



## Balance-Shifting through 'Soft Tactics': A Case Study of Baloch Insurgency

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**Abstract:** *This study analyzes the ethnic nationalist movement among Pakistan's Baloch population. The current multifaceted and multi-focused approach of this movement is the result of its development through several periods. Nationalists' use of gentler methods has contributed to the current wave of insurrection. This movement has matured into a class struggle with a militant element that uses both hard and soft tactics to achieve its ends. The advantages and disadvantages of the Baloch Insurgency have been evaluated by looking at how soft tactics fit into the theoretical framework of irregular warfare presented by James D. Kiras. This insurgency has shown, through its use of soft tactics, that it is nearly successful despite the best efforts of law enforcement and the government. The state must guarantee that no resident is without access to food, clothing, and shelter. Local authorities should also discourage nationalist and separatist movements from developing in the region.*

**Key Words:** Baloch Insurgency, Irregular Warfare, Conflict, Nationalist, Soft Tactics, James D. Kiras

### Introduction

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province and plays an important geopolitical role as a result of its proximity to Afghanistan, Iran, and the seashore. The location of Balochistan near the Strait of Hormuz is highly significant. The Gwadar port is in a prime position for access to the Strait of Hormuz. Chinese interest and presence in the region through investments in recent years have significantly boosted the region's strategic significance. Balochistan shares a border with Afghanistan to the northwest and with Iran to the west, a distance of roughly 475 and 625 miles, respectively. About 562 kilometres (about 340 miles) separate Balochistan's Makran Coast from the Persian Gulf (M. S. Khetran, [2014](#)).

Pakistan has been experiencing a Baloch insurgency for decades. Pakistan's position has gotten worse due to the country's unitary state creation, egocentric political strife, military coups, and weak writ of law and order. As early as 1948, Prince Karim, brother of Khan of Kalat, began armed conflict against Pakistan (Bennett, [2003](#)), sparking the first insurgency. The second wave occurred in October 1958, when Pakistani soldiers attacked and arrested Khan and his subordinates on suspicion that they were plotting a rebellion against Afghanistan. Violence on a massive scale erupted after the arrest. A lot of trouble started because the tribesmen wouldn't give up their guns despite the army's repeated demands. Five of Nauroz Khan's troops were executed for

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treason in July of 1960. They had formed a ragtag militia after the general was captured. In 1963, a third wave of Baloch resistance erupted, led by Sher Mohammad Marri, who launched an organized uprising against military targets in Balochistan. After Pakistan abolished the "one unit" (ICG, 2006), the conflict subsided. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's dismissal of the Balochistan administration on treason charges set off the fourth wave in the province. As a direct consequence, the Marri tribe and Baloch students launched a massive insurgency against Pakistani interests in the province. Balochistan People's Liberation Front (BPLF) leader Khair Bakhsh Marri formed the group as a response, and it adopted more extreme guerrilla tactics as a result. In the past, the four waves were handled through repression and a short-term political agreement with the Baloch leadership (Weaver, 2010).

In 2003, a new tidal wave began, which was bolstered by the rape and subsequent murder of Dr Shazia Khalid and Akbar Bugti. Militants numbering between 3,000 and 5,000 are keeping up the pressure. It appears that Pakistan's interests will be severely damaged by the fifth wave, which has been going on for a while and is more structured. This movement relies heavily on soft methods to win over supporters and establish its credibility before implementing its agenda (Braithwaite & D'Costa, 2022).

## Literature Review

The theoretical paradigm put forward by James D. Kiras is applicable to both insurgency and counterinsurgency situations. As a result, his theory makes it even more challenging to explain certain aspects of soft techniques, significantly complicating the research on insurgency and counterinsurgency. In Pakistan, the irregulars have gained an advantage over the regulars thanks to the unrestricted and limitless "virtual space" and the greater reach it provides. These "soft" strategies may have some of the same conditions as the elements of system subversion, such as time, space, support, and legitimacy. It allows rebels to have strategic depth, or strength, despite being outgunned and undersupplied. It has allowed irregulars to spread their message and win support from the general public, so extending the fight. State

forces were already at a disadvantage in this field before the introduction of soft tactics, which interact with the elements of protecting the system despite their lack of development, capacity building, and a practical framework for the security forces. Law enforcement has been weakened by the pressure of soft approach strategies. Insurgents and their followers' use of online propaganda has trapped the security forces and made counterinsurgency efforts more difficult. Internet and technology advancements have both theoretical and practical applications for insurgency and counterinsurgency. Studying and understanding the modern dimensions of insurgency and counterinsurgency is impossible without first grasping the significance of soft tactics.

The ethnic National movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Pakistan were explored by Amin (1988). He investigated what he believed to be the foreign interests at the root of the Baloch uprising. He also kept a tally of the various ethnic migrations in Sind and KPK. The history of Baloch nationalism was analyzed by Breseeg (2004). He argued that the Baloch people of Pakistan and Iran are distinct people who should have their own country. He disregards the insurgency movements in Pakistan and Iran as well as their national standings. The evidence against the Nationalists is clearly laid forth, and the state's position is not explained. According to Khetran (2011), the crisis in Balochistan is due to a combination of governance problems, the Sardari system, social and economic issues, poverty, marginalization, and foreign interference.

In his book "The Baloch and Balochistan," Dashti (2012) detailed Balochistan's historical evolution through its various stages. He talked about how the Aryans came to the Balochistan of today. His description of the journey was titled "The Long Walk from Balashagan to Balochistan." The Baloch people have a long and troubled history, a rigid tribal structure, and an antiquated manner of doing things. They were nomads who herded sheep and goats, hence they were nomadic and active people within their tribe. But because they operated outside of the mainstream of politics, there is nothing written or known about them. The Balochistan nationalist movement and Pakistani government policies were the focus

of Grare's (2013) research. This research shed light on the nature of Baloch nationalism, the politics of war in Balochistan, governmental repression as policy, the erosion of ethnic identities fostered by sectarianism, and potential solutions. Using Robert Moore's theoretical framework for insurgency and counterinsurgency, Jilani & Mujaddid (2020) analyzed the conflict in Balochistan. The state's triumph in Balochistan was evident in its counterinsurgency efforts. However, this study does not account for recent developments in Baloch nationalism, such as the long march, Dharna, social media propaganda, etc.

The resilient nature of the Baloch insurgency was investigated by Gattani (2021). He zeroed in on the fifth wave of insurgency, which has been going on since 2004. He broke up his article into three sections: (1) background on the Baloch insurgency, (2) causes of the fifth wave of insurgency, and (3) focus on the resurrection in 2020. However, he fails to mention the part played by militants' soft tactics in extending the battle and gaining legitimacy in the resurgence of the Baloch insurgency and movement.

Balochistan's intraprovincial rivalry and the new development project funded by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) were the focus of research by Zaheer and Asim (2021). The study examined the worries of Baloch nationalists about these initiatives and the involvement of foreign powers in hastening this conflict. Scholars have looked at the impact of the geostrategic importance of Balochistan and the role of socioeconomic inequality in exploiting the region (Kalim et al., 2018; Ismail, 2014). Baloch nationalists' attempts to break away were the subject of research by Mushtaq & Mirza (2022). They argue that the state's coercive measures and glaring regional inequalities have contributed to the Baloch's sense of abandonment and hardship, thereby sparking ethnic violence. Inspired by Frances Stewart's "horizontal inequalities," they examine how economic disparities contribute to ethnic political conflict and citizen participation in Balochistan's government. They try to learn more about how interethnic conflict and

political instability might be made worse by horizontal inequality. They maintained that democratic stability in a multiethnic society might be improved by inclusive governance and policies of distributive justice. Oxford Analytica (2022), reported "Pakistan will work harder to curb Baloch insurgents," described Balochistan as a real problem for Pakistan. Pakistan will deal with it with determination for internal stability and external normalization. The Baloch insurgency can affect Pakistan's relations with neighbouring Afghanistan, China, and Iran. Curbing these elements is strategically important for Pakistan.

Regular forces have successfully put down every significant armed insurgency in history. Previous primary literature focuses on a causal study of the insurgency in Balochistan and government strategies for countering it. However, as science and technology advance and international organizations grow, 'soft tactics' have become increasingly important in insurgency and counterinsurgency. Studies on soft tactics in relation to insurgency and counter-insurgency are lacking in the current literature. Understanding the scope of modern insurgencies necessitates not only the soft tactics examined in this paper but also the development of new theoretical frameworks.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Subverting the System: the theory and Practice of Irregular Warfare**

According to the work of James D. Kiras (2007) that in irregular war, the way is to find to increase strength through mobility, the structure of the organization, secrecy of the activists and stealth to ouster the powerful or resourceful adversary. The success or unsuccess of such warfare takes decades to measure. The advantage over the adversary can be measured in terms of time, space, legitimacy and support. The interaction of the soft tactics with elements of the insurgency and the result of this interaction is also given below:  
Yes= If the interaction is in favour of insurgents  
No= If the interaction is not favourable for insurgents

**Table 1**

*Interaction of Soft Tactics with the Elements of the Insurgency*

Soft Tactics	Elements of Insurgency			
	Time	Space	Legitimacy	Support
Dharna	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Protest	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NGOs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Awareness Seminars	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online News Channels	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online Activists	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TCNG	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Baloch insurgents have plenty of time to plan their violent battle and spread their stories via covert methods. Insurgents benefit from the favourable conditions and gained time that dharna, protests, and NGOs bring about by putting pressure on security personnel to act without hesitation. Irregulars also had an advantage in terms of time thanks to the utilization of cyberspace. However, the territory of Balochistan gives the insurgents a strategic and tactical advantage over the state troops, even if they have been defeated or are at a disadvantage in terms of space control. Their mobility and capacity to launch guerilla attacks are unrestricted. Law enforcement authorities face difficulties in conducting large-scale movements and counter operations due to the terrain's rugged, harsh nature. Due to the size of the country and the way the government safeguards its most important political, economic, social, and military assets, rebels are able to expand their operations into previously unprotected regions. Attack rates by nationalists provide them with a clear spatial advantage, as shown above. Using social media as part of a soft strategy gives them a platform from which to coordinate their efforts and spread their message, as well as a system through which to oversee the administrative aspects of their various organizational structures. With the help of soft techniques, militants and nationalists are able to operate more freely in populated regions.

The Baloch community is beginning to view this insurgency as legitimate. The population's desire for autonomy has been stoked by the ongoing economic crisis, widespread unemployment, low wages, political marginalization, and pervasive feelings of unfairness and exploitation.

Consistent growth in armed movements and acceptance of soft tactics shows that they are widely accepted by the Baloch people. They are attempting to get the Baloch cause on the United Nations' agenda by using diplomatic niceties to gain credibility in the eyes of the world community. A 2019 preliminary assessment by the EU Disinfo Lab confirmed India's role in helping the Baloch insurgency; it found that India had been conducting a huge operation aimed at international institutions and advancing Indian goals. This is also reflected in their efforts to gain credibility and support at the international level (Machado, Alaphilippe, Adamczyk, and Grégoire, 2020). Insurgents employ soft tactics whenever they seek support from the populace at large or a specific demographic.

There is widespread backing for the insurgency among the Baloch people. Discomfort in Balochistan has been growing as a result of the region's chronic lack of economic and political resources. As a result of widespread support among the populace, rebels are able to maintain operations and refine their plans. Furthermore, the Baloch diaspora and local Baloch groups have given the oppressed and underprivileged people of Balochistan a sense of belonging and legitimacy. Bansal (2005) and Khetran (2011) cite research showing that because of its strategic importance, this insurgency also receives assistance from outside parties. Networking ceaselessly to amass the backing necessary to carry on with the cause is an example of a soft approach.

## Preventing the System: Counter Insurgency

James D. Kiras built his work on Mao's Yu Chi Chan work that "counter-insurgency operations could be concluded in three words: Location, Isolation, Eradication" (Mao, 1961).

**Table 2**

*The Interaction between Soft Tactics and Counter-insurgency*

Soft Tactics	Elements of Counter Insurgency		
	Location	Isolation	Eradication
Dharna	Yes	Yes	Yes
Protest	Yes	Yes	Yes
NGOs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Awareness Seminars	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online News Channels	No	No	No
Online Activists	No	No	No
<b>TCNG</b>	No	No	No

Counter-insurgency efforts require a thorough understanding of the whereabouts and hiding places of insurgents. To finally put an end to this threat, an effective intelligence network and military force were necessary. Pakistan has the military discipline, operational history, and technological resources to gather this type of intelligence for counterinsurgency purposes. Unfortunately, state troops are missing several key ingredients, such as help and support from the local populace. However, the public opposes law enforcement agencies (LEAs) because of the numerous checks and balances in place and the tendency to arrest those who seem suspect. Some soft techniques, such as Dharna, protests, NGOs, and awareness seminars, are easy for security authorities to monitor and counter. However, overcoming them necessitates a more nuanced strategy than simple isolation and extermination. While the Pakistani government lacks the resources to conduct "Location," or trace, track, and counter-insurgent operations in cyberspace.

Second, the militants have been cut off from their resources. Balochistan occupies around 44 per cent of Pakistan's land area (Ahmed & Baloch, 2015). Pakistan's border with India (Jamwal, 2002) and Afghanistan (Mazhar & Goraya, 2020) pose security threats, limiting the number of troops that may be sent to Balochistan. The state, ideally, would be able to seize control of the land and completely shut off the rebel Baloch from their base of support.

The interaction between the soft tactics and elements of counterinsurgency is given below:

Yes= If the interaction is in favour of counter insurgency

No= If the interaction is not favourable for counter-insurgency

If the state is unable to isolate the insurgents in cyberspace, there is an alternative. Through the use of cyberspace, they are able to advance their design. Large swaths of unpopulated land make it impossible for the state to provide adequate protection in times of economic, political, or security emergency. Those who use "soft" techniques like dharna, protests, etc., are easily separated from the broader populace. To maintain isolation, however, business transactions had to be managed methodically. Pakistan cannot support the channels, activities, or even the online activists who are trying to pass the conflict on to the next generation.

Permanent peace and stability can be achieved by the elimination of insurgents. They can be wiped out by Pakistan's modernized counterterrorism agency and the military forces' overwhelming firepower and elite special units. The top two strategies—location and isolation—are problematic because they exceed the state's capabilities. Because the few guerrilla fighters are so dispersed, eradication efforts will lead to more civil strife in Balochistan. The government is able to effectively eliminate insurgents by employing the "pseudo guerrillas" tactic. Correct eradication necessitates weakening their ability to fight back. The state is unable to provide the level of surveillance and law enforcement necessary for this. Physical elimination is feasible, but what about the insurgents' use of cyberspace and other "soft"

strategies? In order to eliminate the causes of the insurgency, it is necessary to take a tactical and nuanced approach to eliminate soft tactics. A weak nation cannot meet the criteria for using soft methods to quell an insurrection.

### **Bringing the System down or Thriving on its Margins?**

Balochistan is the largest province in Pakistan, covering over 44% of the country. While they do hold a numerical advantage in Balochistan, it is hardly overwhelming. There are around 7 million Balochs in Balochistan, or about 55-60% of the entire population. Although they only make up about 5% of Pakistan's population, they claim nearly half the country as their own (Ahmed & Baloch, 2015). It's irrational and has no practical use whatsoever. Game developers are fueling this wave of delusion for their own financial gain. This shift, even at its height, will not travel downstream. But it can also make the fight last longer, raise new security concerns, and slow political and socioeconomic progress. It may cause Pakistan to face an image problem. The progress of projects with strategic and geostrategic relevance may be slowed as a result. The Baloch nationalists' softer approach will just drag out the conflict and keep the Pakistani government on edge. The insurgents' current strategy will allow them to survive on the fringes of the system for the foreseeable future. It does not appear like the insurgents will be able to bring down the system anytime soon.

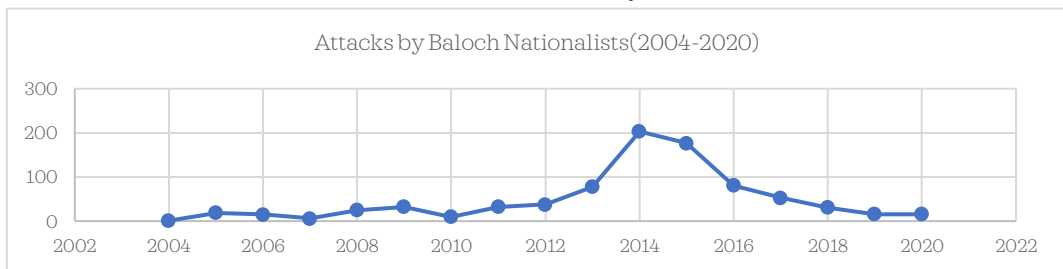
### **Research Methodology**

This investigation is a case study of digital ethnography. The author spent at least three months following Baloch nationalist/insurgents on Facebook, Telegram, and Twitter. Virtual world configurations were analyzed using only the accounts that had a meaningful effect. Measures of success

included the number of people who followed a campaign's social media account and the number of times that campaign content was shared or retweeted. To better comprehend the current wave of Baloch insurgency, the author tracked their strategies and movements in cyberspace and the ties or impact they had on the real world. To plan this research, we performed a content analysis, a visual analysis, and a comparative analysis with real-world activities. Some nationalist movement social media activists and members of the security forces are consulted during the analytical process so that the author can put themselves in their shoes. We rely heavily on social media sites like Facebook, Telegram, and Twitter for our data collection. Similarly, secondary sources include things like books, articles, newspapers, and magazines. The question was answered by outlining and analyzing the data collected in depth. The features of both the "Subverting the System" insurgent framework and the "Protecting the System" counterinsurgency framework proposed by James D. Kiras are affected by the use of soft tactics. The effect of soft tactics, and the overlap between them, is studied. There is a table detailing the interaction, with both "Yes" and "No" options. A "yes" answer indicates that the situation is to the party's advantage, whereas a "no" response indicates that the situation is not beneficial. Analysis of the interplay between soft tactics and insurgency and counterinsurgency components takes into account the capabilities of the contending factions.

### **Baloch Militancy against Pakistan**

When Pakistan annexed Balochistan, it sparked an armed uprising by the Baloch people. Local leaders frequently started the first four waves of the rebellion to reap the most rewards for themselves. Pakistan's ruling military class, therefore, did not take these



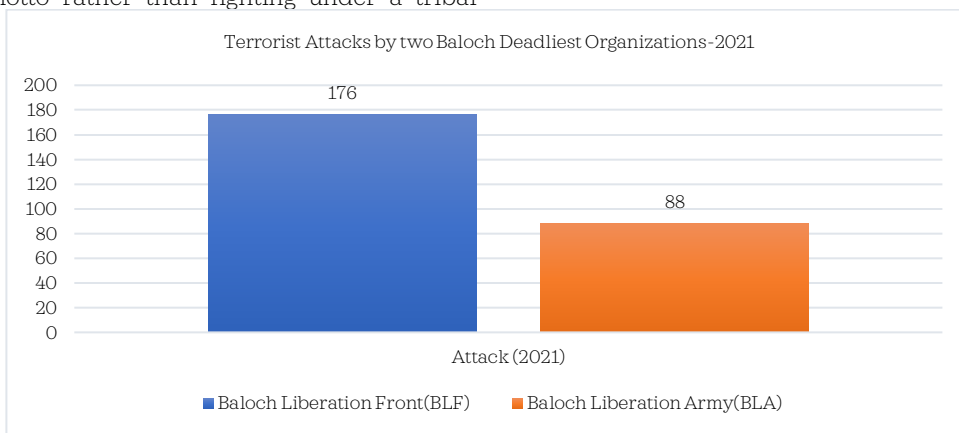


groups seriously. The long-term war was less likely when such corrupt politicians were in charge (Grare, 2013). The middle class is largely responsible for the onset of the fifth wave in the twenty-first century. This conflict has accelerated the procedure of "detrribalization." The tribes are no longer the decisive force in the conflict and are therefore losing ground.

*Data obtained from the South Asian Terrorism Portal*  
 This middle-class struggle also enhanced the cohesion among different groups. Now, they are fighting under organizational struggle with a motto rather than fighting under a tribal

This fight by the middle class has given the Baloch Nationalist movement fresh life and momentum (Ahmad, 2012). This educated middle class has come to define itself primarily via the use of "soft approaches" to victory. Here are some things to keep an eye out for in this fifth wave of armed conflict:

leader without individual awareness. Recently, the most active separatists groups' armed activities are increasing:



*Data collected from Annual reports of BLA and BLF*

### 'Soft Tactics'

The armed struggle of the insurgents cannot alter the equation of power with the state. However, it can create a constant threat and sense of insecurity. The state forces can curb the armed militant with intelligence and operational capabilities. That was why in the 70s, Pakistani forces defeated almost 50000 insurgents in Balochistan. The educational middle class entered this struggle into a new phase of soft tactics, creating a constant symbol of resistance in Balochistan. It's spreading awareness for freedom, increasing social acceptance for irregulars, propagating against the state, struggling to get legitimacy in the eye of the international community and advancing their narrative multi-dimensionally. The following soft approaches have been adopted:

- Dharna (a long-continued seating in disagreement)
- Protests-National and international level

- NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations)
- Awareness seminars
- Online News channels
- Online activists
- Transformation of conflict to Next Generation (TCNG)

Mama Qadeer Baloch (voice chairman of Voice for Baloch Missing Persons) is considering the symbol of resistance in the form of Dharna and protests. He is continuously seating in Dharna for more than 4896+ days in Quetta. He has also broken the Gandhi record by marching more than 2000 Km from Quetta to Islamabad via Karachi to recover Missing persons. Baloch also protested against state forces in Pakistan and outside Pakistan at vital platforms. Baloch has formed NGOs to promote their cause, protect rights, and propagate their narrative. This irregular warfare is not restricted to Mountain; Baloch has prepared a lot that is committed and educated. They have writers, columnists and

propagandists to strengthen their cause. Baloch has enlarged the boundaries of this irregular warfare; they have dragged this conflict into the soft domain and continuously ousted government and law enforcement agencies.

Official channels are operated by outlawed terrorist organizations like BLA, BLF, BRAS, etc. They spread the word about every assault, portray the Baloch fighters as martyrs, and advocate for Balochistan's independence. Spokespeople and other high-profile members of the organization often take charge of these forums. Biographies of martyrs are often featured on these channels in an effort to recruit new members and spread the organization's message.

An examination of their pliable methods reveals the following about their structure:

Diligent members of the diaspora and newly established propaganda outlets such as ZBC, BNM, Republican news, Baloch Warna, The Baloch American Congress, The Balochistan Post, Baluch Sarmachar, etc., are vital to the success of the current struggle. By using current events, media trends, and missing person cases, they spread more Baloch misinformation. Most of their online accounts, channels, and websites are unmonitored by the government, giving them unrestricted access to private, virtual environments. These networks, along with the diaspora and some local zealots, use video footage of children, women, and elderly people to stoke youth excitement. Involving children and families in the insurgent movement's rallies and struggles is an attempt to spread the insurgent story to future generations. Methods like this are part of an effort to ensure the continuation of the movement into the future. Because of them, the Baloch insurgency has shifted into the cyber realm, with online forums and social media serving as battlegrounds. For missing people and in opposition to the Pakistani government, they generate trending topics on Twitter among local supporters. In an effort to put pressure on Pakistan, activists in Europe and the United States are organizing awareness campaigns by holding seminars and distributing posters and banners.

Local backers actively engage in online

trendsetting and propaganda in addition to attending rallies and dharnas in person. Youth and the next generation in Balochistan are now particularly vulnerable to the propaganda spread via social media. Primarily, they recruit students through a social media campaign and campus groups. The Baloch nation's fight for independence in Balochistan has been bolstered by the campaign's messaging at all levels. The Baloch insurgency has been successful in turning the tide of the war thanks to the softer tactics it has chosen.

There is no major issue with the armed insurgency, despite the large number of guerrilla strikes. Baloch rebels and nationalists rely on a supply chain of soft techniques. The use of diplomatic "soft power" is what has prolonged and exacerbated this conflict. Pakistan, a developing nation, has a hard time competing with gentle approaches. The Pakistani government cannot effectively resist the rebels' extensive use of cyberspace.

## Conclusion

We can draw the conclusion that the Baloch uprising will only serve to prolong the conflict, with no positive outcome in sight. The current scope of the nationalist movement, bolstered by insurgents and soft tactics, gives it the depth it needs to survive in the long run without bringing the system crashing down. Efforts by the state to resolve the conflict with the Baloch have been hampered by the use of nonviolent strategies. Both foes are battling to safeguard current objectives. If the state is going to succeed, it must use soft techniques to compete with the nationalists' soft methods. In addition to resolving pressing concerns like the whereabouts of missing people, the rule of law must be enforced in its purest form. People have suffered and been deprived unjustly as a result of this war. For the sake of Balochistan's future, it is time for the state and nationalist leaders to work together. The state has an obligation to ensure that no member of the population goes without basic necessities. For the sake of humanity and the betterment of development in the region, local authorities should also discourage nationalist and separatist initiatives.



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