**Securing Balochistan**

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The manner of US’ rather hasty egress from the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region (APR) epitomises the colossal failure of its Afghan campaign. It shows precisely how not to bring a failed military campaign to a closure. The US has dumped Afghanistan and sent it tottering towards an uncertain, indeterminate future.

Predictably, the region at large and Pakistan are on edge and bracing themselves to handle a thoroughly destabilised APR.

Pakistan derives critical advantages from its geostrategic location as does Balochistan, its largest province. Balochistan’s coastline and natural harbours, its untold mineral wealth and now the BRI-CPEC traversing it enhance its status at the geopolitical and geo-economic levels enormously.

PM Imran Khan has announced his policy to pacify and mainstream the Baloch again. His compulsions to do so at this point in time have global, regional and domestic undertones.

Geopolitics at the global level seem to have Balochistan in focus now. The US feels threatened by China’s meteoric rise and the challenge it poses to its pre-eminence as the sole economic and super power of the world. It wants to circumscribe, contain and manage its emergence as a formidable competitor—that is where the BRI-CPEC and in particular Balochistan come into the picture. The BRI’s network encompasses about a hundred and forty countries. That translates into an enhanced sphere of influence for China as well as a correspondingly increased strategic reach. This economic juggernaut carries within itself the potential/seeds of acquiring military and strategic dimensions at some future point in time. The US thus feels threatened not only in the geo-economic domain by the BRI-CPEC but also on geopolitical and geostrategic levels as well.

[At least 54 dead after COVID hospital in Iraq catches fire](https://nation.com.pk/13-Jul-2021/at-least-54-dead-after-covid-hospital-in-iraq-catches-fire)

There is an obvious convergence of interests between the US and India, to delay, disrupt and destroy the BRI-CPEC. The US needs to gain time to mount a serious challenge (Build Back Better World—B3W) to the Chinese BRI. For that purpose, it will have to keep the APR specially Balochistan and the Makran Coast-Gwadar Complex on the boil. Concomitantly, there is an opposing convergence of interests between China and Pakistan to secure and safeguard the BRI-CPEC against all hostile actions. A massive clash of interests thus emerges. The BRI-CPEC (and Balochistan) thus move into the crosshairs of super power rivalry in the region. Pakistan can ill-afford a destabilised Balochistan in such potentially adverse strategic environments.

At the regional level, Afghanistan and Iran are bound to be incorporated into the BRI-CPEC. That will provide the launchpad for the further expansion of the BRI into the Greater Middle East Region, Africa and Europe. Balochistan, due to its contiguity with Iran and Afghanistan and its Makran Coastline-Gwadar Port, provides the SLOCs and GLOCs essential for the purpose. Its stability thus becomes inevitable for the BRI-CPEC’s further progression.

[UN sends 50 truckloads of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia’s Tigray](https://nation.com.pk/13-Jul-2021/un-sends-50-truckloads-of-humanitarian-aid-to-ethiopia-s-tigray)

At the domestic level, unfortunately, Pakistan has a history of treating Balochistan rather perfunctorily. This has caused understandable anger, frustration, a sense of alienation, dissent and insurgency amongst the Baloch. Previous attempts by federal and provincial governments have failed due to a lack of will and continuity in policy. Hostile countries and agencies still fish in these troubled waters, much to Balochistan’s and Pakistan’s detriment. Pakistan needs to bring all Baloch into the national mainstream. It must adopt a whole-of-the-nation and a whole-of-the-government approach while engaging them. It must have a two-pronged strategy—a political one and a military-intelligence one. Both must work synergistically and in a synchronised manner to pacify and secure Balochistan from hostile influences from within and abroad. These efforts must be supported by a dynamic and far reaching diplomatic and media offensive. The PM must call an All-Parties Conference and make public his policy. He must define its desired end state and the ways and means to get there. He must take all national, in particular Balochistan political leaders/Sardars into confidence, garner their support and incorporate them in his initiative. This must be a truly national effort.

[COVID-19 deaths on the rise again globally: WHO chief](https://nation.com.pk/13-Jul-2021/covid-19-deaths-on-the-rise-again-globally-who-chief)

All dissident and insurgent elements must be engaged, spoken and listened to and political, social and economic stakes in Balochistan and Pakistan be created for them. This should lead to socio-politico reintegration and rehabilitation. The CPEC is bringing in an economic windfall for Balochistan. There are job and business opportunities, which must of right and necessity, go to the locals on priority. They must be given vocational training and skills to earn their livelihoods in a dignified manner. Jobs, loans to kickstart businesses and agriculture enterprises etc must be provided. Health and education needs must be met at priority. The BRI-CPEC is bringing in enormous infrastructure. BRI-CPEC’s benefits must reach all Baloch as well. Government programmes like Kamyab Jawan, Ehsaas etc must move into the Balochistan interior and deliver at all doorsteps.

Concurrently, Pakistan must employ its military, civil armed and paramilitary forces and all LEAs and intelligence resources to secure Balochistan and the BRI-CPEC. They must be sanitised against all terrorist attacks. The fence along the Afghan and Iranian borders must be completed post haste and be covered by observation, surveillance and fire on ground and through the air as well. Drones must be employed, day and night, to obviate all unchallenged/unopposed incursions across the borders. Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad must continue to relentlessly seek and destroy sleeper cells of all hostile agencies/countries. The RAW-NDS combine must be dealt with head on. It is at its weakest in Afghanistan at this moment in time. Now is the most opportune moment to wean its proteges away from it, their paymasters. Pakistan must outbid the Indians and Afghans. A Truth and Reconciliation forum, an amnesty offer (conditional), and guaranteed rehabilitation and reintegration into society must be on offer. The message conveyed to them must be one of hope, economic-social-political security and parity, a bright future and most important of all social and political justice.