Militant Landscape of Balochistan

Muhammad Amir Rana *

Balochistan has been experiencing terrorist violence from multiple shades of militant groups including Baloch nationalist insurgent groups, so-called religiously inspired local and international militant groups such as Pakistani Taliban and ISIS-affiliates, and violent Sunni and Shia sectarian groups. Some religious-nationalist groups have also been active along the province’s border with Iran mainly Iranian Jundullah and its splinter Jaishul Adl. While the Baloch insurgent groups aim to achieve nationalist goals, including also secessionist, the religiously inspired militant and sectarian groups have largely religious-political goals, which at times also overlap.

There has been a gradual decline in incidence of terrorist violence in Balochistan, in particular since 2013. Weakening of different brands of militant groups due to a continuing counterterrorism campaign across the country including in Balochistan is the main factor. A huge security infrastructure is also deployed in the province, including also to protect CPEC-related projects mainly Gwadar Port, which has also significantly dented militants’ operational capabilities. Still many assert that undercurrents of Baloch insurgency are though largely dormant currently but the factors of conflict are still there which could retrigger the insurgent violence.

1. Nationalist Insurgency

Baloch nationalist insurgency was once largely confined in tribal areas and led by tribal chieftains. As the middle class grew and literacy rate increased in central and southern or coastal Balochistan, mainly in Makran region, a new cadre of young nationalists also emerged. Some of these middle class youth gradually took over the control of the insurgency in their region including Awaran, Kech and Gwadar, etc. Before the rise of these so-called urban-based, middle-class groups, mainly the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), tribal elders-led insurgent groups like Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Republican Army (BRA) were the beneficiaries of the human resources coming from different streams mainly through Baloch Students Organization (BSO) and nationalist political movements. Therefore the leaders of BLA and BRA, Hyrbiyar Marri and Barhamdagh Bugti, respectively, had concerns about the emergence of a new leadership in the folds of BLF, Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LeB) as well as hardline factions

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of (BSO). While the BLA and BRA were traditionally stronger in central and eastern districts of Balochistan, the rise of BLF and LeB made the insurgency more active in southern districts attracting human resources from different regions.

Despite causing confrontation among the insurgent groups, this divide also changed the characteristics of the whole insurgent movements. The leadership of the tribal insurgent groups (BLA, BRA) lived in exile mainly in Europe from where they operated through their commanders. Many of these local commanders were not trustworthy as they kept shifting their loyalties from one group to another and many had surrendered before the government and security forces. The leaders of the urban insurgents however led from the front keeping full control on their organizations. They also considered tribal system oppressive as well as expedient to reconcile with the power elites of the country without caring for the interests of the Baloch people.

In this process, the profile of the insurgent leadership has also changed; many middle class insurgents got education out of Balochistan, which helped them to absorb new ideas and develop new paradigms on nationalism.\(^1\) They come from the cities like Kech, Panjgur, Gwadar, Quetta, Khuzdar, Turbat, Kharan, Lasbela or even Karachi. The tribal-led organizations were also forced to bring innovations in their structures. The non-Marri BLA was reorganized and restructured on the lines of BLF by Aslam Achu, who was killed in Kandhar in a suicide attack in December 2018.\(^2\)

While the geographical balance of the insurgency has largely shifted to the southwest of the province, the insurgents have also changed the operational strategies and tactics. The perpetration of suicide attacks by the nationalist insurgents in 2018 is a case in point, which indicates a major shift in their operations. The tribal insurgent groups were following classical guerrilla tactics of hit and run and damaging the state infrastructure.

**Internal Fissures among Insurgent Groups**

Various Baloch insurgent groups lack mutual harmony for now. The BLA, BRA, BLF, Lashkar-e-Balochistan etc., and others have separatist and secessionist agendas. They don’t subscribe to the moderate nationalist view of attaining political autonomy and control over Balochistan’s natural resources while remaining within the framework of the federation. Although Lashkar-e-Balochistan also has an anti-state agenda but it was formed to counter the growing ambitions of the BLA and the BLF, and to maintain the influence of Mengal *sardars* in the province.

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1 Zofia Mroczek, “A new society in Pakistani Balochistan,” Analysis no 266, July 2014, ISPI.
2 “Consulate attack mastermind killed in Afghanistan: Marri,” *The Nation*, December 26, 2018
Two views prevail regarding the nature and level of the current insurgency in Balochistan. According to one viewpoint, it is violent anarchism rather than a classical insurgency. Analysts subscribing to this view opine that the present insurgent movement not only lacks a charismatic leadership unlike past insurgencies in Balochistan but it is also divided amid frequent infightings and lacks coordination. The Baloch insurgency in 1958 was led by Nawab Nauroz Khan, who was highly revered by his followers. Similarly, the second insurgency from 1963-69 was led by Sher Muhammad Marri. The Parari guerrilla movement of the 1970s was led by Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, who also enjoyed the support of notable Baloch leaders such as Sardar Attaullah Mengal, Sher Muhammad Marri and Nawab Akbar Bugti. The perceived leaders in the present conflict are hardly a comparison, as Nawab Akbar Bugti’s grandson Brahmduag Bugti is hiding in Switzerland while Baloch nationalist leader Khair Bakhsh Marri’s son Harbiyar Marri is based in London.3

The other school of thought categorizes the insurgency as a manifestation of the legitimate cause of disenchanted Baloch segments, which has all the makings of becoming a mass movement of the young educated middle class. They hold that public support for the movement is not waning. They also argue that low level of insurgency is due to heightened securitization of the province. Proponents of this view believe that as nothing is being done for the frustrated and unemployed young Baloch, who feel relatively deprived, left out and neglected, they remain vulnerable to joining the insurgents irrespective of tribal divisions and internal differences.

They also allude to a ‘growing realisation’ among the Baloch insurgent groups to get united for their cause, and the formation of BRAS – an alliance of BRA, BLA and Baloch Republican Guards – which claimed a lethal attack on security personnel in Ormara near Gwadar is one case in point.

**The Advantages to Insurgents**

Strategic and counter-insurgency experts classify the current Baloch insurgency as a low-level guerrilla warfare or low-intensity internal armed conflict. The intensity of violence fluctuates from low to medium and occasionally high levels. Waging of such low-level guerrilla warfare does not require heavy weaponry or huge sums of money. Some analysts believe that Baloch insurgent groups not only receive funds from Baloch Diaspora but some regional countries, particularly India, are also funnelling money to Baloch separatists.

The geographical features of the province including deserts, mountain ranges, huge size of territory and sparse population, and rugged and difficult terrains as well as long

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international borders with Iran and Afghanistan are all in the favor of the insurgents in the province. According to classical guerrilla warfare expert, David Gallula, such factors determine the scale and spread of an insurgency. Balochistan also has long coastline at the mouth of the Gulf and different ranges of mountains and deserts. The Balochistan coastline extends over 750 km from near Karachi at River Hub to the Gwadar Bay on Pak-Iran border.

The Baloch insurgents come from diverse topographical background and the insurgent groups know well where they can use their human resource best. Those who belong to coastal region could be assigned the task of attacking non-Baloch settlers working on various infrastructure projects in these areas. The labor from south Punjab and Sindh has been the prime target of these groups during the construction times of costal highway between Karachi and Gwadar and highway between Gwadar and Sorab. Now their prime target are the trucks and vehicles, which carry the material related to the constructions of Eastern Bay highway, port and other infrastructure related projects in Gwadar. However the insurgents hailing from small towns of Turbat, Panjgur, Washak districts are trained in attacking the security check posts and convoys. These insurgents have edge over the security forces that they know their areas better and can easily hide. Another cadre belonging from Kalat, Dalbadin, in Chaghi district, and Mashikhel, etc., took part in major hit and run operations and attacks on state infrastructure. BLA has developed expertise in such operations; its militants not only engage in hit and run operations but also in small battles and clashes with army units. They also have learned the tactics to hide their identities as they were often found engaged in operations far from their native towns. After taking part in an operation, they would go back to their native towns and pretend living normal lives.

**Targets and Tactics of the Insurgents**

In 2019, until December 26th, different Baloch insurgent groups carried out 51 terrorist attacks in 16 districts of Balochistan. The attack tactics employed by the Baloch insurgents included 29 IEDs blasts, 19 incidents of firing or targeted killing, 2 grenade attacks, and one rocket attack. Similarly, PIPS’ Pakistan Security Report 2018 had noted that Baloch groups carried out 74 terrorist attacks in 20 districts of Balochistan during the year 2018, by employing different attack tactics including 38 IEDs blasts (including one suicide attack in Chaghi), 27 incidents of firing or targeted killing, 8 grenade attacks, and one rocket attack. In 2018, Baloch insurgent also launched a coordinate gun and suicide

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5 Interviews with local journalists and political activists in Turbat and Gwadar between March 14-18, 2019
6 Ibid
attack against Chinese consulate in Karachi.⁷

Similarly, while in 2018 as many as 51 percent of the total attacks by Baloch insurgents targeted security forces and law enforcement personnel, in 2019 about 55 percent of their attacks were targeted against security forces.

In 2018, the PIPS report had noted, Baloch insurgents tried to launch some major attacks, using the strategy of coordinated suicide assaults, but largely failed. First, traditionally having been relied on low intensity subversion acts and attacks, they don't have yet that capability which the religiously inspired groups have in launching major, lethal attacks. Secondly, the response by the law enforcement agencies was quick and effective to neutralise the attackers, mainly in the case of China consulate attack.⁸

As cited earlier, traditionally Baloch insurgents have followed classical insurgency models as Dashti mentioned in his book about 1974 insurgency.

“By July 1974, Baloch guerrilla units succeeded in cutting off most of the main roads linking surrounding provinces and rail communication were paralyzed. The militants under the discipline of BPLF avoided direct confrontation with the Pakistani army and whenever possible, their primary tactic remained ambushing army convoys and harassing its supply lines…. [a]ccording to Harrison (1981), during four years of insurgency, there were one hundred seventy eight major engagements and one hundred sixty seven lesser incidents between Pakistani forces and the Baloch fighters”⁹

When the new phase of insurgency started in 2002, the insurgents adopted similar strategies of 1970s. In the beginning, insurgents established bases in inaccessible mountainous regions. However, the use of the air force made it very difficult for the militant groups to maintain camps and hideouts in the barren mountains of Balochistan. Now the majority of the fighters are based in villages and townships and they have invented ways to hide themselves within local population. The security forces blame these tactics of the militants for the enforced disappearances in the province.¹⁰

The insurgent groups used modern telecommunication technology very effectively in the planning and execution of their attacks on state security forces. But the increased monitoring of communication systems by security agencies has resulted in inflicting heavy losses to militants because their whereabouts were identified electronically and

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¹⁰ Informal interaction with security officials in Quetta and Islamabad.
heavily bombed. At present, most militant groups have reorganized their fighters into small mobile groups in order to make it difficult for the security agencies to locate them.\(^\text{11}\)

Aslam Achu, a BLA commander killed in Afghanistan, had tried to bring shift in the traditional tactics of the insurgency and introduced suicide bombing. He was the mastermind of the two suicide attacks targeting the Chinese engineers in Dalbandin and Chinese consulate in Karachi. Apparently the Islamist militants, who mastered in such attacks, inspired him.

However, the groups like BRA and BLA-Mari still emphasize classical tactics, which is basically based on a long-term engagement with the target. They manage small-scale attacks with brief and long intervals, and chances of large scale countering operation from security forces remain low. This is a warfare Baloch insurgents have trained themselves in since decades. Interestingly the urban origin insurgents see such tactics flawed and considers strategy to negotiate and bargain with the power elites.\(^\text{12}\)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS)</td>
<td>Baloch Khan (spokesperson)</td>
<td>An alliance of armed ethnic Baloch separatist group include BLA, BLF and BRG</td>
<td>Deep Makran region, costal areas from Pasni, Ormara to Lesbela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF)</td>
<td>Allah Nazr Baloch; Abdul Nabi Bangalzai, former chief commander UBA has also joined BLF</td>
<td>Anti-state, secessionists/separatists</td>
<td>Awaran and Panjgour districts; Tung, Mand and Buleda in Turbat district; Basima in Washuk district; Jiwani and Pasni in coastal areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)</td>
<td>Harbiyar Marri, and commander Bashir Zeb head their factions</td>
<td>Anti-state, secessionists/separatists</td>
<td>Ispalgai in Mustung district; Mach, Harnai, Nasserabad, Jaffarabad, Loralai, Quetta, Awaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baloch</td>
<td>Brahamdagh</td>
<td>Anti-state,</td>
<td>Kohlu, Barkhan,</td>
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\(^{11}\) Naseer Dashti, *The Baloch Conflict with Iran and Pakistan*, pp. 224-225.

\(^{12}\) Interviews with political activists in Quetta, Turbat, Gwadar and Nushki.
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<td>Republican Army (BRA)</td>
<td>Bugti</td>
<td>secessionists/separatists</td>
<td>Naseerabad, Jaffarabad, Shubatpur Loralai, and few small pockets in Dera Bugti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baloch Republican Guard (BRG)</td>
<td>Bakhtiar Domki</td>
<td>Anti-state, secessionist</td>
<td>Naseerabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Baloch Army (UBA)</td>
<td>Mehran Marri</td>
<td>Anti-state, secessionists/separatists</td>
<td>Bolan, Lasbela, and Basima in Washuk district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lashkar-e-Balochistan</td>
<td>Javed Mengal</td>
<td>Aimed at countering the growing ambitions of BLA and BLF, and to maintain the status of Mengal Sardars in the area.</td>
<td>Lasbela, Makran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balochistan Liberation United Front (BLUF)</td>
<td>Mir Shakak Baloch</td>
<td>Recovery of missing persons, drawing world attention to military operations and human rights violations of security forces in Balochistan</td>
<td>Little presence in Washuk and Panjgur districts</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(spokesperson)</td>
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**Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS)**

The Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS) is an alliance of three separatist insurgent groups formed in 2018. It was the initiative of BLA commander Aslam Achu to form an exclusive operational force to target the CPEC and Chinese interest in Pakistan. Later the alliance has been extended to target the security forces of Pakistan as well. The BLA, BLF and BRG are the major component of the alliance but few analysts suspect that Lashkar-e-Balochistan and United Baloch Army (UBA) are also part of the alliance.

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13 Interviews with local leaders and journalists in Quetta, Gwadar and Turbat.

14 Interview with a Quetta based journalist Akber Notazai, March 17, 2019.
The mandate of BRAS is narrow as the groups are only bound to contribute their human resources and logistical support in the joint attacks but the member groups are free to pursue their political and operational aims.

BRAS has managed to launch four attacks since its establishment in later 2017, including two major ones. On April 18, 2019, at least 14 people, including 11 personnel of Navy, Air Force and Coast Guards, were killed by BRAS gunmen wearing security uniforms after they were picked up with the help of their computerized national identity cards (CNICs) and offloaded from seven buses in the Buzi Pass area near Ormara in Gwadar district. The Ormara attack had huge impact on the security of the province and CPEC. Since then, the government has raised the security measures in Makran region and a special command based in Turbat has been set up; a new corps has been raised to increase border patrolling. Apart from aerial surveillance of the Pak-Iran border through helicopters, the Iranian border would also be fenced. Pakistan believes Baloch insurgents who carried out Ormara attack used Iranian soil for shelter.

Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)

The BLA has currently two offshoots. One is led by Harbiyar Marri and operates in eastern part of Balochistan. It comprises mainly Marri tribesmen loyal to Harbiyar Marri. The other offshoot comprises on the insurgents hailing from various tribal, rural and urban backgrounds. It mainly operates in central and coastal regions of the province and also has networks in interior Sindh and Karachi. Aslam Achu was leading this faction until he was killed in Kandahar. He had formed the group after developing differences with Harbiyar Marri in 2013. Achu thought Harbiyar had come under the influence of Western forces and could adopt a reconciliatory way.

After Achu’s death, Karim Marri, Hamal and Commander Nisar are leading the group. However the main leading figure is Commander Bashir Zeb, who was a class fellow of Allah Nazar Baloch. Some say their close ties have helped them to strengthen the BRAS. According to local sources, the educated Marri insurgents are leaving BLA-Hyrbiyar faction and joining Zeb group, which they believe is more active.

Interestingly Aslam Achu also adopted operational strategy from the Islamist militants and formed dedicated operational squads for specific operations. Fidayeen Majeed Brigade was among such special operational squad, which was formed to target the Chinese and CPEC related projects.

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16 “Pakistan to fence 950km border with Iran: Qureshi,” The News, April 21, 2019.
17 Interview with Akber Notazai.
18 Interviews with local leaders and journalists in Quetta, Gwadar and Turbat.
BLA’s origin dates back to 1973, a period of resistance against military operations in Balochistan and the discovery of the secret NAP-led London Plan. The Marri tribe played an important role in the insurgency in the 1970s. When the government forces overcame the insurgency, the Marris went into exile in Afghanistan. BLA was declared a terrorist organization by the Musharraf government on April 9, 2006. The PPP-led coalition government twice banned the group, on September 8, 2009 and in April 2010.

Harbiyar is active in Europe running campaigns against Pakistan. From 2016, Mir Hairbyar supporters have been carrying out their activities under the banner of Baloch Freedom Movement.

**Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF)**

The Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) is based in the central and southwestern districts of Balochistan. It has gone into hiding, either in the areas close to the Iranian border or moved across the border into Iran or Afghanistan.

Led by Dr Allah Nazar Baloch, BLF is believed to be the most organized of the Baloch resistance groups, engaging security forces and its affiliated militias in a wide area beginning in central Balochistan up to the coastal region. Its militants have been engaged in many pitched battles with security forces in recent years and Dr. Allah Nazar himself was targeted by the Pakistan air force on many occasions.

Allah Nazar took refuge in Iran after he got hurt in an operation by security forces. It is speculated that security institutions were not happy with former Balochistan chief minister Zehri when he had released Allah Nazar’s family members including his wife, sister and children.

As with other Baloch insurgent groups, the BLF also strives for an independent Balochistan. The group’s inspiration comes from the Iranian Baluchi resistance group of the same name, which was formed in 1960s by the Iranian Baluchi youth of middle classes. The BLF in Pakistani part of Balochistan has many similarities with the BLF in Iran because of their common social and economic profiles; Pakistani BLF is under such an influence of Iranian BLF that it also follows a similar organizational structure and operational strategies. The Iranian BLF had intensified its militant activities in Iran during early 70’s and the group was somehow using the Pakistani soil while taking

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22 Interview with Quetta based senior journalist Shazada Zulafqar March 16, 2019
24 Interview with an informed nationalist leader in Turbat, who once was close aide of Allah Nazar Baloch during the college life.
advantage of the porous borders between the two countries. That had forced Iran and Pakistan to develop cooperation and launch joint action against the group.\(^{25}\)

After the killing of 14 Pakistani security personnel on April 18, 2019 on coastal highway, Pakistan had formally launched the protest with Iran for BLF getting shelter there. Many local religious and political leaders in Turbat, Panjigur, Khuzdar and Kalat also think that Iranian authorities deliberately overlook the movement of the Pakistani Baloch insurgents, mainly BLF and BLA. What they get in return is the information about the hideouts of Jaishul Adl – an Iranian group based in Iranian Balochustan-Sistan that operates across the border – and other Iranian religious-separatist groups, as well as information about narcotics dealers operating along border.\(^{26}\) However, there is another important perspective that many residents of the bordering town have dual nationality and they can cross border legally anytime and many insurgents are exploiting this dual nationality factor.\(^{27}\)

**Baloch Republican Army (BRA)**

Led by Brahmdagh Bugti, the outlawed Baloch Republican Army is the militant wing of Balochistan Republican Party (BRP), a rechristened arm of Akbar Bugti’s Jamhoori Watan Party. The BRA cadre was previously a personal tribal militia for Nawab Akbar Bugti amid his rivalries with Marri tribes. After Akbar Bugti’s assassination in 2006, the militia was renamed as Baloch Republican Army (BRA).

Since then the group has also recruited the militants from other parts of Balochistan especially in Kech and Gwadar districts, where its fighters operate in close coordination with BLF fighters.\(^{28}\) The BRA usually deploys conventional tactics of the resistance movements and it has managed many attacks on gas supplies from Sui to other parts of the country.

**Baloch Republican Guards (BRG)**

Led by former MPA Bakhtiar Domki, the group is operational in Naseerabad district. It has over 200 militants in its fold and mainly operates in collaboration with the BRA. It is also part of BRAS, along with BLF and BLA. Bakhtiar Domki had formed the group when his wife and daughter were shot dead in Karachi in January 2012.\(^{29}\) The deceased were also the sister and niece of BRA leader Baramdagh Bugti. Domki lives in exile in


\(^{26}\) Interviews with local leaders and journalists in Makran region in March 2019.

\(^{27}\) Interviews with local political leadership.

\(^{28}\) Naseer Dashti, *The Baloch Conflict with Iran and Pakistan*, p. 225.

London from where he runs anti-Pakistan campaigns.

**United Baloch Army (UBA)**

Late Nawab Khair Bakhsh, after being estranged from his elder son Harbiyar Marri, nominated his youngest son Zamaran alias Mehran Marri who formed another insurgent group United Baloch Army (UBA). Mehran lives in London in self-exile. Under the leadership of a former BLA chief commander Abdul Nabi Bangulzai, UBA has been active in Bolan, Lasbela and Basima in Washuk district. Some local sources claimed that Abdul Nabi Bangulzai has left UBA and joined BLF, thus further strengthening the latter.

**Lashkar-e-Balochistan**

Lashkar-e-Balochistan, led by Javed Mengal, the eldest son of elderly Baloch leader Sardar Attaullah Mengal, was formed in 2008. It operates mainly in the Jhalawan and Makran regions. It is believed that it recruits fighting volunteers from the Mengal tribe and the Balochistan National Party (BNP) sympathizers. But the BNP claims to have no role in the armed struggle and its declared objective is to achieve the right of self-determination for the Baloch in a peaceful struggle according to the United Nations Charter.

Mir Javed Mengal lives in exile in London and the UAE. He denies any link with Lashkar-e-Balochistan but the several members of nationalist parties and journalists in Balochistan confirm that Javed Mengal is mastermind behind the group. He and his son Mir Noordin Mengal have been active in Europe in anti-Pakistan campaigns.

2. **Religious & Sectarian Extremists**

Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda and local militant outfits such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Balochistan, sectarian groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Imamia Students Organization (ISO) and Sipah-e-Muhammad etc., are active in the province in one way or another. These organizations are pursuing their parallel agendas while the Baloch movement continues to occupy centre stage in the broader conflict in Balochistan.

**Table 2: Religious/Sectarian Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Motives/ Agenda</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daesh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-West, anti-Shia global terrorist group</td>
<td>Quetta, Bolan, Mastung, Jhal Magsi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Jaishul Adl

Iranian-based Jaishul Adl was formed soon after the arrest and execution of the Sunni extremist organization Jundallah’s leader Abdul Malik Regi. In the beginning, Jundallah was split into two factions i.e. Al-Nasr and Jaishul Adl. In 2016, both factions got united and issued a joint declaration of unification. However before the merger, Iran had killed the head of Al-Nasr, Maulvi Abdul Rauf, in an operation inside Pakistan.

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30 Interviews with informed source persons based in Dalbandin and Mashkeel
The 40 years old leader of Jaishul Adl, Salahuddin Farooqi, belongs to Iranian-Baluchi region “Raisk”, and is considered a hardliner Sunni. One reason for his leaving Jundallah was secular and liberal attitude of many of the core members of the group. However, Mr. Farooqi denies any links with Al-Qaeda or Daesh.

During 2015 and 2016, Jaishul Adl carried out many serious hit and run attacks on security forces in Iranian Baluchistan, establishing itself the most lethal militant group of Sistan-Baluchistan.

The armed confrontation between Pakistani Baloch separatists groups and Jaishul Adl has become a routine as both have their operational bases in similar vicinities. Locals in Balochistan believe that Jaishul Adl’s center is in “Mashkeel”. This is a rough and difficult terrain with little population but is a favorite route of insurgents of all shades as well as smugglers. Most of the petroleum smuggling from Iran also happens through this route. Jaishul Adl also has a strong support base in Chagai and Panjgur districts, where many mosques apparently belong to the group. Iran also has extensive spying network in the Chagai district and also fires mortars following Jaishul Adl militants in this area.

**Ansar Al-Furqan**

Harkat-e-Ansar-e-Iran was another splinter group of Jundallah, which had launched many attacks in Iranian Balochistan during 2012-13. Later the group was merged with Hizbul Furqan to form Ansar Al-Furqan in late 2013. This is comparatively a small religious group and reportedly has hideouts in district Kharan. According to Hoshang (2015), Jaish ul-Adl adopted a more moderate approach and to some extent has moved further towards Baloch ethnic nationalism.31

**Daesh, or Islamic State (IS) Group**

Daesh or the Khorasan chapter of the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS, has shown its strong presence in Balochistan while managing 10 major terrorist attacks in the province since its establishment. A total of 270 people lost their lives in these attacks reported from Quetta, Jhal Magsi and Mastung districts of Balochistan.

**Table 3: Terrorist Attacks by IS-affiliates in Balochistan (1 Jan. 2014 to 26 Dec. 2019)**32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Attacks</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Target</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jhal Magsi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Worship places/shrines/imambargahs</td>
</tr>
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32 Statistics are drawn from PIPS database on conflict and security: www.pakpips.com/app/database
The data on terrorist attacks claimed by Daesh in Pakistan suggests the group has relatively greater presence and activities in Balochistan and northern Sindh, where a new emerging sectarian fault-line lies. The Hazara community in Quetta valley, the Shia population in northern Sindh and Shia influence on Sunnis there, a pluralist culture of shrines, poorly governed provincial borders and most importantly, the Shia pilgrimage routes to Iran and Iraq attract a multitude of sectarian actors in this region.

One important commander of Daesh Hafeez Brohi from Sindh has been killed this year, which will have impact on the group’s operations in bordering region of Balochistan and Sindh. However, police and law enforcement officials in Quetta confirm that Daesh is still a potent threat in Bolan region as it has been collaborating with small factions of LeJ there in terrorist operations.

**Pakistani Taliban**

Although the military operations have forced the Pakistani Taliban to relocate to other side of Pakistan-Afghan border in recent years, yet the Taliban presence is relatively more pronounced in suburbs of Quetta and Pashtun belt of Balochistan. Main Taliban groups, which have been active in parts of Balochistan are listed below.

- **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**

Since the establishment of the TTP in 2007, its Balochistan chapter (Tehreek-e-Taliban Balochistan) had been active in the province, which is significantly weakened now to almost non-existence. But the TTP presence and continuing terrorist activities in recent years are conspicuous by the sporadic attacks it has been perpetrating and claiming.

Between 1 January 2015 and 27 December 2019, the TTP perpetrated 65 terrorist attacks in Balochistan – including 3 suicide blasts – which claimed 192 lives and injured 376 others. More than half of these attacks, or 33, concentrated in Quetta, another 15 were reported from Qilla Abdullah, mainly Chaman, and 4 attacks each from Loralai and

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Zhob. Recently, from January 2019, the group has been quite active in Loralai district of Balochistan where it has claimed 4 major attacks on security forces killing 26, mostly security personnel. In March 2019, the TTP also launched a major attack in Ziarat, adjacent to Loralai, killing 6 Levies persons.

- Jamaatul Ahrar and Hizbul Ahrar

In all, 110 people were killed and 181 others injured in 8 attacks perpetrated by these two groups in Pishin, Qilla Abdullah and Quetta districts of Balochistan since August 2016. Five of these attacks were suicide blasts.

Both groups are splinters of the TTP, with Hizbul Ahrar being the recent one. Jamaatul Ahrar came into limelight in Balochistan after August 2016 suicide blast at Civil Hospital, Quetta. More than 70 people were killed, nearly half of them lawyers, in the attack targeting mourners gathered at the hospital. Jamaatul Ahrar and the Islamic State (IS) group both claimed responsibility for the attack, separately.

From April 2018, Hizbul Ahrar has been active in Balochistan and has launched 3 attacks so far, including 2 in Quetta and one in Pishin. Two of these attacks were suicide bombings including a major assault on an FC camp in Quetta in April 2018. The most recent attack by the group in Balochistan was reported in January 2019 from Pishin that targeted the office of Naib Tehsildar Abdul Malik Tareen.

Sectarian Outfits

Violent sectarian groups have been operating in Balochistan since long, although their activities have become relatively less frequent and less intense in recent years. Still, sectarian-related target killings of members of the Shia Hazara community is a regular feature of Balochistan’s security landscape.

Among the Sunni sectarian groups present in the province are Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ); so-called global arm of the LeJ known as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami (leJ-A) was also active in the province few years back. Factions of

33 Statistics are drawn from PIPS database on conflict and security: www.pakpips.com/app/database
Shia groups Sipah-e-Muhammad, and Imamia Students Organization (ISO) are also active in parts of the province mainly Quetta.

- **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi**

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) is a Sunni outfit with an anti-Shia agenda and operates in and around Quetta. Two splinter groups of the LeJ known as Usman Kurd group – Kurd was killed in an operation in 2015 – and Qari Hai group are active in Balochistan. The LeJ group still has presence in Quetta, Mastung and Khuzdar but is struggling to capitalize on its operational strengths.

In retrospective, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has been the main violent sectarian actor in the province, along with LeJ-A. These two groups have perpetrated 35 terrorist attacks in the province between 1 January 2015 and 27 December 2019, which claimed 195 lives and wounded 331 others. Three of these attacks happened in 2019 claiming 3 lives.

- **Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) and ISO**

The Shia outfit Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) was found involved in targeted killings of religious leaders of the rival Sunni sect in recent years. Few years back, three factions of SMP, lead by Baqar Zaidi, Mohsin Mehdi and the Balti group, were active in Karachi and Quetta. However, these groups have had no direct link with the Punjab-based SMP, which has been dysfunctional since an effective police operation against the group in the late 1990s resurfaced in Karachi and Quetta in 2011.\(^{37}\)

\(^{37}\) For details, see Pak Institute for Peace Studies’ Annual Security Reports for 2012 and 2013.