**[Balochistan: the foreign hand?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1677136/balochistan-the-foreign-hand)**

[Pervez Hoodbhoy](https://www.dawn.com/authors/2286/pervez-hoodbhoy)Published February 26, 2022

The writer is an Islamabad-based physicist and author.

WITH the present uptick of attacks on security forces, we are back to a familiar routine. Between when a terrorist incident occurs and blame is assigned, the separation is no more than a few minutes. The investigation-free and evidence-free conclusion never changes; whatever happened is the work of foreign forces. Domestic political opponents — even if perfectly peaceful and totally unconnected with the incident — can conveniently be labeled as foreign agents and stomped upon hard. It is hoped that fear will leave them paralysed and speechless.

This may explain why Hafeez Baloch was [forcibly disappeared](https://www.dawn.com/news/1675714) three weeks ago by armed men who alighted from a black pickup. This bright young man is an M.Phil candidate in particle physics in my department at Quaid-e-Azam University. The incident happened in front of his terrified students and fellow teachers while he was teaching at a small private school in Khuzdar, his hometown. Hafeez had used the winter vacations to take a short trip home and earn some desperately needed cash. Just days away from returning to Islamabad for submitting his final thesis, his teachers and fellow students tell me he was a bookworm not known to have the slightest connection with any violent group.

Fearful of how the security forces might react, the local police balked at registering an FIR. While in their captivity, Hafeez will doubtless have been accused of being a foreign agent. Like countless other young Baloch men arbitrarily picked up in the past, he too will be deeply scarred emotionally — and perhaps physically — during this ordeal. One does not even know if he will ever be seen alive again. The mounting sense of Baloch grievance will go up yet another notch.

Pakistan’s external enemies are claimed to be behind its problems of national integration. But those who play secret games under the guise of national security bear far greater responsibility. It is they who made our country suffer so grievously from terrorism between 2001 and 2014. Although inimical foreign powers have undoubtedly sought to inflict hurt, Pakistan’s wounds during that terrible period were largely self-inflicted.

Forcibly disappearing Baloch students won’t eliminate terrorism but will weaken the federation of Pakistan.

In the years following 9/11, terrorist attacks became a daily occurrence once Gen Pervez Musharraf sided with America and joined its so-called war on terror. Earlier, Pakistan had been the Taliban’s principal supporter and, as is well known, that support continued secretly. However, publicly Pakistan had declared itself on the side of the Taliban’s enemy. In retaliating against this perceived betrayal, religiously inspired young boys from madressahs blew themselves up in bazars, hospitals and schools. The establishment, however, claimed all terrorists were either foreigners or foreign supported. The common refrain was: how could killers of Muslims be Muslim?

The loudest advocate of the foreign hand theory was the late Gen Hamid Gul. My first encounter with this famous general was after he addressed an audience sometime around 1998 in the physics auditorium at Quaid-e-Azam University. There he urged Pakistan to lead jihad around the world. During the Q&A session he was flattered at my calling him Adolf Hitler’s brother. We then sparred frequently on various TV channels. My last televised encounter with him was in early 2014, just after a horrendous back-to-back suicide attack some hours earlier. The general declared that the bombers were non-Muslim because they had not been circumcised. He angrily refused to provide proof.

The truth, however, had started leaking out soon after the bloody capture in 2008 of the Swat valley by Mullah Fazlullah’s forces. The powers that be of those times approvingly watched him — and the infamous Mangal Bagh — from a distance. Their U-turn came much later. After the 2014 [massacre](https://www.dawn.com/news/1151361) of 149 children and their teachers at the Army Public School in Peshawar, the denial mode was switched off. Thereafter the Pakistan Army launched Operation Rad-ul-Fasaad. The word ‘fasaad’ is a term strictly used for internal conflict only, not war against an external enemy.

Suddenly Pakistanis began to see TV propaganda video clips of PAF jets pounding targets in North Waziristan, artillery firing into the mountains, or, perhaps, some other celebration of these military operations. You rubbed your eyes in disbelief — how could aircraft of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan bomb Taliban fighters whose stated goal was to establish Pakistan as an Islamic state? How could they ever have been portrayed as non-Muslims?

It took a very long time to admit that Fazlullah’s TTP was actually a Muslim force. Now that the Afghan Taliban government in Kabul continues to harbour and protect the TTP, that delusionary bubble has finally burst. But has it? I don’t know. One day TTP is denounced as India-funded and, on the next, embraced as brothers. The confusion continues.

For now, let’s leave that as it is. What about Balochistan. Where lies the truth? How deep is India’s involvement?

India has certainly not been unaware of Pakistan’s difficulties in Balochistan. As a general rule, whenever a population is angry and alienated, for external enemies to find domestic allies is easy. India believes that Pakistan recruited Kashmiris on India’s side of the LOC to attack Indian security forces. Back in 1971, India could successfully exploit Bengali alienation to cut Pakistan in two. Today, Baloch alienation leads many Indians to talk about Balochistan as an arrow in India’s quiver against Pakistan.

**Editorial:** [*Cycle of distrust and disaffection must be broken to deal with renewed insurgency in Balochistan*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1672064/renewed-insurgency)

Indian spymasters Vikram Sood and Ajit Doval, as well as PM Modi, have often spoken about doing a tit-for-tat for perceived Pakistani involvement in Kashmir. Meanwhile strategists like Pramit Pal Chaudhuri suggest the retribution could come through fanning Pakistan’s exaggerated fears of Baloch secession. India should hope, he says, that the Pakistan Army’s angry overreaction to dissent will keep Balochistan aflame.

The abductors of Hafeez Baloch — and of other young missing Baloch men who number in the hundreds — have taken the bait dangled by Pramit Chaudhri and others. Throughout the Baloch community of students in Islamabad, anger and fear run deep. The flagrant violation of Baloch constitutional rights is weakening the national spirit and harming the federation. Before the self-appointed guardians of Pakistan’s security cause further damage to our country through their illegal actions, they must be brought to task.

*The writer is an Islamabad-based physicist and author.*

*Published in Dawn, February 26th, 2022*