch was promised but the vacancies have been filled by non-Baloch candidates (Baloch, 2016). Due to a systematic marginalization of ethnic groups in Pakistan (Gazdar, 2007), there is a widespread apprehension among the Baloch that settlers will turn them into a minority. They accuse the center of demographic engineering and are troubled by non-Baloch labor as Akhtar Mengal, leader of the BNP-M party, has said (as cited in Hasan, 2017):

“We Balochs are few in number anyway and the other workers are being brought from everywhere, not to mention when the Chinese too would flock here in huge numbers. It will just make the indigenous people of Balochistan invisible.”

For the Baloch, sudden bursts of investment are signs of foreign invasion and more exploitation. “If Sui, RekoDiq and Saindak projects did not yield any benefits for them, then how a corridor can change their fates? It will make a handful of fat Baloch fatter but for the majority, this project will convert them into a minority; CPEC will change demographic realities.”¹¹ When China signed the CPEC, the identified strategic and economic benefits of cooperation with Pakistan overshadowed the risk perceptions. Bringing economic development through institution-building and infrastructure is a different process in Balochistan due to: (a) profound spatial disparity between national and provincial spaces; (b) without understanding the *politics of spatial development*

involved in the province, blanket economic development approaches will neither be effective nor sufficient.

Gwadar: A Case of Dispossession. Gwadar, a fishing village, is being reborn as the link between China's OBOR and Maritime Silk Road (Ali, 2018; Deng, Yeo and Du, 2018); Gwadar port is the growth pole around which industries and economic zones are proliferating. This reconstruction of Gwadar Port is estimated to generate millions in tariffs, duties, and revenue through China-Pakistan collaboration (Xiangming et al., 2018). What will be the share of indigenous people and fishing households in the profits to come?

The artisanal fishing economy is based on day-to-day catch and as the amount of fish has decreased due to environmental changes and security restrictions brought by port construction (Ali, 2018), the fishermen are either to migrate to far-off harbors (Mahmood, 2017) or to seek menial jobs. The natives sought engineering, construction and porter jobs at the port but no work was available as hundreds of Chinese workers were already constructing day and night and it was announced that China will bring thousands of more workers, engineers, and specialists to carry out the business of the corridor—this will further the alienation of the indigenous from their land (Ali, 2018). Following the official narrative, Xiangming et al. (2018) say that most construction workers are locals; but actually, locals get no jobs or facilities (Dilawar, 2018). The scarcity of clean drinking water is probably the biggest problem in the district (Govt. of Balochistan & IUCN, 2007).

Under CPEC a freshwater treatment facility, of 5 million gallons per day, is to be installed in Gwadar by the end of this year (Kiani, 2018); but if it would only cater to the needs of the port or be opened to the public, that remains to be seen.

Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Spatial Overhaul. A marginalized backwater has been transformed into an urbanized space with access to world markets. This rapid transformation, marked by asymmetric development interventions, has caused dislocation, resettlement, and resentment among the natives (Govt. of Balochistan & IUCN, 2007; Jamali, 2013). In 2007, the Gwadar Integrated Development Vision report recommended a broad-spectrum of short, medium, and long term solutions but nothing has been done to mitigate the crises in the past decade. Local villagers who sold their lands to real-estate sharks or were displaced by port construction (Haider, 2005; Malik, 2017) and had migrated to the hinterlands, have returned to the town in search of livelihood. Most recently, massive public/private investments have triggered a land rush in Gwadar which is a harbinger of increasing migrant influx and impending population explosion—estimated to rise from current 185,000 to 2 million over the next two decades (Malik, 2017). There is not enough developed space to accommodate this boom. Scarcity of water, environmental degradation, unemployment, informal settlements, rapid urbanization and motorization in Gwadar are rooted in land acquisition.

The steady process of land acquisition can be divided into three phases:

1. The first phase of the land acquisition began in 2002 for the construction of a deep seaport and an airport.
2. The second phase was for the allotment of land to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) –but Pakistan Navy didn't vacate the allotted land (Yousaf, 2013)- and for building Kalimat Naval Base [30,000 acres] which would harm the local shrimp trade; hence the project is still in the pipeline due to its possible environmental consequences (Amin, 2010).
3. The third and current phase began in 2015 which seeks to expand the port into a massive transshipment and naval space for China; to develop the Gwadar Port Free Zone [2292 acres]; to build the New Gwadar Airport [4000 acres], and to occupy space for the Naval Air Station in Turbat –despite that Turbat is not on the ocean (Figure 1) and there already are three naval stations in the vicinity- and for a reported future Chinese military base in the Jiwani peninsula which will relocate residents to inland Balochistan (Gertz, 2018; Maza, 2018; Rajagopalan, 2018).

This overhaul of space is being supplemented by increased militarization to secure these new architectures “by establishing a cordon sanitaire around Gwadar Port and the town” (Jamali, 2013). Under the pretext of CPEC development, the military is expanding its power (Wolf, 2016). The locals, confused between hopes of prosperity and fears of control, are victims of “the structural violence of mega infrastructure projects” (Jamali, 2014).

Solutions and Recommendations

When it came to light that China has been allegedly negotiating with the Baloch militants, the Chinese government immediately issued a disclaimer and the Chinese ambassador in Pakistan went further on to declare that those insurgents are not real Pakistanis. The reports of China building a military base in Balochistan were also rejected as rumors. These anxious disclaimers make the whole Chinese presence in Balochistan shady. Officially both the countries justify the militarization of Balochistan to secure CPEC projects; then, why any attempts at negotiating peace to achieve security be deemed inappropriate? If Pakistan could negotiate with the Taliban, why can't it with the Baloch insurgents? China has been there for almost two decades and now its citizens and massive investments are at stake in Balochistan. It is proposed that if China wishes to gain greater diplomatic advantage and sociopolitical security, it has to play a role larger than imagined by China and Pakistan until now.

The Baloch do not understand the language of megaprojects –and more so if it is in Mandarin. They understand the ever-increasing presence of armed forces and the Chinese as signs of control, violence and resource curse. They need to be spoken to in a different language –one that doesn't only promise but practically demonstrates the provision of freshwater, hospitals, schools, and humane labor conditions. China is a superpower that is using its resources and intends to develop its space in return –the locals need to see the helping hand reaching out to them without a military convoy. The military establishment of Pakistan won't like this new discourse of soft power but the situation has grown way bigger than civil-military power; it's about a subnational space being

contested by myriad domestic, regional, and international actors (Alam, 2018). This contest will either lead to socio-economic prosperity for the actors involved or end up being just another episode of power politics.

Balochistan is a broken society with structural problems of any conflict zone; and for structural problems, there are structural solutions like SDGs, SEZs, FDI, institutional building, national integration and infrastructural/architectural development, demilitarization, democratization and so on. But there is no point in recommending these run of the mill solutions because (a) the federal-multiethnic structure in Pakistan is flawed and rigid; (b) China is a rather new player in regional/global development so it can't push Pakistan for structural change; (c) a multitude of scholars are suggesting these same solutions (Khetran and Saeed, 2017; Shah & Ishaque, 2017; Shafqat, 2017; S. Ali and Abbas, 2018; Deng and Liu, 2018; Hirsh, Awan and Sarmah, 2018; Ali, 2018).

A New Approach

It is proposed that if the structure can't be fixed, why not start with what can be fixed. A new human-security-centered approach for China to achieve security in which: (a) CBMs precede development; (b) hard architecture is supplemented by soft architecture, and (c) there is a way forward to build a parallel structure that is flexible and inclusive.

Under this approach a few of the quick-fixes are as follows:

CBMs. Confidence building measures are imperative for reconciliation. First of all, China has to announce and make it public that it is going to bring the Baloch natives into confidence before any further development in their land. Such proclamations are considered significant and spread quickly in Pakistani society. This can go controversial but this will end many other controversies surrounding CPEC.

Diversion of CPEC funds. A small diversion of a few hundred million dollars has to be devised for public works to facilitate locals all over the province –especially in the resource-rich highly underdeveloped areas like the towns of Sui, DeraBugti, Saindak, and Turbat, etc. According to local sources, China can immediately win the confidence of the natives by the following measures:

- Installation of tube wells for groundwater extraction.
- China-sponsored hospitals and rural medical centers.
- China-sponsored schools and scholarships designated for Baloch students. For example, the Gwadar-China Scholarship by HEC Pakistan is a welcome initiative for the natives (Higher Education Commission, Pakistan [HECP], 2018).
- Construction of in-roads that could link the remote towns to the main roads and main roads to the Western Alignment.¹²

Decisive timeline for the construction of Western Alignment. The people of Balochistan will only benefit from CPEC if the Western Alignment is constructed –which is not being done for now and the CPEC route controversy remains unaddressed. There should be a decisive timeline for its construction and China has to push Pakistan for it.

Terrain. Following the example of National Space Research and Development Agency (Nigeria), where Sadiya et al. (2017) designed a geospatial framework for counter-terrorism by projecting cover and concealment abilities of the topography, a geospatial terrain visualization project is required to get a fresh knowledge of the terrain, in collaboration with scholars from Balochistan, to map out the most vulnerable spaces and developing a strategy to make CPEC operations secure.

Strategy for China to Popularize CPEC in Balochistan. If China and CPEC are popularized in Balochistan, it would be mutually beneficial for both the natives and the Chinese nationals stationed in the province. Once the locals become aware of and accept what China has to offer, CPEC projects will become safe and the Baloch space would begin fixing itself –but for this process to begin a dedicated media policy is required to be operational in Pakistan.

Advertisement. China can use advertisements as a tool for generating widespread awareness about the CPEC projects in Balochistan. Massive-scale advertisement is recommended which includes: (a) paid primetime advertisement of projects to be broadcasted on all the major and minor news networks; (b) a TVC, preferably in regional languages, that shows a synergy of ethnic cultures and CPEC projects; (c) billboards along the Western route could be a unique method to project images of prosperity through development.

CPEC as a Brand for Public Works. CPEC should be associated with real development in Balochistan. Tube wells, sites for new hospitals, rural centers and schools could use plaques with bilateral donor messages translated into local dialects; for example: “A gift from the Chinese Government for the people of Balochistan” or “A Welfare Project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”

The above-given recommendations are simple and practical but these need to be acted upon by Chinese policy-makers without delay. While the national and provincial institutions of Pakistan are distracted in the wake of the upcoming general elections and ongoing demonstrations against the security forces –by the Pashtun Protection Movement- China can make use of the political environment and national media to announce these minor readjustments in the CPEC plan.

Conclusion

After analyzing all aspects of the Balochistan conflict with a spatial lens, this article further draws the following conclusions:

- Balochistan has become a geography of terror and resistance; hence, resisting development and normalcy.

- Leaving the internal insecurities of space unmitigated to keep it safe from external threats would trap that space in a multidimensional insecurity situation.
- Troop deployment is ineffective towards creating peace in the province because (a) increased troops on the ground would not be enough as any professional army cannot win asymmetric warfare in inhospitable terrain; (b) increasing military presence to protect Chinese nationals from insurgents is giving the wrong message to the Baloch masses.
- If China does not use the Baloch space and society in a way that is mutually beneficial for Chinese enterprises and the locals, the situation will worsen.

A new approach for conflict resolution and the strategy laid out for its implementation might seem unprecedented but there is no other way to begin fixing Balochistan's space. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a reconceptualization of space in war zones and conflict studies.

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