

The Geopolitics of Balochistan: Regional Power Competition and Security Implications in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

Balochistan has become one of the most important geopolitical regions in South Asia because of its strategic location, vast natural resources, and access to the Arabian Sea. It connects South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, making it important for trade, energy, and security. The province is also central to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has increased the interest of regional and global powers. At the same time, the long-running Baloch insurgency has created serious security challenges for Pakistan and raised concerns about regional stability. This study examines the geopolitical importance of Balochistan by analysing the interests of Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States. It also explores how internal conflict, cross-border security issues, resource competition, and great-power rivalry shape developments in the region. The article uses qualitative research based on secondary sources, including academic literature, policy reports, and official documents. The study finds that Balochistan is not only a domestic security issue for Pakistan but also a key strategic space influencing Indo-Pacific politics, regional connectivity, maritime security, and economic competition. The paper argues that a lasting solution requires political dialogue, inclusive development, better governance, and regional cooperation rather than relying only on military measures.

KEYWORDS: *Balochistan, Geopolitics, Pakistan, South Asia, CPEC, Indo-Pacific, Regional Security, Great Power Competition.*

INTRODUCTION

Balochistan is one of the most important regions in South Asia because of its strategic location, rich natural resources, and growing role in regional politics. It is the largest province of Pakistan by area and borders Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arabian Sea. The province is also close to the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest oil shipping routes. This location has made Balochistan a key meeting point for South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. As a result, the province has become an important part of regional trade, energy transport, maritime security, and strategic competition.

The importance of Balochistan has increased in recent years because of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a major part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The deep-sea port of Gwadar is the centre of this project and is expected to improve trade and transport between China, Pakistan, and other regions. Pakistan sees CPEC as

an opportunity for economic growth and regional connectivity. China considers Gwadar important for securing trade routes and reducing its dependence on the Strait of Malacca. However, these projects have also increased security concerns because militant groups have repeatedly targeted security forces, infrastructure, and foreign workers.

The political situation in Balochistan remains complex. Since the province became part of Pakistan in 1948, sections of the Baloch population have expressed dissatisfaction over political representation, control of natural resources, and economic development. Several armed groups demand greater autonomy or complete independence. Pakistan views these groups as separatist organisations that threaten the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The government has carried out military and security operations to control the insurgency while also introducing

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development projects. Despite these efforts, violence has continued in many parts of the province, creating concerns over peace, human rights, and long-term stability.

The developments in Balochistan are not limited to Pakistan alone. The province has become an area where the interests of many regional and global powers intersect. China has invested heavily in transport, energy, and port infrastructure through CPEC. Iran closely watches developments because it shares a border with Balochistan and has its own Baloch population. Afghanistan is linked to the region through cross-border movement, trade, and security issues. India and Pakistan continue to exchange accusations over support for militant activities, adding another layer of political tension. The United States also views the region through the wider lens of Indo-Pacific strategy, maritime security, and regional stability. These overlapping interests have made Balochistan an important geopolitical space where domestic conflicts and international competition influence one another.

Although many studies have examined the Baloch insurgency, CPEC, or Pakistan's internal security, fewer studies bring together the broader geopolitical picture involving regional power competition, maritime strategy, economic interests, and security challenges. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how geography, strategic resources, and competing national interests shape the politics of Balochistan. It also analyses the security implications of the conflict for Pakistan and neighbouring countries. By studying these issues together, the article provides a better understanding of why Balochistan has become a key strategic region in South Asia and why its future will continue to influence regional peace, economic cooperation, and the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Literature Review:

Balochistan has become an important subject in the fields of international relations, security studies, political science, and regional development. The existing literature discusses the province from different perspectives, including its history, political conflict, natural resources, strategic location, and growing importance in regional geopolitics. Earlier studies mainly focused on the origins of Baloch nationalism and the relationship between the federal government and the province. More recent studies have shifted towards the strategic importance of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Gwadar Port, maritime security, and regional power competition. This change reflects the growing

international importance of Balochistan in South Asian and Indo-Pacific politics.

Several authors have examined the historical evolution of the Baloch nationalist movement. Harrison (1981) remains one of the earliest scholars to explain the political roots of the Baloch conflict and its relationship with the formation of Pakistan. Dashti (2012) traced the development of Baloch nationalism from the colonial period to the modern era, arguing that political identity and demands for greater autonomy have remained central to the movement. Ahmed (2012) discussed how repeated military operations, political exclusion, and weak provincial autonomy contributed to the continuation of conflict. These studies agree that the insurgency cannot be understood only as a law-and-order issue but must also be viewed through historical and political developments.

Another group of scholars has focused on the economic dimensions of the conflict. They argue that although Balochistan possesses vast reserves of natural gas, copper, gold, coal, and other minerals, local communities have gained limited economic benefits. Economic inequality, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and weak public services have increased public dissatisfaction. Recent research on CPEC also argues that development projects have not always addressed local concerns regarding employment, land acquisition, and resource sharing. Some scholars therefore view uneven development as an important factor behind continuing instability in the province.

The strategic importance of Gwadar Port and CPEC has received significant attention in recent years. Small (2020) argues that CPEC has transformed Pakistan's strategic partnership with China and strengthened regional connectivity. Markey (2020) explains that China's growing presence in Pakistan has increased the geopolitical value of Balochistan within the Belt and Road Initiative. Rolland (2017) also notes that Gwadar provides China with direct access to the Arabian Sea while reducing dependence on traditional maritime routes. Recent studies further observe that security threats to CPEC have become one of the major challenges facing both Pakistan and China. Militant attacks on infrastructure and Chinese nationals have increased concerns regarding the long-term success of these investments.

Many scholars have analysed the role of regional and global powers in shaping the geopolitics of Balochistan. China views the province as an important gateway for trade, energy security, and maritime access. Pakistan considers Balochistan

central to its territorial integrity and national security. Studies on India mainly discuss Pakistan's allegations regarding external support for separatist groups, while India has consistently rejected these claims. Iran's interest is linked to border security and the presence of ethnic Baloch communities across both countries. Afghanistan also remains important because of cross-border movement, refugee flows, and militant networks. The United States has examined Balochistan mainly from the perspective of regional stability, counterterrorism, and Indo-Pacific strategy. Together, these studies show that Balochistan has become an arena where domestic politics and international strategic interests intersect.

Recent research has also explored the relationship between security and development. Munir et al. (2022) argue that security challenges remain the biggest obstacle to the successful implementation of CPEC. Akbar and Shabbir (2024) explain that competition among regional and global powers has increased the geopolitical importance of Balochistan while also creating new security risks. Studies published during 2025 further suggest that development projects must include local participation, transparent governance, and equitable resource distribution to reduce conflict and improve long-term stability.

Although the existing literature provides valuable knowledge on the history, security, economy, and strategic importance of Balochistan, important gaps remain. Most studies focus on a single issue such as insurgency, CPEC, or regional security. Very few studies examine how historical grievances, economic development, maritime strategy, regional power competition, and Indo-Pacific geopolitics interact within one analytical framework. This study addresses that gap by offering an integrated assessment of Balochistan's geopolitical importance and its security implications for Pakistan and South Asia.

Objectives:

The primary objective of this study is to examine the geopolitical importance of Balochistan in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region. It analyses how the province's strategic location, abundant natural resources, and access to the Arabian Sea have increased its importance in regional politics, maritime security, energy transportation, and international trade. The study also explores how Gwadar Port has transformed Balochistan into a key strategic hub.

The study further seeks to analyse the historical and political factors that have shaped the Baloch independence movement. It examines the historical

evolution of the conflict, political grievances, demands for provincial autonomy, issues related to governance, and the role of ethnic identity in influencing the movement. It also considers how resource distribution and socio-economic conditions have contributed to continuing unrest.

Another objective is to evaluate the strategic interests of Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States in Balochistan. The study investigates how the security, political, economic, and strategic priorities of these countries have influenced their engagement with the province. It also assesses how regional and global power competition has affected the security environment and diplomatic relations in South Asia.

The study also aims to assess the impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port on regional power competition and economic connectivity. It evaluates how these projects have influenced trade, infrastructure development, investment, maritime security, and regional cooperation. The study further examines their role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

The final objective is to identify policy measures that can promote peace, stability, and sustainable development in Balochistan. It explores the importance of political dialogue, good governance, equitable resource management, inclusive economic growth, effective security policies, and regional cooperation in addressing long-standing challenges. The study seeks to suggest practical measures that can contribute to lasting peace and strengthen regional stability.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the geopolitical importance of Balochistan and its security implications for Pakistan and South Asia. A qualitative approach is suitable because the study seeks to understand political developments, strategic interests, regional power competition, and security challenges rather than measure numerical data. It allows a detailed examination of historical events, policy decisions, and international relations from multiple perspectives.

The study is based entirely on secondary data. Information has been collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government reports, policy papers, think tank publications, official statements, and reports published by international organisations. Reliable sources from institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, International

Crisis Group, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and recognised research institutes have also been consulted where relevant. Recent publications on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Indo-Pacific strategy, regional security, and Baloch nationalism have been reviewed to ensure that the analysis reflects current developments.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive and thematic content analysis. Relevant information was carefully organised into major themes, including the historical background of the Baloch conflict, strategic geography, natural resources, CPEC, regional power competition, security challenges, and policy responses. The study compares different scholarly views to identify areas of agreement and disagreement while presenting a balanced interpretation of the available evidence. No primary surveys or interviews were conducted, and the findings are based solely on published academic and policy literature.

Limitations of the Study:

This study has certain limitations. First, it relies only on secondary sources and does not include fieldwork, interviews, or primary data collected from stakeholders in Balochistan. Second, the political and security situation in the province changes rapidly, and new developments may emerge after the completion of this study. Third, access to official government information, security records, and data from conflict-affected areas is limited, which may affect the availability of complete evidence. Fourth, some published sources reflect the political or strategic perspectives of different countries and institutions. To reduce this limitation, the study compares information from multiple academic and policy sources before drawing conclusions. Despite these limitations, the research provides a balanced and comprehensive assessment of the geopolitical significance of Balochistan and its implications for Pakistan and the wider South Asian region.

Geopolitical importance of Balochistan in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region:

Balochistan occupies a unique geographical position that makes it one of the most strategically important regions in South Asia. It is Pakistan's largest province and shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan while opening into the Arabian Sea. This location connects South Asia with Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. Because of this strategic setting, Balochistan has become an important gateway for regional trade, energy

transport, and military strategy. Its location has attracted the attention of regional and global powers seeking influence over key maritime and land routes.¹

The province lies close to the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes every day. Any instability in this region can affect global energy markets and international shipping. The Arabian Sea also serves as an important route for commercial vessels connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. Control over ports and sea lanes in this region therefore carries both economic and strategic value. Balochistan's coastline strengthens Pakistan's maritime position and increases its importance in regional security planning.²

The development of Gwadar Port has further increased the geopolitical value of Balochistan. Gwadar is located near major international shipping lanes and provides direct access to the Arabian Sea. Pakistan considers the port an important driver of economic growth, while China views it as a strategic outlet for trade and energy supplies. The port also reduces China's dependence on the longer maritime route through the Strait of Malacca. As a result, Gwadar has become one of the most significant strategic ports in the Indian Ocean region.³

The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has transformed Balochistan into the centre of regional connectivity. Roads, highways, energy projects, and port infrastructure are designed to connect western China with the Arabian Sea. This corridor has strengthened economic cooperation between China and Pakistan while increasing the strategic value of Balochistan in the Belt and Road Initiative. The project is expected to improve trade and investment across the region if security challenges are effectively addressed.⁴

Balochistan is also rich in natural resources. The province possesses large reserves of natural gas, copper, gold, coal, chromite, and rare minerals. These resources are important for Pakistan's economy and are increasingly valuable in a world facing rising demand for critical minerals. Resource availability has encouraged both domestic and foreign investment while also increasing strategic competition among interested states.⁵

The geopolitical importance of Balochistan extends beyond economics. It has become an important arena for regional power competition involving China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States. China seeks secure access to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar and CPEC. Pakistan views the province as essential for national unity and strategic depth.

India closely monitors developments because of their implications for regional security and the Indian Ocean. Iran remains concerned about border stability and the security of its own Baloch-populated regions. These overlapping interests have made Balochistan an important strategic crossroads in South Asia.⁶

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the centre of global strategic competition during the past decade. Within this changing environment, Balochistan has gained additional importance because it links the Indian Ocean with continental Asia. Maritime trade, naval deployments, energy security, and regional connectivity increasingly shape the policies of major powers. Gwadar's location allows Pakistan and China to expand their maritime presence, while other regional powers closely observe these developments as part of the broader balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.⁷

Security remains one of the biggest factors influencing the geopolitical importance of Balochistan. Insurgent attacks, separatist violence, and threats to infrastructure have affected investment and delayed several development projects. Repeated attacks on Chinese nationals and CPEC facilities have highlighted the close relationship between security and economic development. These challenges have also increased security cooperation between Pakistan and China, making the province an important focus of regional counterterrorism efforts.⁸

Balochistan also influences regional diplomacy. Developments in the province affect Pakistan's relations with China, Iran, Afghanistan, and India. They also shape discussions on regional trade corridors, energy pipelines, and maritime cooperation. The province has become a meeting point where economic interests, security concerns, and geopolitical competition interact. Decisions taken in Balochistan increasingly have consequences that extend well beyond Pakistan's borders.⁹

Balochistan has evolved from a peripheral province into one of the most strategically important regions in South Asia. Its geographical location, access to the Arabian Sea, natural resources, and role in CPEC have greatly increased its international significance. At the same time, continuing security challenges and competing strategic interests have made the province central to regional politics. Understanding the geopolitical importance of Balochistan is therefore essential for explaining the changing balance of power in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region.¹⁰

Historical and political factors that have shaped the Baloch independence movement:

The Baloch independence movement has developed through a long historical and political process. Its roots extend to the late colonial period when the British administered Baloch territories through different political arrangements. During this period, the princely State of Kalat enjoyed a degree of internal autonomy under British supervision. The growth of political awareness among educated Baloch leaders during the 1930s and 1940s encouraged demands for greater political rights and self-rule. These early political developments laid the foundation for modern Baloch nationalism and continue to influence present-day political debates.¹¹

The political transition following the partition of British India in 1947 became a turning point in Baloch history. The accession of the State of Kalat to Pakistan in 1948 remains one of the most debated events in the region's history. The Government of Pakistan maintains that the accession was legal and constitutional. Many Baloch nationalist writers, however, argue that it took place under political pressure and without the consent of all sections of the Baloch leadership. These competing interpretations continue to shape political narratives on both sides and remain central to the independence movement.¹²

The relationship between the federal government and Balochistan has experienced repeated periods of political tension. Several elected provincial governments were dismissed during different periods, creating distrust between provincial leaders and the central government. Many political groups argued that constitutional promises of provincial autonomy were not fully implemented. These developments strengthened demands for greater control over local administration, natural resources, and decision-making within the federal system.¹³

The insurgency has passed through several distinct phases since Pakistan's independence. Armed uprisings occurred in 1948, 1958–59, 1962–63, 1973–77, and again after 2004. Each phase was influenced by different political circumstances, but many scholars identify similar underlying causes, including disputes over political representation, resource distribution, and provincial rights. The continuation of these cycles demonstrates that the conflict has both historical and structural dimensions rather than being the result of a single event.¹⁴

Natural resources have become an important political issue in the Baloch movement. Balochistan possesses significant reserves of natural gas, copper, gold, coal, and other minerals. Nationalist leaders have

argued that local communities have received only a limited share of the benefits generated from these resources. Concerns regarding employment opportunities, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and revenue sharing have increased political dissatisfaction in several districts. Resource governance has therefore become closely linked with political mobilisation.¹⁵

Tribal leadership has also influenced the political evolution of the movement. Traditional tribal chiefs have historically played an important role in Baloch society and politics. While some tribal leaders have participated in provincial and national politics, others have supported nationalist campaigns demanding greater autonomy or independence. At the same time, a younger generation of educated political activists has expanded the movement beyond tribal leadership by promoting ethnic identity, political participation, and social mobilisation through student organisations and civil society groups.¹⁶

The emergence of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) introduced a new political dimension to the conflict. Development projects centred on Gwadar Port increased expectations of economic growth, but they also raised concerns among some local communities regarding land acquisition, demographic change, employment opportunities, and control over local resources. These concerns have become part of wider political debates about development, representation, and local participation in decision-making processes.¹⁷

Political responses by the Pakistani state have combined constitutional reforms, economic development programmes, and security operations. Measures such as the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment strengthened provincial powers, while various development packages sought to improve infrastructure and public services. Despite these initiatives, several studies argue that political mistrust continues because many local grievances remain unresolved. This has limited the effectiveness of state-led reconciliation efforts in some parts of the province.¹⁸

Human rights concerns have become another important political factor influencing the movement. National and international organisations have reported allegations of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, restrictions on political activity, and violence involving both state and non-state actors. Pakistani authorities have rejected or disputed many of these allegations and maintain that security operations are necessary to combat terrorism and protect national security. The debate over human rights

continues to shape both domestic politics and international attention towards Balochistan.¹⁹

The Baloch independence movement today represents a combination of historical memory, political demands, ethnic identity, economic concerns, and security issues. Its development has been influenced by colonial legacies, constitutional debates, changing leadership, resource politics, and regional strategic interests. Understanding these interconnected historical and political factors is necessary for analysing the continuing conflict and the prospects for political dialogue and long-term stability in Balochistan.²⁰

Strategic interests of Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the U.S. in Balochistan:

Balochistan has become an important centre of regional and international politics because of its location, natural resources, and access to the Arabian Sea. The province connects South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, making it valuable for trade, energy transport, and maritime security. The growing importance of Gwadar Port and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has attracted the attention of major regional and global powers. Each country views Balochistan through its own security, political, and economic interests, making the province a key area of geopolitical competition rather than only a domestic issue for Pakistan.²¹

Pakistan considers Balochistan essential for its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and economic development. The province occupies nearly forty-four percent of Pakistan's total land area and contains significant reserves of natural gas, copper, gold, and other minerals. Islamabad views peace in Balochistan as necessary for national security, successful implementation of CPEC, and economic growth. The government has therefore invested in transport networks, ports, mining projects, and security measures while continuing military operations against armed separatist groups operating in the province.²²

China's strategic interest in Balochistan is mainly linked to the Belt and Road Initiative and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Gwadar Port provides China with direct access to the Arabian Sea, reducing dependence on the Strait of Malacca for energy imports and trade. China also views Balochistan as an important link connecting western China with international markets. The protection of Chinese workers, investments, and transport infrastructure has therefore become a major concern in China's relationship with Pakistan. Increasing attacks on Chinese nationals have further

strengthened security cooperation between the two countries.²³

India closely follows developments in Balochistan because of their impact on South Asian security and the Indian Ocean region. New Delhi views CPEC as strategically significant because part of the corridor passes through territory claimed by India. India has also invested in Iran's Chabahar Port, which provides access to Afghanistan and Central Asia without using Pakistani territory. Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of supporting Baloch militant groups, while India has consistently rejected these allegations. The competition between Gwadar and Chabahar has added another strategic dimension to India-Pakistan relations.²⁴

Iran shares a long border with Pakistan's Balochistan and has its own Baloch population in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. Tehran seeks stability along the border to prevent cross-border militancy, arms smuggling, and illegal migration. Iran is also interested in expanding regional trade through Chabahar Port while maintaining stable relations with both Pakistan and China. Although Gwadar and Chabahar are often viewed as competing ports, some analysts argue that they may also complement each other through regional connectivity if political cooperation improves.²⁵

Afghanistan's interest in Balochistan is influenced by geography, border management, refugee movements, and regional trade. The long and porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has created challenges related to militant movement, smuggling, and illegal trade. Stability in Balochistan is therefore closely linked to peace in Afghanistan. After the return of the Taliban government in 2021, both Pakistan and China increased diplomatic engagement with Kabul to improve regional security and encourage economic cooperation involving Afghanistan.²⁶

The United States views Balochistan mainly through the wider framework of Indo-Pacific strategy, regional stability, maritime security, and counterterrorism. Washington recognises Pakistan's importance because of its geographical position between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. At the same time, growing Chinese investments through CPEC have increased American interest in the region. The strategic competition between the United States and China has made Balochistan part of a broader contest for political influence, infrastructure development, and regional partnerships.²⁷

The interests of these countries frequently overlap but also compete with one another. Pakistan and China seek to strengthen economic connectivity through Gwadar and CPEC. India promotes alternative connectivity through Chabahar and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Iran attempts to balance economic cooperation with security concerns along its eastern border. Afghanistan seeks greater regional trade while addressing cross-border security challenges. The United States continues to monitor these developments because of their implications for Indo-Pacific strategy and the changing balance of power in Asia.²⁸

Security concerns influence the strategic calculations of every major stakeholder. The activities of the Baloch Liberation Army and other militant groups have targeted security forces, infrastructure projects, and foreign nationals, especially Chinese workers. These attacks have delayed investment, increased security costs, and affected regional confidence in large development projects. Pakistan has strengthened military operations and security arrangements to protect strategic infrastructure, while China has repeatedly called for stronger protection of its personnel and investments.²⁹

The strategic interests of Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States demonstrate that Balochistan has become much more than a provincial issue. Geography, energy resources, maritime access, regional connectivity, and great-power competition have transformed the province into one of the most important geopolitical spaces in South Asia. The interaction of these interests continues to shape regional diplomacy, security policies, economic planning, and the future balance of power across the Indo-Pacific region.³⁰

Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port on regional power competition and economic connectivity:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the largest infrastructure and connectivity projects in South Asia. It was launched in 2015 as a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC aims to connect Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Province with Gwadar Port on Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast through a network of highways, railways, energy projects, industrial zones, and communication infrastructure. The project has changed the strategic importance of Balochistan by placing it at the centre of regional trade and geopolitical competition. It has also strengthened economic cooperation between China and Pakistan while attracting global attention because of its

strategic location and long-term security implications.³¹

Gwadar Port is the most significant component of CPEC. Located near the Strait of Hormuz, it provides direct access to one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes. For Pakistan, Gwadar is expected to become a major commercial hub that can increase trade, attract foreign investment, create employment, and support industrial development. The port also offers Pakistan an opportunity to improve regional connectivity with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Its strategic location has therefore increased Pakistan's importance in regional transport and maritime trade networks.³²

China views CPEC as an important project for strengthening its energy security and expanding economic connectivity. At present, much of China's imported energy passes through the Strait of Malacca before reaching Chinese ports. Gwadar offers an alternative route by allowing goods and energy supplies to move through Pakistan into western China. This shorter route reduces transportation time and strengthens China's ability to diversify its supply chains. CPEC therefore supports China's broader economic and strategic objectives under the Belt and Road Initiative.³³

CPEC has also transformed regional economic connectivity. The transport corridors built under the project are expected to improve the movement of goods between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Better road and rail infrastructure can reduce transport costs, improve market access, and encourage cross-border trade. Industrial zones established along the corridor may promote manufacturing, logistics, and investment. These developments have the potential to support economic integration across a wider region if political stability and security are maintained.³⁴

The strategic importance of CPEC has also increased regional power competition. China considers the corridor an important part of its global connectivity strategy, while Pakistan views it as a major source of economic growth and strategic partnership. At the same time, India has expressed concerns because part of the corridor passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory claimed by India. These competing strategic interests have made CPEC an important issue in regional diplomacy and security discussions.³⁵

The United States also closely monitors developments related to CPEC. American policymakers view China's growing economic and strategic presence in the Indian Ocean as part of

wider geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific. The expansion of Chinese investments, infrastructure projects, and possible future maritime access through Gwadar has increased discussions regarding regional balance of power. As a result, CPEC has become an important factor in the broader strategic competition between China and the United States.³⁶

Regional connectivity under CPEC also has implications for neighbouring countries. Afghanistan could benefit from improved transport links and increased access to international markets if regional political conditions become favourable. Central Asian countries may gain shorter trade routes through Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. Iran's Chabahar Port has often been compared with Gwadar because both ports seek to improve regional trade and connectivity. While they are sometimes viewed as competing projects, several scholars argue that both ports could complement each other through regional economic cooperation.³⁷

Despite its economic potential, CPEC continues to face serious security challenges. Militant attacks on Chinese engineers, infrastructure projects, and security personnel have delayed several projects and increased investment risks. The Baloch Liberation Army and other militant groups have repeatedly targeted CPEC-related facilities in Balochistan. These attacks have led Pakistan to strengthen security arrangements and establish dedicated forces to protect Chinese personnel and strategic infrastructure.³⁸

Local development remains another important issue in assessing the impact of CPEC. Although major investments have been made in ports, roads, airports, and industrial infrastructure, many residents of Gwadar continue to face shortages of clean water, electricity, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Local communities have raised concerns regarding resource distribution, land acquisition, and participation in development planning. Addressing these concerns is important for ensuring that economic growth benefits local populations as well as national economies.³⁹

The future success of CPEC will depend on political stability, effective governance, regional cooperation, and sustained security. Continued investment in infrastructure, transparent administration, local participation, and improved regional relations can strengthen economic connectivity across South Asia and beyond. The corridor has already reshaped the strategic importance of Balochistan by linking regional trade, maritime security, energy transport, and great-power competition into a single geopolitical framework.⁴⁰

Policy measures for promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development in Balochistan:

Peace and stability in Balochistan require a comprehensive policy approach that addresses political, economic, social, and security concerns together. The long-running conflict has shown that military measures alone cannot resolve deep-rooted grievances. Lasting peace depends on improving governance, strengthening public institutions, ensuring political participation, and promoting inclusive development. A balanced policy framework can reduce tensions while creating conditions for economic growth and regional cooperation. Recent studies emphasise that sustainable peace is more likely when development is accompanied by public participation and accountable governance.⁴¹

Political dialogue should become a central element of conflict resolution. Constructive engagement between the federal government, the provincial government, elected representatives, tribal leaders, civil society organisations, and youth groups can build trust and reduce political alienation. Open discussions on constitutional rights, provincial autonomy, and resource management may create opportunities for peaceful solutions. Inclusive dialogue also helps reduce misunderstanding between the state and local communities.⁴²

Good governance is essential for restoring public confidence. Transparent administration, efficient public services, and strong local institutions can improve relations between citizens and the government. Reducing corruption, strengthening accountability, and improving service delivery in education, healthcare, water supply, and local administration can address many long-standing public concerns. Better governance also encourages investment and supports social stability across the province.⁴³

Economic development should directly benefit local communities. Large infrastructure projects such as CPEC and Gwadar Port can generate employment and business opportunities, but local people must receive a fair share of these benefits. Policies should prioritise local hiring, vocational training, support for small businesses, and transparent revenue-sharing mechanisms. Community participation in development planning can improve public trust and reduce resentment towards large projects.

Education and skill development are important for reducing unemployment and preventing youth radicalisation. Expanding schools, universities, technical institutions, and vocational training

centres can improve employment opportunities and strengthen human capital. Scholarships, entrepreneurship programmes, and digital skills training can encourage young people to participate in the formal economy rather than joining violent movements. Investment in education creates long-term social and economic benefits for the province.⁴⁴

Natural resource management requires greater transparency and local participation. Balochistan possesses valuable reserves of natural gas, copper, gold, and other minerals. Fair distribution of royalties, environmental protection, and responsible mining practices can improve public confidence in resource development. Local communities should participate in decisions concerning resource extraction so that development contributes to both provincial and national prosperity.⁴⁵

Security policies should combine effective law enforcement with respect for human rights and the rule of law. Protection of civilians, public infrastructure, and development projects remains necessary because militant attacks continue to threaten stability. At the same time, building public trust requires transparent legal processes, independent oversight, and protection of civil liberties. A balanced approach can improve security while reducing political tensions.⁴⁶

Regional cooperation can also contribute to long-term peace. Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, China, and other regional partners share common interests in border security, trade, and economic development. Improved intelligence sharing, coordinated border management, and joint efforts against terrorism and organised crime can strengthen regional stability. Expanding legal trade and transport links may also reduce illegal cross-border activities and encourage economic integration.⁴⁷

Community participation should remain at the centre of development planning. Local governments, women's organisations, youth associations, business groups, academics, and civil society organisations should be involved in designing and monitoring development projects. Inclusive decision-making improves transparency, strengthens accountability, and increases public acceptance of government policies. Development programmes that reflect local priorities are more likely to achieve lasting success.⁴⁸

Long-term peace in Balochistan depends on combining political dialogue, accountable governance, inclusive economic growth, quality education, responsible resource management,

effective security policies, and regional cooperation. These measures can strengthen public confidence, reduce conflict, and create conditions for sustainable development while improving the province's contribution to Pakistan's stability and regional connectivity.⁴⁹

Security Implications:

The conflict in Balochistan has become one of the most important security challenges in South Asia. The province has witnessed repeated attacks by separatist groups, particularly the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). Their operations have become more organised, involving attacks on military installations, railway networks, highways, airports, and strategic infrastructure. The growing operational capability of these groups has increased security concerns for Pakistan and its regional partners.⁵⁰

The continuing insurgency directly affects Pakistan's internal security. Large deployments of military and paramilitary forces have been required to protect public infrastructure, government institutions, and civilian populations. Frequent attacks have increased defence expenditure and diverted resources that could otherwise support economic and social development. The persistence of violence has also complicated governance in several districts of the province.⁵¹

The security situation has become a major concern for the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Chinese engineers, workers, and investment projects have repeatedly been targeted by militant groups. These attacks have delayed infrastructure projects, increased project costs, and required Pakistan to establish dedicated security forces for the protection of Chinese personnel. Beijing has consistently urged Pakistan to strengthen security measures around Chinese investments.⁵²

Balochistan also has important implications for maritime security. Gwadar Port is located close to the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest energy transport routes. Any major disruption caused by militant attacks or regional conflict could affect commercial shipping, energy supplies, and maritime trade across the Arabian Sea. This has increased the strategic attention given to the province by regional and extra-regional naval powers.⁵³

Cross-border security remains another important challenge. Balochistan shares long borders with Iran and Afghanistan, making border management difficult. Militant groups, smugglers, and criminal networks often exploit these porous borders for movement and illegal activities. Weak border control

increases the risk of arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and cross-border militancy, creating security concerns for all neighbouring countries.⁵⁴

The conflict also affects regional diplomatic relations. Pakistan has frequently alleged external support for separatist groups, while neighbouring countries have rejected such claims. These accusations contribute to mistrust among regional states and complicate efforts to improve political dialogue and security cooperation. As a result, Balochistan has become an important issue in regional strategic calculations.⁵⁵

The deteriorating security environment discourages foreign investment and slows economic development. International companies involved in mining, energy, and infrastructure projects have expressed concerns regarding the safety of their personnel and assets. Recent reviews of major mining investments demonstrate how persistent insecurity can delay large development projects and reduce investor confidence. Human security has also been affected by the prolonged conflict.

Civilian casualties, displacement, disruption of education, and limited access to healthcare have created serious social challenges. Human rights organisations have raised concerns regarding violence involving both militant organisations and state security forces. These issues continue to attract international attention and influence Pakistan's global image.⁵⁶

The security situation in Balochistan increasingly influences the wider Indo-Pacific region. The province has become part of strategic competition involving China, India, the United States, Iran, and other regional actors. Competition over ports, trade corridors, energy security, and maritime access has transformed local instability into an issue with broader regional and international consequences.

Future Scenarios:

The future of Balochistan will depend largely on the ability of the Pakistani government to address political grievances while maintaining security and promoting inclusive economic development. If political dialogue is strengthened and provincial institutions are given greater authority, public trust may gradually improve. Greater participation of local communities in decision-making and equitable distribution of development benefits can reduce tensions and create conditions for long-term stability. Recent studies argue that inclusive governance is essential for ensuring that

infrastructure projects generate sustainable peace rather than deepening existing divisions.⁵⁷

The success of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port will remain closely linked to improvements in the security environment. If attacks on infrastructure, foreign workers, and security forces decline, CPEC has the potential to transform Balochistan into a major regional trade and logistics hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Expansion of industrial zones, transport networks, and maritime trade could generate employment, increase investment, and strengthen Pakistan's economic integration with neighbouring regions. However, continued instability could delay projects, discourage foreign investors, and reduce the economic benefits expected from the corridor.

Regional diplomacy will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of Balochistan. Pakistan, China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries share common interests in secure borders, economic connectivity, and counterterrorism cooperation. Improved coordination in border management, intelligence sharing, and regional trade could strengthen stability and reduce opportunities for militant networks. At the same time, competition among major powers in the Indo- Pacific is likely to continue influencing strategic calculations in the region, making Balochistan an important component of wider regional geopolitics.⁵⁸

The management of natural resources will remain a decisive factor in determining future outcomes. Balochistan possesses significant reserves of copper, gold, natural gas, and other minerals that can contribute substantially to Pakistan's economy. Transparent governance, fair revenue-sharing mechanisms, environmental protection, and greater local participation in mining and infrastructure projects can improve public confidence and reduce conflict. Failure to address these concerns may continue to generate dissatisfaction and affect the implementation of large-scale development initiatives.⁵⁹

Technological and institutional improvements may also shape future security and development. Greater use of digital surveillance, border monitoring systems, intelligence coordination, and modern policing can improve the protection of critical infrastructure and transport corridors. At the same time, investment in education, vocational training, healthcare, and local entrepreneurship can strengthen human capital and reduce unemployment among young people. Such measures can improve social

stability while supporting sustainable economic growth across the province.⁶⁰

The long-term future of Balochistan will therefore depend on balancing security, political inclusion, economic development, and regional cooperation. A comprehensive approach that combines accountable governance, effective law enforcement, inclusive development, responsible resource management, and constructive regional engagement offers the strongest opportunity for reducing conflict and strengthening stability. Such an approach can enhance Pakistan's economic connectivity while contributing to peace and cooperation across South Asia and the wider Indo- Pacific.⁶¹

Findings:

The study finds that Balochistan has become one of the most important geopolitical regions in South Asia because of its strategic location, abundant natural resources, and access to the Arabian Sea. The development of Gwadar Port and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has significantly increased the province's strategic value. Pakistan views Balochistan as essential for national security and economic development, while China considers it a key gateway for the Belt and Road Initiative. India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States also have strategic interests in the region, making Balochistan a focal point of regional and global power competition. The study also finds that geography has transformed the province from a peripheral region into a major centre of maritime security, energy connectivity, and regional trade.

The study further finds that the Baloch independence movement is rooted in historical, political, economic, and social factors rather than a single cause. Long-standing concerns regarding political representation, provincial autonomy, resource distribution, and economic inequality have contributed to continuing unrest. Although CPEC and Gwadar Port have created opportunities for economic growth, the benefits have not been perceived as equally shared by many local communities. The persistence of insurgency has affected governance, delayed development projects, discouraged foreign investment, and increased security costs. Repeated attacks on security forces, public infrastructure, and foreign nationals have also strengthened military responses and regional security cooperation.

The study finds that sustainable peace in Balochistan requires a balanced approach that combines political dialogue, accountable governance, inclusive economic development, effective security measures, and regional cooperation. Military action alone is

unlikely to resolve long-standing grievances. Greater local participation in decision-making, transparent management of natural resources, improved education and employment opportunities, and stronger public institutions can help reduce conflict and build public confidence. The study also finds that cooperation among Pakistan, China, Iran, Afghanistan, and other regional partners is essential for improving border security, expanding economic connectivity, and promoting long-term stability in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

Discussion:

The findings show that Balochistan is no longer only an internal issue of Pakistan but has become an important geopolitical space in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Its strategic location, rich mineral resources, Gwadar Port, and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have attracted the attention of major regional and global powers. Pakistan considers the province essential for national security and economic growth, while China views it as a key link in the Belt and Road Initiative. India, Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States also have strategic interests that influence their policies towards the region. These competing interests have increased regional rivalry and made Balochistan a critical area for maritime security, energy routes, and economic connectivity. The findings support recent studies that argue geography and connectivity projects have significantly increased the strategic importance of Balochistan in regional politics.

The study also indicates that the conflict in Balochistan cannot be explained only through security concerns. Historical grievances, demands for greater political participation, unequal distribution of natural resource benefits, and limited socio-economic development have all contributed to the continuation of the insurgency. The findings suggest that lasting peace requires a balanced policy that combines political dialogue, good governance, inclusive development, respect for human rights, and effective law enforcement. Improving local participation in development projects, ensuring transparent resource management, and strengthening regional cooperation can reduce tensions and support long-term stability. Such an approach would not only benefit Balochistan but also contribute to peace, economic growth, and regional cooperation across South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Significance:

This study is significant because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical

importance of Balochistan in the changing strategic environment of South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. While many previous studies have examined the Baloch insurgency, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), or regional security as separate issues, this research integrates historical, political, economic, security, and geopolitical dimensions into a single analytical framework. It explains how Balochistan has evolved from a peripheral province into a strategically important region that influences maritime security, energy transportation, regional connectivity, and the foreign policies of major powers. The study also highlights the relationship between domestic political developments and broader regional power competition, thereby contributing to the growing literature on South Asian geopolitics and international security.

The study also has practical policy significance. Its findings may assist policymakers, security analysts, diplomats, researchers, and development planners in understanding the complex challenges facing Balochistan. The analysis demonstrates that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through security measures alone but requires political dialogue, accountable governance, equitable resource management, inclusive economic development, and stronger regional cooperation. The study offers policy recommendations that may support better governance, improved regional connectivity, and long-term stability in the province. It also provides a useful academic reference for future research on regional security, conflict resolution, maritime strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the evolving balance of power in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion:

Balochistan has emerged as one of the most strategically important regions in South Asia because of its geographical location, abundant natural resources, and access to the Arabian Sea. The development of Gwadar Port and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has increased its significance in regional trade, energy security, and maritime connectivity. These developments have attracted the attention of Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, the United States, and other international actors, making Balochistan an important centre of regional power competition.

The study shows that the Baloch independence movement is shaped by a combination of historical, political, economic, and social factors. Issues related to political representation, provincial autonomy, resource distribution, governance, and

development continue to influence the conflict. The persistence of insurgency has affected internal security, delayed infrastructure projects, reduced investor confidence, and increased regional security concerns. These challenges demonstrate that security measures alone are not sufficient to achieve lasting peace.

The study concludes that long-term stability in Balochistan depends on a comprehensive and balanced policy approach. Political dialogue, accountable governance, equitable sharing of natural resources, quality education, employment generation, effective law enforcement, and greater participation of local communities are essential for reducing conflict. Strong regional cooperation in trade, border management, and counterterrorism can further support peace and economic development. Addressing these issues together will strengthen stability in Balochistan and contribute to regional security, economic connectivity, and sustainable development across South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

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