

BALUCHISTAN: THE STATE VERSUS THE NATION

FREDERIC GRARE

Balochistan, the largest but least populous province of Pakistan, is slowly descending into anarchy. Since 2005, Pakistani security forces have brutally repressed the Baloch nationalist movement, fueling ethnic and sectarian violence in the province. But the Pakistani armed forces have failed to eliminate the insurgency—and the bloodshed continues. Any social structures in Balochistan capable of containing the rise of radicalism have been weakened by repressive tactics. A power vacuum is emerging, creating a potentially explosive situation that abuts the most vulnerable provinces of Afghanistan. Only a political solution is likely to end the current chaos.

Key Themes

- Before the state began repressing Balochistan in an effort to maintain authority, most Baloch nationalist parties were not radicalized or fighting for independence. They were working within the framework of the federal constitution to achieve more political autonomy and socioeconomic rights.
- State institutions such as the Supreme Court have been unable to convince security forces to respect the law, but they have been instrumental in drawing attention to violence and atrocities in Balochistan.
- Many Pakistanis now view the security forces—not the separatists—as the biggest obstacle to national unity and stability.
- A negotiated solution is politically feasible. The nationalist movement is weak and divided, and a majority of Baloch favors more autonomy, not the more extreme position of independence. Islamabad may be willing to seek a political solution now that it has failed to eliminate the nationalists by force of arms.

Finding a Way Out

- The nationalist parties should participate in provincial elections in May. Only their participation in Balochistan's administration can confer sufficient legitimacy on the provincial government. A legitimate and credible Baloch government can reestablish local control over the province, help reduce violence, and advocate for Balochistan on the federal level.
- The Pakistani security establishment should show greater respect for human rights in Balochistan by disbanding death squads, stopping extrajudicial executions, and ending forced disappearances. Serious negotiations and political solutions are impossible as long as these violations persist.
- Security forces should disavow the use of proxy groups and use legitimate state authority to combat sectarian violence.
- The United Nations should send a permanent observation mission to Balochistan to monitor the human rights situation. Such a mission would create greater transparency, promote accountability, and build confidence should the security establishment decide to change its policies in the province.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frederic Grare is senior associate and director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment. His research focuses on security and strategic issues in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

CONTACT

Scott Toussaint
Government Affairs Manager
(202) 939-2307
stoussaint@ceip.org

Charita Law
Media Manager
(202) 939-2241
claw@ceip.org

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