Understanding Conflict and Reconciliation: Lessons from Balochistan, Pakistan

Nawabzada Mir Jamal Khan Raisani, Nichan Singhaputargun[*]

School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University

* Corresponding author e-mail: nichan.sin@mfu.ac.th

Abstract

This study investigates the conflict and violence in Balochistan, Pakistan, with a focus on identifying root causes and exploring reconciliation strategies to foster long-term peace and stability. The research employs a qualitative methodology, including primary data from interviews with key stakeholders such as local leaders, policymakers, and civil society representatives. Findings reveal that historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and political marginalization are key drivers of conflict in the region. The study highlights the need for equitable resource distribution, political inclusion, and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission tailored to Balochistan's socio-political dynamics. Recommendations include strengthening local governance structures, fostering inter-ethnic cooperation, and implementing youth-focused development programs to promote sustainable peace.

Keywords: Violence, Conflict, Reconciliation, Balochistan, Peace

Introduction

The Baloch conflict is an ongoing dispute between the Baloch people and the Pakistani state, with an understanding that Balochistan has been side-lined since Pakistan's independence in 1947 from the British.

Many claim that in 1948, Balochistan was annexed to Pakistan by force, but this could be discarded as Khan of Kalat's (the ruler of Balochistan) understanding and cooperation with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the founding father of Pakistan). However, some people did not accept that Balochistan was part of Pakistan and, in this process, fought many wars to show their disagreement. Being Pakistan's largest province in terms of geographic size, Balochistan is a province that is wealthy in natural resources and assets. It has an ancient tribal system and values its cultures and traditions. It is divided into two regions, the Sarawan and the

Jhalawan regions, both led by their respective tribal chiefs under the Khan of Kalat. From 1948 to 1977, the province saw multiple battles for Baloch independence due to incompatible goals. However, since the mid-2000s, a deadly war between Baloch separatists or anti-state groups and the Pakistani state has remained prevalent in the region, halting the development of the province in many domains (Isenhart & Spangle, 2012).

Strategically, Balochistan is in a critical location, opening a pathway to the colossal resources of Central Asian countries with its gigantic number of natural resources, and it's tremendously large area has expanded its centrality in worldwide affairs. Due to its strategic location, external forces are eyeing its large territory and natural resources. It became more noteworthy after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and later the US war against the Taliban since Balochistan served as a gateway to Afghanistan, bringing the War on Terror to the Baloch's doorsteps.

Since 1948, the Pakistani state and Baloch individuals have had incompatible positions and goals. The primary conflict and grievance of the Baloch is the state's estrangement and alienation towards them, which has exacerbated the circumstances in the region, especially concerning the economy, social advantages, the lack of basic needs of the people, and the underdevelopment of the biggest province by land mass of Pakistan, resulting in violent, warlike situations. The Baloch conflict can be said to be an ethno-nationalist separatism comprising various political and civil organizations as well as militarized aspects, deeply embedded in a complex and tense relationship with the Pakistani government and historical factors.

This research intends to answer the following questions: (1) What are the root causes of the conflict, and how does violence take place in Balochistan? (2) How has the Pakistani government handled conflict and violence regarding reconciliation? (3) What would be the future process of reconciliation and models for handling the conflict and violence in Balochistan? This research adopts peace and conflict studies to build analytical lenses to analyze and explain the phenomenon of conflict, violence, and reconciliation in Balochistan. The research will be structured as follows with this section (1) Introduction and then will follow by explaining (2) the Theoretical framework, (3) the Research methodology, (4) the Results; and lastly (5) the Conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

This research explores the field of peace and conflict studies, incorporating key approaches and theories. It blends theoretical perspectives, empirical research, and practical insights to analyze the complex dynamics of conflict, violence, and reconciliation in Balochistan.

Conflict

Conflict is a struggle between two or more parties with opposing ideologies, opinions, or objectives, defined by the incompatibility of their positions (Diez et al., 2006, p. 565). Conflicts may be social or political, often rooted in opposing viewpoints, priorities, or interests.

To maintain harmony, peace studies were developed to understand and address such disputes. Various approaches exist for conflict management, including the Harvard approach, which emphasizes distinguishing between positions and interests (Fisher & Ury, 1981). This approach aims to achieve a win-win outcome by helping conflicting parties identify their "best alternative" or a systematic fallback plan (Crocker et al., 2015).

Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle

As mentioned earlier, conflict can be approached from various perspectives and theories. This research employs Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle, which proves particularly relevant and effective in analyzing the conflict in Balochistan. Galtung emphasizes that peace can be achieved through compassion, understanding, nonviolence, and creative thinking. He argues that empathy addresses attitudes, nonviolence resolves behavior, and creativity mitigates contradictions—foundations critical for conflict transformation.

Galtung's ABC Triangle model focuses on three interconnected components of conflict: attitudes (A), behavior (B), and contradictions (C). These elements often interact as sources of disputes. In the context of Balochistan, negative attitudes between the state and the Baloch population, violent behaviors from both separatist groups and security forces, and contradictions over political autonomy and resource control exemplify this dynamic. Applying the ABC Triangle provides a structured framework for comprehending and addressing the multi-faceted conflict landscape in the region (Galtung, 1971).
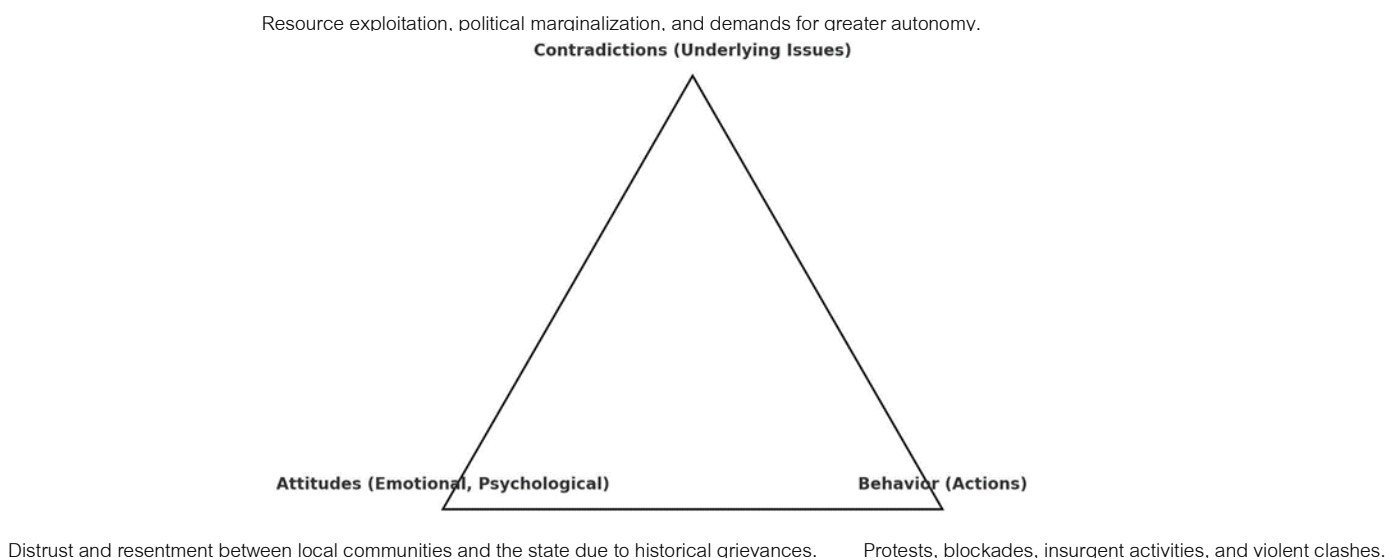

Resource exploitation, political marginalization, and demands for greater autonomy.
Contradictions (Underlying Issues)

Attitudes (Emotional, Psychological)   **Behavior (Actions)**

Distrust and resentment between local communities and the state due to historical grievances.   Protests, blockades, insurgent activities, and violent clashes.

Figure 1 Johan Galtung's conflict triangle contextualized for Balochistan

Formation of Conflicting Parties

The formation of conflict parties is a crucial element in this research as it examines how individuals or groups, both within and outside mainstream national politics, evolve into opposing parties. One key factor in understanding this formation is the concept of asymmetric power, which highlights how individuals or organizations with limited political influence may develop into conflict parties when they perceive a lack of equity and fairness compared to more dominant groups (Singhaputargun, 2020). A sense of political exclusion often fuels this development, as these marginalized groups feel incapable of competing in the established political field.

Two additional factors are critical in understanding how conflict parties outside mainstream national politics are formed. The first is grievances, which arise when groups experience frustration and bias, leading them to fight for their rights and dignity due to neglect or mistreatment by authorities. The second is mobilization potential, where individuals or movements rally people who share common ideas and are open to collective action (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). In Balochistan, grassroots and middle-class citizens, such as families of missing persons and victims of terrorism, exemplify this type of mobilization as they seek justice and recognition from the state.

Finally, the concept of incompatibility emerges when groups or organizations have irreconcilable goals or positions, fostering conflict both within and outside the political landscape. This situation encourages alliances among parties with shared interests, often resulting in opposition to other groups. Understanding these dynamics in Balochistan provides valuable insights into the region's complex conflict landscape and offers pathways for reconciliation.

Types of Conflicting Parties

Core conflicting parties actively engage in the conflicts and have high-impact interests (Boulding, 1978, pp. 342–345). Due to their predefined aims and considerable stakes in values, these parties are hard to persuade, bargain with, or negotiate with. This party may include elites, middle-class citizens, and grassroots activists. For instance, in Balochistan, there are the Baloch Nationalist politicians, the state or law enforcement agencies, the Balochistan Liberation Army, etc. Non-core conflicting parties are less harmed by the dispute than core conflicting parties (Boulding, 1978, pp. 342–345). When they agree with the core-conflict parties, they may join them.

If the dispute or the interests of any party affect them, they may become core conflict parties. This type of party can be made up of political elites, which means they have political influence and might also be part of any political movement.

Violence

Violence can be defined as "the intentional use of tangible force or power, threatened or realistic, against oneself, another person, or against a community or group, such that it either results in or has an elevated potential to cause damage, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or poverty" by the World Health Organization in a worldwide public health problem report. Another description is the deliberate use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, a group, or a community, with the intent of causing injury, death, harm, or deprivation (World Health Organization, 2007).

Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle

The "violence triangle" model by Johan Galtung examines the root causes of violence, categorized into three types: direct (behavioral), cultural (social constructs), and structural. Direct violence is visible, while cultural and structural violence remains invisible. These forms of violence are interconnected, nourishing and reinforcing each other. Galtung likens this to an iceberg, where direct violence represents the visible tip, while structural and cultural violence lies hidden below the surface (Galtung, 1971).

1. Direct Violence

We witness and feel direct violence. As a result, physical violence, such as assault, death, and so on, can be said to be direct violence. In addition, psychological aggression or behavior may produce trauma, worry, or stress, which is also considered a form of direct violence (Galtung, 1971).

2. Structural Violence

Structural violence is embedded in societal systems such as laws, markets, and institutions, often resulting in the marginalization or discrimination of certain groups (Galtung, 1971). It operates through unequal access to resources, decision-making, and opportunities, typically as a by-product rather than an intentional act. Galtung describes this as "social injustice."

3. Cultural Violence

Cultural violence relates to the prevalent attitudes or ideas that are used to justify direct or structural violence. These include societal biases or preconceptions that have been adopted by people. Stereotypes manifest themselves through people's relationships with one another (Galtung, 1971). While it is not possible to see cultural violence, it remains the most dangerous type of violence because it justifies both direct and structural violence.
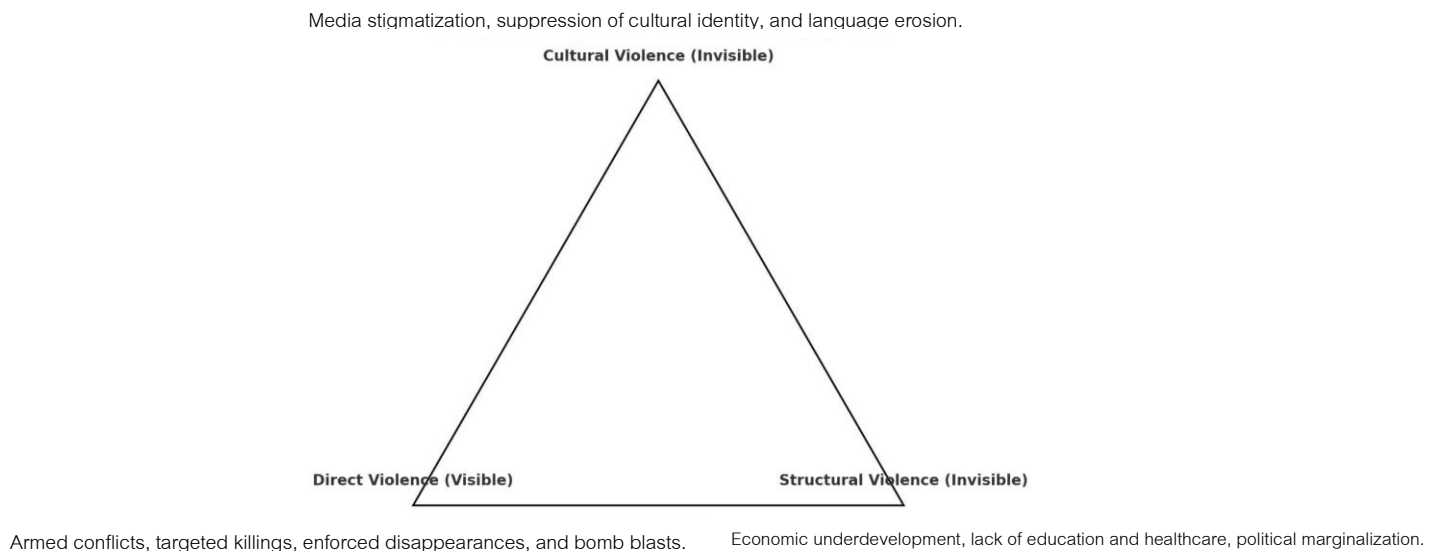
Media stigmatization, suppression of cultural identity, and language erosion.

Cultural Violence (Invisible)

Direct Violence (Visible)　　　　　　　　**Structural Violence (Invisible)**

Armed conflicts, targeted killings, enforced disappearances, and bomb blasts.　　　Economic underdevelopment, lack of education and healthcare, political marginalization.

Figure 2 Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle Contextualized for Balochistan

Conflict Management

Conflict cannot always be resolved quickly but can be managed or constrained to reduce its negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes (Isenhart & Spangle, 2012). Conflict management focuses on controlling tensions and preventing non-productive escalations by fostering communication, self-awareness, and structured negotiation frameworks (International Crisis Group, 2006).

In the context of Balochistan, where political, economic, and cultural tensions persist, conflict management becomes crucial. While a complete resolution of the conflict may be challenging due to deep-rooted grievances and incompatible goals, managing the conflict through inclusive dialogue, political engagement, and equitable development can help stabilize the region. This approach emphasizes containment and gradual progress toward reconciliation (Digvijaysinh, 2013), aiming to mitigate violence and foster cooperation between the Baloch people and the Pakistani state.

1. **Conflict Management Concepts**

Conflict management involves five essential concepts that help manage or constrain disputes. The first is collaboration, which combines assertiveness with cooperation. This approach allows both parties to achieve their goals while minimizing negative feelings. It works best for long-term relationships and results, as both sides engage in discussions, analyze objectives, and seek a "win-win" solution that fosters positive relationships (Askandar, 2021). The second concept is competition, where both parties act forcefully and uncooperatively, prioritizing their interests at the expense of the other. This approach is suitable when the outcome is critical, but the relationship holds little importance. It often results in a "win-lose" scenario (Askandar, 2021).

Avoidance is the third concept, where parties tactfully dodge the issue or retreat from confrontation. It is beneficial when postponing the conflict is preferable, or the outcome is insignificant. However, unresolved conflicts may resurface over time (Askandar, 2021). The fourth concept is accommodation, which involves one party sacrificing their interests to satisfy the other. This approach is useful when preserving the relationship is more important than the immediate outcome. Nevertheless, it can lead to power imbalances or recurring disputes if one side consistently yields (Askandar, 2021).

Finally, compromise seeks a mutually agreeable solution that partially satisfies both sides. This approach is effective when time is of the essence, and both parties are willing to make concessions to reach a decision and move forward (Benoliel, 2014).

2. Conflict Management Strategies

To reconcile incompatible goals and manage conflict effectively, some strategies are essential. First, conflict should never be ignored, as avoidance often worsens the situation. Addressing issues early helps prevent escalation. Second, identify a systematic win-win solution through guided dialogue, allowing both parties to find common ground, even if it requires compromise (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Three management approaches support this process: short-term management for immediate stabilization, mid-term management to foster positive relationships, and long-term management to address root causes and build sustainable peace (Singhaputargun, 2020).

Reconciliation

In an ideal world, reconciliation would eliminate the use of the past as a source of renewed conflict. It enhances freshly built or reintroduced democratic institutions, consolidates peace, and ends the cycle of conflict. It is not a one-time deed but a consistent willingness to abandon the dominion of violence and fear. The reconciliation procedure needs to be more chronological (Huyse, 2003). The three reconciliation steps are replacing fear with nonviolent cooperation, increasing trust and confidence, and creating empathy.

Individuals who are related as victims, benefactors, and offenders establish coexistence, trust, and empathy. This is an example of interpersonal reconciliation. Many projects in healing (coaching victims and perpetrators together) and restorative justice (mediation) follow this path to reconciliation. All stages of the process involve the overall reconciliation of individuals, groups, and society. Each perspective, interpersonal and societal, has its chemistry, but they are both equally crucial in the healing process (Huyse, 2003).

Trying to bury the past peacefully and reconciliatory necessitates using various strategies. Most must be activated in the short cycle: mending the victims' wounds, some sort of corrective or restorative justice, historical accountability via truth-telling, and restitution for the victims' material and psychological harm. These four

processes are strongly intertwined. There can be no reconciliation without justice (Huyse, 2003). When properly structured, restorative justice can potentially heal the wounds of both the victim and the offender.

Given the unpredictability of post-conflict situations, effective time management is crucial yet challenging in reconciliation efforts. After violent conflict, priorities often include rebuilding political structures, organizing free elections, and prosecuting human rights violators. However, reconciliation cannot be delayed indefinitely, as timely efforts are essential for fostering trust and long-term peace.

1. **What is Reconciliation?**

In an ideal world, reconciliation would break the cycle of using past grievances as a basis for renewed conflict. It serves to solidify peace, end cycles of violence, and strengthen newly introduced or restored democratic institutions. Reconciliation involves addressing past injustices, fostering healing for victims, and rebuilding nonviolent connections between individuals and communities. It requires former adversaries to acknowledge a shared understanding of the past and move toward a collective vision for the future (Lederach,1998).

In the context of Balochistan, reconciliation would mean recognizing the historical grievances of the Baloch people, fostering dialogue, and building trust between the state and local communities. This process also entails the fair distribution of power and resources to ensure political and economic inclusion.

Reconciliation is inherently complex, time-consuming, and uncertain. It demands a fundamental shift in attitudes—replacing vengeance with tolerance and hostility with cooperation. Symbolic gestures, such as inclusive memorials for those lost on both sides of the conflict, can serve as steps toward healing. Legal frameworks, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, can also play a pivotal role in facilitating justice and acknowledgment of past wrongs (Lederach,1998).

However, no single approach guarantees success. Balochistan's unique socio-political and cultural dynamics necessitate a tailored reconciliation strategy that respects its distinct history and traditions. A flexible, multi-faceted approach combining political reform, community engagement, and justice mechanisms offers the best chance for sustainable peace.

2. **Stages of Reconciliation**

The first step toward reconciliation is substituting peaceful coexistence for fear. This entails ceasing violence, putting down weapons, and fostering peaceful interactions between conflicting parties. It requires shifting from vengeance to dialogue, recognizing that violence cannot undo past losses. As Martin Luther King Jr. aptly noted, "Those who do not learn to live together as brothers are all going to perish together as fools" (United Nations & World Bank, 2018).

In Balochistan, where decades of conflict have bred resentment, the initial step involves breaking the cycle of victimization and fostering communication between opposing groups. Creating platforms for dialogue between victims and offenders can help overcome isolation and mistrust, paving the way for reconciliation initiatives.

The second essential step for reconciliation is ensuring a secure environment. Without basic safety, reconciliation efforts are unlikely to succeed. Political leaders at national and local levels must play a pivotal role in establishing order and promoting respect through nonviolent means. Replacing personal revenge with formal judicial mechanisms, such as a truth and reconciliation commission, can help address past injustices.

The next step is establishing trust and confidence. Over time, trust can be rebuilt as victims and perpetrators rediscover their self-worth and ability to trust one another. This stage allows for a distinction between individual and collective guilt, which is essential for healing.

Finally, reconciliation reaches empathy the last step, when victims are willing to understand the offenders' perspectives, and offenders acknowledge the suffering they caused. Truth commissions can play a critical role in facilitating this stage by separating facts from myths and fostering a shared understanding of past events. Applying these stages in Balochistan could help bridge deep-seated divides and promote long-term peace and stability.

3. Reconciliation and Human Security

Following World War II, the concept of reconciliation focused on human security emerged as a critical field (Philpott, 2012). Unlike power-based reconciliation, which is competitive and interest-driven, human-security-based reconciliation prioritizes cooperation and addresses fundamental human needs to achieve win-win outcomes. This approach emphasizes inclusion, cooperation, and nonviolence. According to Rosati et al. (1990), social systems must accommodate individual needs or risk instability and forced transformation. Unlike negotiable interests, basic human needs—such as security, identity, and acknowledgment—cannot be denied, bargained for, or exchanged.

Violence often results from the alienation and neglect of these essential needs (Rosenberg, 2015). By understanding and addressing human needs through a security framework, both direct and structural violence can be mitigated (Christie, 1997). Human security is not limited to physical survival needs like food, shelter, and clothing. Conflicts frequently arise over intangible needs such as recognition, belonging, and understanding (Danielsen, 2005). Addressing these non-physical needs is critical for handling violent disputes and fostering lasting peace.

One key reason for protracted or intractable conflicts is the persistent desire of individuals and communities to fulfill unmet needs at the personal, collective, and societal levels. Estrangement from these essential needs often leads to violence, which must be resolved to establish peaceful coexistence (Bukhari et al., 2015).

The human security framework, which advocates for protecting individuals from a wide range of threats such as hunger, disease, poverty, violence, and unemployment, challenges traditional state-centric security paradigms. Classical security models prioritize the state as the primary referent of security. However, it is crucial to recognize that state security is a by-product of human security, not its cause. Ensuring the well-being of individuals lays the foundation for a stable and secure state.

Research Methodology

A mixed-method approach was undertaken, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine conflict and violence towards reconciliation in Balochistan. The qualitative research method is prioritized, as it effectively manages multiple variables such as conflicting parties, conflict issues, conflict management agents, and conflict management results.

1. Research Design

The methods employed include case studies, content analysis, and in-depth interviews to comprehensively understand the conflict. The case study approach offers descriptive data on Balochistan's conflict dynamics. Content analysis examines public records and personal documents, including government archives, news reports, articles, and databases. In-depth interviews are conducted with key stakeholders such as political leaders, NGO heads, journalists, tribal elders, villagers, religious scholars, and students to gain direct perspectives.

2. Data Collection & Sampling

The research site is Balochistan, covering various districts affected by the conflict. The study includes 16 participants, equally divided into:

Core conflicting parties (government officials, separatist leaders, political figures).

Non-core conflicting parties (tribal leaders, scholars, businesspeople, and media persons). Interviews follow a structured protocol, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, while selection follows purposive sampling, prioritizing relevance, expertise, and diversity in perspectives. The below table clearly shows the sampling groups.

Table 1 Details and sampling of in-depth interviews

In-depth Interviews		Sample Groups	
		Core-Conflicting Parties	Non-Core Conflicting Parties
Political Actors	Government officials/stakeholders, separatist leaders	2	2
	Politicians/etc	2	2
Non-political actors	NGO heads, Journalists, Tribal leaders, Village heads, and Villagers	2	2
	Teachers, religious scholars, students, businessmen, etc.	2	2
Total		8	8
Total number of participants		16	

3. Data Analysis

The research applies Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle, categorizing violence into direct, structural, and cultural. Conflict mapping is used to analyze historical grievances, conflict actors, and violence patterns. The study also evaluates conflict management models, including bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation. A historical analysis is crucial for understanding the Balochistan conflict. Examining its trajectory helps construct analytical frameworks for nuanced interpretations. This approach grounds findings in the socio-political landscape, deepens understanding, and enriches academic discourse by uncovering deeper meanings and implications. The below figure shows the conceptual framework for a better understanding of the reader.
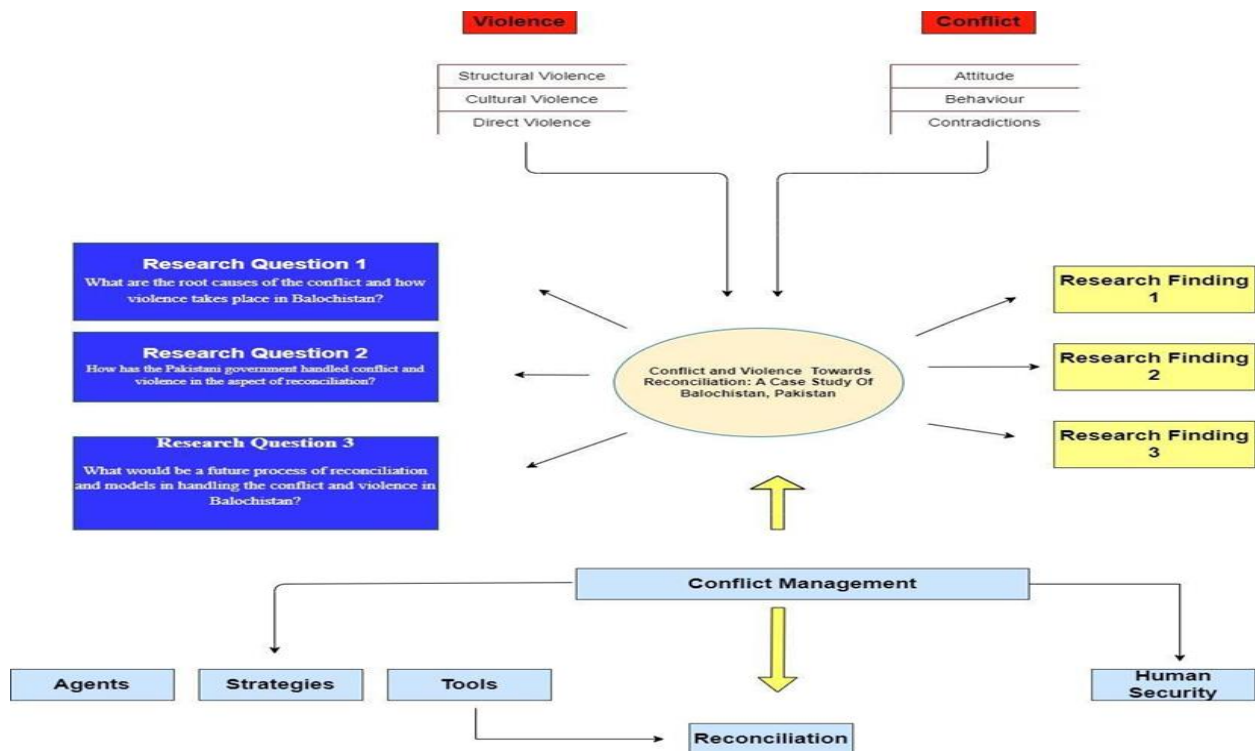
Figure 3 Conceptual framework of the research

3.1 Conflict in Balochistan

The Balochistan conflict springs from historical grievances following its annexation into Pakistan in 1948, leading to long-standing hostility. Economic exploitation, political marginalization, and lack of autonomy have intensified discontent, while ethnic and sectarian tensions, aggravated by demographic shifts and external influences, have made the situation more complicated. Attaining peace requires inclusive political dialogue, proportionate economic development, and reconciliation efforts.

3.2 Major Conflicts in Balochistan

As shown below in the figure, many battles have been fought in Balochistan During the first conflict of 1948, Prince Abdul Karim rebelled against his brother Khan Ahmad Yar Khan's accession to Pakistan, but the revolt lacked tribal support and ended by 1950 (International Crisis Group, 2006). In the second conflict of 1958, Nawab Nauroz Khan opposed the One Unit Policy, fearing loss of Baloch representation. His insurgency led to imprisonment and executions, ultimately failing to gain widespread support (Kupecz, 2012; Harrison, 1980). In the third conflict, Sher Muhammad Bijrani Marri led separatists in opposing military bases during the third conflict in the 1960s. They used guerrilla tactics until President Yahya Khan abolished the One Unit Policy in 1970, recognizing Balochistan as a province (Mohammad Marri & Shuja, 1973). The fourth conflict marked President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissing Balochistan's provincial government in 1973, triggering an insurgency led by Khair Bakhsh Marri's BPLF. Though martial law ended the rebellion, it gave rise to separatist factions like the

Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) (Jalal, 2007; Abbas, 2015). While the fifth conflict, which started in 2005 and persists to date, resulted from a rape incident in Dera Bugti, where Nawab Akbar Bugti and Mir Balach Marri demanded resource control and a military withdrawal. Bugti's 2006 assassination escalated violence, activating groups like the BLF and BLA (Wallensteen, 2015). The external involvement seems to remain limited, though leaked U.S. cables noted some support for the Bugti-led revolt (Walsh, 2010). During the recent conflict, insurgents have also targeted CPEC projects, dividing Baloch society and intensifying the conflict (Agarwal, 2020).
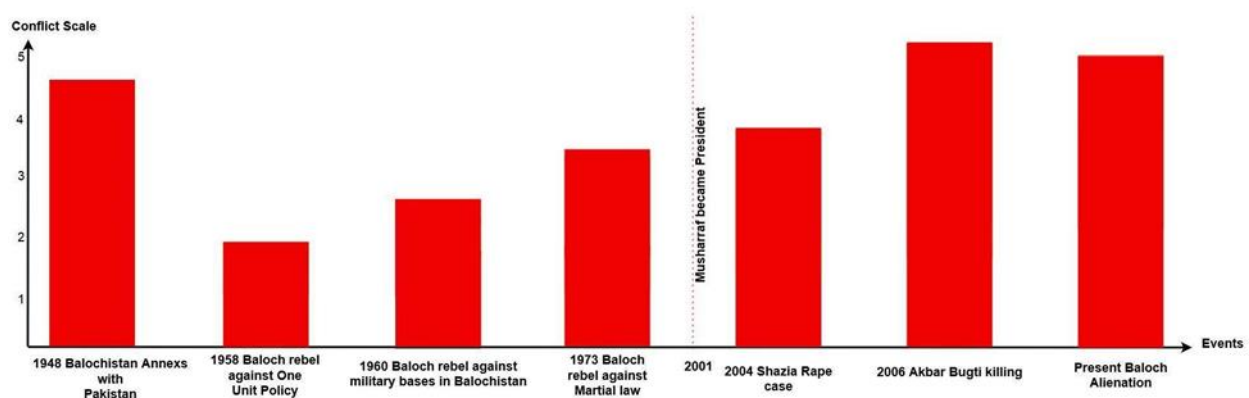

Figure 4 History of conflict in Balochistan

Results

The interview findings provide critical insights into the complex and diverse dynamics of the Balochistan conflict. Several recurring themes emerged, helping to systematically address the research questions. Research Questions 1 and 2 are answered through interview results and the concepts mentioned in the research methodology, while Question 3 is examined using both the theoretical framework and interview data. Notably, Pakistan's Former Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq, along with other key bureaucrats and politicians, contributed to the study. Additionally, the results highlight both similarities and differences between the perspectives of core and non-core conflicting parties, providing a structured comparative analysis.

1. **What are the Root Causes of the Conflict and How Violence Take Place in Balochistan?**

The conflict in Balochistan is rooted in historical grievances stemming from Pakistan's supposedly forced annexation of the region in 1948. The Baloch people, who have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity, did not willingly join Pakistan and have since harbored resentment towards the central government. The Baloch nationalist movement emerged as a direct response to this perceived historical injustice. The legacy of this forced integration has left a lasting impact on the Baloch psyche, fostering a strong sense of alienation and resistance against the Pakistani state. As Sarfraz Bungulzai, a former militant commander, mentioned in the interview, "Our

struggle is not just about independence; it's about dignity, resources, and the right to govern our affairs. The state has always treated us as outsiders."

Balochistan is rich in natural resources and remains one of Pakistan's poorest and least developed regions. Political marginalization is a significant root cause of the conflict in Balochistan. The Baloch people have consistently sought greater political autonomy and meaningful representation within the Pakistani state. Local leaders are often sidelined or co-opted by the central authorities, and genuine political representation for the Baloch people still needs to be discovered. This political exclusion has created a vacuum filled by nationalist and separatist movements, further intensifying the conflict. Babar Yousafzai, former Coordinator to Chief Minister Balochistan, endorsed this in the interview saying, "While some groups push for separatism, many of us simply want fair representation. If Balochistan had meaningful political autonomy, much of this conflict could have been avoided."

Balochistan is home to a diverse population, including Baloch, Pashtuns, Hazaras, and other ethnic groups. The region's prolonged conflict stems from historical grievances, economic exploitation, political exclusion, ethnic tensions, and external interference. Resolving these issues demands a comprehensive approach involving political dialogue, equitable economic development, and respect for the cultural and political rights of the Baloch people.

1.1 Grievances and Tribal Contradictions

One of the primary root causes identified by interviewees is the historical grievances stemming from perceived injustices and marginalization. Balochistan's history is marked by conflicts between the local tribes and the central government, dating back to the colonial era and continuing post-independence. This situation can be effectively analyzed under Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle Theory. Galtung's model categorizes violence into three types: direct (behavioral), cultural (social construct), and structural. In the context of Balochistan, direct violence includes physical clashes between local tribes and government forces. Cultural violence manifests through the narratives and ideologies that justify the marginalization of Baloch people, while structural violence is evident in the systematic inequalities and policies that disadvantage the region. The deep-seated tribal contradictions, power struggles among tribal leaders, and resource competition exacerbate these tensions. Imran Gichki, a well-known bureaucrat and the principal secretary to the Chief Minister of Balochistan highlighted these internal conflicts' significant role in perpetuating violence saying, "People often see the Baloch conflict as just a separatist movement, but they fail to understand the internal power struggles between tribal leaders and the competition for control over resources."

1.2 Socio-Economic Disparities

Socio-economic disparities within Balochistan are another critical factor driving the conflict. The province is one of the least developed regions in Pakistan, with high levels of unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty. Interviewees pointed out that these disparities create a fertile ground for discontent and radicalization. According to Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle Theory, these socio-economic issues can be seen as forms of structural violence, where systematic inequalities and institutional neglect result in a lack of basic amenities, such as education and healthcare, and inadequate infrastructure. This deepens the sense of deprivation among the Baloch people. In the interview, Shahmeer Rind, a young businessman, said, "The economic underdevelopment and lack of opportunities have left many young people disillusioned, making them more susceptible to recruitment by insurgent groups."

This structural violence, along with cultural violence perpetuated by narratives that justify the marginalization of Balochistan, exacerbates the feelings of marginalization and injustice. The uneven distribution of natural resources further intensifies these grievances. In the context of Galtung's theory, these disparities and their impacts on the Baloch population illustrate how structural and cultural violence contribute to the ongoing conflict in the region.

1.3 External Interference

The role of external interference in exacerbating the conflict was a recurring theme in the interviews. Neighboring countries, particularly India and Afghanistan, have been accused of exploiting Balochistan's vulnerabilities to serve their geopolitical interests. Hamna Malik, a media practitioner, pointed out in the interview that "The arrest of Kulbushan Yadev from Balochistan and EU Disinfo Lab Report of 2020 titled Indian Chronicles confirms Indian involvement as an external interference." Noor Bungulzai, a local tribal leader, and other interviewees mentioned that these external actors support insurgent groups, fueling the conflict. The strategic location of Balochistan, with its proximity to important trade routes and natural resources, makes it a focal point for regional power struggles. This external interference provides material support to insurgents and complicates efforts for conflict resolution by introducing additional layers of complexity to the already intricate local dynamics.

1.4 Government Policies and Political Exclusion

The Pakistani government's approach to Balochistan has also been a significant factor in the perpetuation of conflict. The central government's policies have often been perceived as exploitative and neglectful, focusing on extracting the region's resources without adequately addressing the needs and rights of the local population. The political exclusion of the Baloch people has fostered a sense of alienation. Behroz Khan, a student politician, argued that "A more inclusive approach, where intellectuals, imams, political leaders, and

tribal chiefs collaborate to develop strategies that address the fundamental grievances of the Baloch people should be adopted by the authorities." The lack of political inclusion and meaningful engagement has led to a trust deficit between the government and the Baloch people, perpetuating a cycle of resistance and repression.

1.5 Mechanisms of Violence

The manifestation of violence in Balochistan can be understood through the theoretical lens of conflict transformation theory. The conflict has transitioned from sporadic tribal skirmishes to a more organized insurgency, with various militant groups operating in the region. These groups, such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA), engage in guerrilla warfare tactics, including ambushes, bombings, and targeted killings. The interviews reveal that the insurgency has evolved, with leadership now in the hands of educated, middle-class youth rather than traditional tribal leaders, indicating a shift in the socio-political dynamics of the conflict.

In conclusion, the root causes of the conflict in Balochistan are multifaceted, involving historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, external interference, and government policies. The interplay of these factors has created a volatile environment where violence becomes a mechanism for asserting rights, seeking justice, and challenging the status quo. Addressing these root causes requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the historical context, promotes socio-economic development, and fosters political inclusion and dialogue.

2. How has the Pakistani Government Handled Conflict and Violence in the Aspect of Reconciliation?

The Pakistani government's approach to handling the conflict and violence in Balochistan, mainly through the lens of reconciliation, has been multifaceted but fraught with challenges. Analysis of interview responses reveals a spectrum of opinions on the effectiveness of these strategies, with views diverging significantly between political and non-political stakeholders.

2.1 Military Operations vs. Negotiation

The Pakistani government has historically employed a dual approach to military operations and limited negotiation efforts. Using force has been a predominant strategy, particularly in maintaining state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Prominent political figures like Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti said, "There should be no negotiations with those who want a separate land", and former interim Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar advocated for an "iron fist" approach, suggesting that, "Reconciliation should come after military successes that eliminate the immediate threat posed by insurgent groups." This stance is echoed by Jan Achakzai, the former interim spokesperson for the Government of Balochistan, who said, "There is a need for military operations to eradicate militant threats, with the following focus on post-militancy negotiation.

However, this approach has been criticized for exacerbating the cycle of violence. The reliance on military operations often results in collateral damage and alienation of the local populace, undermining trust and making

subsequent reconciliation efforts more challenging. The military-centric strategy is seen as addressing symptoms rather than root causes

2.2 Political Engagement and Reforms

Efforts at political engagement and constitutional reforms have also been part of the government's reconciliation strategy. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan on April 19, 2010, which devolved more extraordinary powers to the provinces, including Balochistan, was a significant step towards political reconciliation. This amendment addressed some of the historical political and fiscal autonomy grievances.

Civil society engagement is another aspect of the government's attempt to foster reconciliation. Programs encouraging the participation of civil society organizations in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts are crucial. However, the effectiveness of these programs has been mixed. Some interviewees express skepticism about the impact of civil society efforts, pointing out that without the substantial political will of the state, such initiatives are limited in effectiveness. As evident from the words of Saira Baloch, Balochistan High Court advocate, who said, "Engaging civil society is key, but reconciliation cannot be built on token gestures. The state must show genuine commitment through action, not just words."

2.3 Challenges in Implementation

One of the significant challenges in the government's reconciliation efforts is the need for more trust between the state and the Baloch people. Historical grievances, perceived injustices, and ongoing military operations exacerbate this trust deficit. The interviews reveal that many Baloch individuals see government initiatives as insufficient and often superficial, aimed more at pacification than genuine reconciliation. This was supported by Mahir Baloch, a senior journalist, who said, "Any reconciliation process that excludes Baloch voices is doomed to fail. The people must be the center of any peace effort."

Furthermore, external interference from neighboring countries complicates the government's efforts. Allegations of Indian and Afghan involvement in supporting insurgent groups add another layer of complexity to the reconciliation process. The government's focus on external threats sometimes detracts from effectively addressing internal grievances.

2.4 Inclusivity in the Reconciliation Process

An inclusive reconciliation approach involving all stakeholders, including tribal leaders, political figures, civil society, and youth representatives, is crucial. Mehmood Baloch, a researcher from the province, advocates for "comprehensive strategies that consider the perspectives of all the groups." The inclusion of youth in the reconciliation process is particularly emphasized, given the evolving nature of the insurgency leadership, which now includes educated, middle-class Baloch youth rather than solely traditional tribal figures.

The government's approach to reconciliation also needs to address the issue of missing persons, a core grievance for many in Balochistan. Allegations of enforced disappearances by security forces have created significant resentment. Addressing this issue through transparent investigations and justice for affected families is essential for building trust and moving towards reconciliation.

3. What Would be a Future Process of Reconciliation and Models for Handling the Conflict and Violence in Balochistan?

The future process of reconciliation in Balochistan must be multifaceted, inclusive, and designed to address both the root causes of the conflict and the immediate manifestations of violence. Drawing from interview responses, existing literature, and conflict resolution theories, a comprehensive reconciliation model can be developed to ensure sustainable peace and development in the region.

3.1 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) modeled after global best practices, such as South Africa's post-apartheid reconciliation process, can serve as a foundational mechanism for healing and stability.

3.2 Structure and Function

The TRC should be an independent and inclusive body with representatives from Core conflicting parties (State institutions, Baloch separatist groups, security forces) and Non-core conflicting parties (Tribal elders, civil society, business leaders, media, and victims' families). The commission's structure should follow Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle and Violence Triangle models by addressing contradictions, attitudes, and behaviors that sustain conflict. It must operate across three primary pillars.

The first pillar, based on truth-seeking and historical reconciliation, should acknowledge the root causes of the conflict, including economic exploitation, political marginalization, enforced disappearances, and military excesses. It shall establish an open truth-telling platform where victims and perpetrators can share testimonies publicly, fostering a collective memory and breaking the cycle of silence. Structural and cultural violence could be addressed by rewriting national narratives to integrate Balochistan's history, grievances, and contributions to Pakistan's identity.

The second pillar shall stand on justice, restorative accountability, and political inclusion to primarily investigate human rights violations, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings ensuring justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators. Furthermore, legal and institutional reforms should be introduced to empower provincial autonomy, aligning with the 18th Amendment and devolving greater authority to Balochistan's local representation in leadership roles. Recognition of political representation gaps and implementation of validating action policies to ensure Baloch voices are included in decision-making shall be undertaken on the federal level.

The third pillar shall give support to socio-economic redress and sustainable peacebuilding with equitable resource distribution ensuring that Balochistan benefits proportionally from its vast natural wealth. The investment in education, employment, and infrastructure to address structural violence that fuels radicalization shall be given preference in the provincial budget. Moreover, initiatives to introduce demilitarization & reintegration programs for insurgents, with economic and psychological support to transition into civilian life must be introduced by the Government. Youth empowerment initiatives to prevent recruitment by insurgent groups and foster a culture of peace and innovation are also crucial.
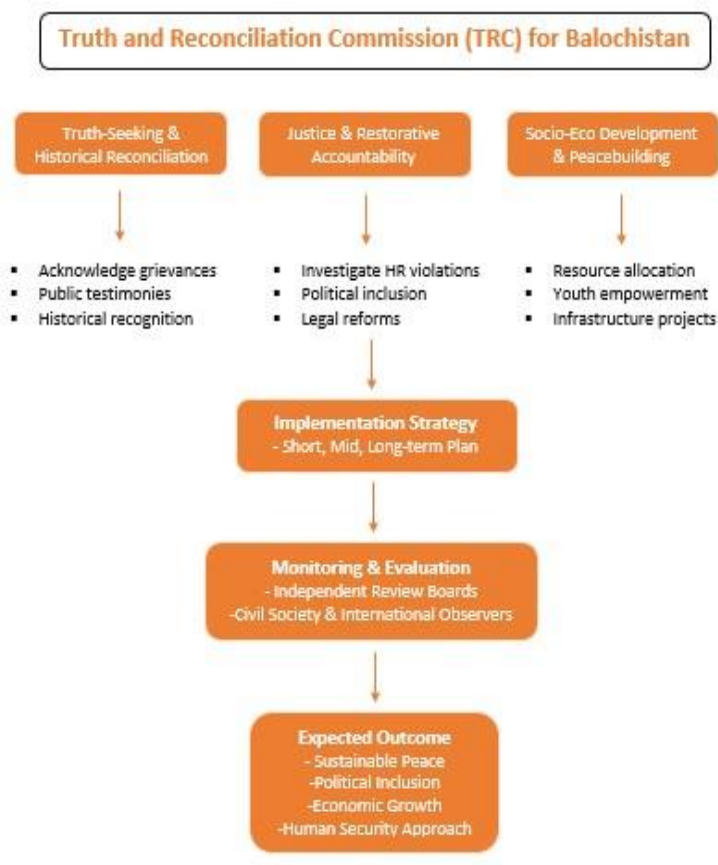

Figure 5 TRC structure

3.3 Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Balochistan should adopt a phased approach to ensure a structured and sustainable reconciliation process that addresses both immediate grievances and long-term structural challenges.

1) Short-Term Phase (1-2 Years)

The initial phase should focus on creating an environment conducive to peace and healing. The first step is achieving an immediate ceasefire by facilitating negotiations between the Pakistani state and insurgent groups, signaling a commitment to de-escalation. Public truth-telling sessions should be organized to

provide victims and witnesses with a platform to share their experiences, fostering acknowledgment and raising public awareness of past injustices. Additionally, victim compensation programs should be established to offer financial aid and psychological support to affected families, helping communities begin the healing process.

2) Mid-Term Phase (3-5 Years)

The second phase should prioritize institutional reforms and accountability to address the root causes of the conflict. Institutional and political reforms must be implemented to strengthen local governance, ensure greater political representation for the Baloch people, and protect their cultural rights. Accountability trials should be conducted through transparent legal proceedings to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable while upholding due process. At the same time, reintegration programs for former insurgents should be introduced, offering vocational training, education, and employment opportunities to help them transition back into society and contribute positively to the economy.

3) Long-Term Phase (5+ Years)

The final phase should emphasize sustainable peace through socio-economic development and societal healing. Economic inclusion should be a priority, ensuring equitable resource distribution and launching development projects that directly benefit local communities, particularly in job creation for Baloch youth. Comprehensive governance reforms should decentralize power and strengthen democratic institutions to promote long-term political stability and inclusivity. Lastly, societal healing initiatives should encourage inter-community dialogue and reconciliation, addressing historical grievances and fostering social cohesion. Educational and media campaigns should promote peacebuilding and cultural understanding to ensure lasting harmony in the region.

By following this phased approach, the TRC can systematically address the complex dynamics of conflict in Balochistan, laying the groundwork for long-term peace, justice, and sustainable development in the region.

3.4 Accountability and Regulation

To ensure the effectiveness and transparency of reconciliation efforts in Balochistan, the establishment of a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Board is essential. This board should include legal experts, conflict resolution specialists, and international observers. Legal experts can ensure that reconciliation initiatives adhere to national and international legal standards, while conflict resolution specialists can guide the implementation of best practices tailored to Balochistan's complex socio-political landscape. The inclusion of international observers would provide impartial oversight, enhancing credibility and fostering trust among stakeholders.

Additionally, a Civil Society Oversight Panel should be formed to actively engage the public and represent diverse perspectives from Balochistan's various communities. This panel would include representatives from tribal groups, women's organizations, youth leaders, and civil rights advocates. Their involvement is crucial for ensuring that reconciliation efforts address the specific needs and grievances of marginalized groups and are grounded in local realities.

The board and panel would work collaboratively to monitor progress, assess the impact of reconciliation initiatives, and recommend adjustments as needed. They would also provide regular reports to the government and the public, ensuring transparency and fostering accountability. By integrating community voices and expert guidance, this mechanism would help build trust and contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable path to peace in Balochistan.

3.5 Expected Outcome

The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Balochistan would foster a transformative shift from a military-centric security approach to a human-security-based reconciliation model. Instead of solely focusing on the suppression of insurgency through force, this approach would prioritize addressing the underlying grievances of the Baloch people, including political exclusion, socio-economic disparities, and historical injustices.

The TRC would dismantle the conditions that perpetuate conflict by promoting dialogue and accountability. It would provide a platform for victims to share their experiences and for perpetrators to acknowledge their actions, fostering healing and trust-building. The commission could also recommend institutional reforms to ensure that the rights and aspirations of the Baloch population are respected and protected.

Through a human-security framework, the TRC would emphasize the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities rather than merely safeguarding state interests. This approach would lay the foundation for an inclusive and politically stable Balochistan by promoting equitable development, social cohesion, and democratic participation. By addressing both immediate and structural sources of conflict, the TRC would contribute to long-term peace and reconciliation in the region.

3.6 Limitations

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Balochistan will likely encounter several obstacles that may hinder its effectiveness. One of the biggest challenges is political resistance from the state and military institutions, which may be reluctant to acknowledge past injustices or allow full accountability. Without state commitment, the TRC risks becoming a symbolic exercise rather than a meaningful process of reconciliation. Deep-rooted mistrust between the Baloch people and the government further complicates the situation, as many

victims and separatist groups may refuse to participate, fearing that the TRC is merely a state-controlled initiative.

Another significant limitation is ongoing violence and insurgency, which can disrupt public hearings and truth-telling sessions. Active militant groups and security operations could create an unsafe environment, making it difficult for victims to testify freely. Additionally, the TRC may lack enforcement power, meaning its findings and recommendations could be ignored, as has happened with past commissions in Pakistan. Ethnic and political divisions within Balochistan also pose a challenge, as different groups may have conflicting interests and grievances that need to be addressed.

External interference from countries like India and Afghanistan has further complicated reconciliation efforts, as foreign actors may exploit the situation for geopolitical purposes. Moreover, socio-economic barriers such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure contribute to instability and may undermine long-term peace efforts. Finally, reconciliation is a slow process, and unrealistic expectations could lead to frustration among stakeholders, potentially derailing the initiative before meaningful progress is made.

3.7 Recommendations

To overcome these challenges, the TRC must be backed by a strong political commitment from the government, ensuring its independence and the implementation of its findings. It should be granted legal authority to prosecute human rights violations and enforce its recommendations. This will prevent the TRC from being reduced to a weak institution. Engaging local communities, civil society, and tribal leaders is essential to rebuilding public trust and encouraging participation from all segments of society.

Ensuring security and stability is another important factor. A ceasefire agreement between security forces and militant groups, along with protection for witnesses and victims, will create a safer environment for reconciliation efforts. Moreover, the TRC should not function in isolation but should be accompanied by economic and political reforms. Fair resource distribution, employment opportunities, and increased political representation for Balochistan will address long-standing grievances and make peace sustainable.

Additionally, international oversight through neutral observers can enhance transparency and credibility, ensuring that the TRC's work is not manipulated for political or diplomatic gain. A well-structured and independent TRC, backed by political will, legal authority, and socio-economic development, is likely to serve as a foundation for lasting peace and stability in Balochistan. However, without genuine efforts to implement its recommendations and address underlying grievances, reconciliation will remain an ambiguous goal.

Conclusion

Reconciliation in Balochistan is not just a policy initiative but a necessity for lasting peace and stability. The region's historical grievances, economic marginalization, and political exclusion have fueled decades of conflict, deepening distrust between the state and the Baloch people. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presents a viable path forward, but its success relies on genuine political commitment, legal enforcement, and meaningful participation from all stakeholders. It must not become a superficial exercise but a transformative process that acknowledges past injustices, ensures future justice and paves the way for sustainable development. The future of Balochistan depends on a comprehensive and inclusive approach that prioritizes economic inclusion, political representation, and cultural recognition. The government must move beyond a military-centric strategy and embrace a human-security-based reconciliation model that addresses the root causes of the conflict rather than merely suppressing its symptoms. A phased approach starting with an immediate ceasefire, followed by institutional reforms, and culminating in long-term economic and governance improvements can help restore trust and lay the groundwork for enduring peace. Reconciliation in Balochistan is not just about addressing past grievances, it is about building a future where justice, inclusion, and progress replace conflict and exclusion. Without real efforts to heal historical wounds, the cycle of mistrust will persist, keeping the region in a state of unrest. However, with a genuine commitment to truth, accountability, and development, Balochistan can turn a new page—one where its people are not sidelined but actively shape their political and economic destiny. This is an opportunity to replace division with dialogue, neglect with empowerment, and conflict with stability. The path to peace is difficult, but by making reconciliation a national priority, Pakistan can ensure that Balochistan becomes not just a region of the past's struggles, but a key pillar of the country's future.

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