

# BALUCH MILITANCY

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE REPORT





# *Executive Summary*

The inter-border airstrikes conducted by Pakistan against Iran in the course of January 2024 mark a dangerous escalation of their situation, which hails back to the beginning of the Baloch insurgency. Pakistani airstrikes were made to hit the Baloch separatist groups within Iranian borders targeting the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) among others. These airstrikes are bound to increase existing instability factors in the region and have implications on the security ramifications on the relationship between Pakistan and China and between Pakistan and Iran with regard to security aspects of the investment China has made in Balochistan. Instead, the report advises Pakistan and Iran to establish increased diplomacy with other regional players to prevent further escalation of violence.

# Background

**Historical Context:** Balochistan has been at the center of insurgency activities for decades since the Baloch nationalists in both Pakistan and Iran fight for greater autonomy or independence. The province holds significant mineral wealth and strategic importance, thus being a focal point for both regional powers.

**Current Developments:** In January 2024, Pakistan conducted retaliatory airstrikes within Iran against Baloch militants, especially the BLF, after Iranian missile strikes against militant groups on Pakistan's side of the border. Both had accused each other of providing militants who conducted cross-border attacks.

**Geopolitical Context:** It encompasses the geopolitical context, as Balochistan is strategically an important region of minerals and gas reserves, cusp-like in position between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Instability in this region has implications on regional security that makes Iran-Pakistan relations complex and further complicates any engagements with external powers such as China, whose investment here faces a threat of constant separatist group activity.

# *Strategic Analysis*

**Geopolitical Implications:** The recent strikes in Iran and Pakistan underscore the fragile nature of Iran-Pakistan relations, and the insurgency along their border is a question that has been thrust into the spotlight. China's ever-growing influence on Balochistan, through projects linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, adds a particularly confusing dimension to this regional dynamic. Baloch militants have attacked Chinese investments over and over again, further straining Pakistan's security commitments.

**Economic Impact:** The Balochistan insurgency threatens Chinese projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, spanning the region. Balochi insurgent attacks that include killing Chinese citizens and destroying Chinese infrastructure may deter future investment.





Security Implications: Cross-border Pakistan attacks inside Iran have increased the tension in the region, and both countries accuse each other of taking in separatist militants. The attack raises the danger of a big conflict that most likely will rise even further because both countries are incapable of suppressing Baloch insurgent activities and cannot guarantee the security of all Chinese investments in Balochistan.

Social and Political Impact: It is government repression fueling political instability in Iran and Pakistan, a means of sustaining the marginalization of ethnic Baloch groups because of Baloch insurgency and movements for separation. Increasing anger and resistance among the various groups of locals have intensified the problem.



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## *Scenario Analysis*

**Best-Case Scenario:** A détente between the two countries through diplomatic means, increasing border security cooperation, and addressing the root causes of the insurgency.

**Most Likely Scenario:** The situation remains a low-intensity conflict with periodic cross-border strikes as both Pakistan and Iran take on their struggle to contain Baloch militants protecting the interests of the nation and foreign investments.

**Worst-Case Scenario:** Escalation of the conflict, which would culminate into a larger security crisis with involvement of extraneous powers, such as China, since that country has economic interest in Balochistan due to its business enterprise.



## ***Strategic Recommendations***

**Diplomatic Recommendations:** Pakistan and Iran should have more diplomacy to avoid further escalations, and regional cooperation needs to be brought back. International actors particularly China should be included in these discussions because of its economic interest in the region.

**Security Recommendations:** Pakistan should improve security along its borders and must have better coordination with Iran for sharing intelligence to halt militant infiltration across the border. The two nations may consider joint counter-insurgency operations to stop the insurgency.

**Economic Recommendations:** Pakistan and China must be able to provide more security measures for Chinese investment projects in Balochistan so that such economic projects can be carried out without further disruption by the militants.



# INSURGENCY

## Conclusion

Deeper beneath the surface of these strikes across the Pakistan-Iran border are issues connected to the Baloch insurgency and broader regional geopolitics. It is at risk of eruption unless concerted efforts by both nations stop the escalating conflict and stabilize the region-this impacts not only on regional stability and key international investments but also on China, in this case. Both the nations have to pursue joint diplomatic and security cooperation.



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