

COUNTERING INSURGENCY IN BALUCHISTAN: THE ROLE OF CPEC, DEVELOPMENT-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND YOUTH INITIATIVES

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Abstract

Baluchistan, Pakistan's largest yet most strategically significant province, remains trapped in a cycle of insurgency, fueled by decades of political exclusion, economic marginalization, and unresolved ethnic grievances. Despite vast natural resources and its central role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the province has struggled to achieve peace. This study argues that a durable solution lies not in force alone, but in a comprehensive, people-centered counterinsurgency strategy that fuses development, infrastructure, and youth empowerment. Anchored in David Galula's counterinsurgency theory, which advocates an 80:20 ratio of non-kinetic to kinetic engagement. The research paper explores how legitimacy, public trust, and inclusive governance can replace military dominance as the foundations of peace. It critically examines how federal and provincial interventions—such as the South Baluchistan Development Package, CPEC projects, and youth-focused education and employment schemes—can address root causes of extremism when implemented transparently and equitably. The findings highlight a clear imperative: without socio-political inclusion, infrastructure and security gains will remain fragile. Moreover, peace in Baluchistan demands a paradigm shift from coercion to collaboration, where state-building is driven by justice, opportunity, and local ownership. Only then can the province transition from a conflict zone to a corridor of stability and shared prosperity.

INTRODUCTION

Despite its rich natural resources and strategic location, Balochistan has long been plagued by violent insurgency, driven by historical grievances, economic marginalization, and perceived political exclusion (Yousaf, 2023). Militant groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA) have capitalized on local discontent, targeting infrastructure projects and security forces, particularly in the context of Chinese investments through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2023).

While the state has traditionally relied on military force to curb separatist violence, it is increasingly evident that a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy must balance kinetic operations with developmental and civic engagement initiatives. This shift is reflected in Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022–2026, which prioritizes human security, economic equity, and inclusive development alongside traditional security responses (Government of Pakistan, 2022). In this context, CPEC emerges as a double-edged sword: a potential engine of economic transformation, but also a source of tension if

benefits are not equitably shared with local communities.

Crucially, Balochistan's youth demographic—over 60% of the population—is both vulnerable and vital. Without access to quality education, employment, and representation, young people remain susceptible to radicalization (PIPS, 2024). However, if empowered, they can become central agents of peace, development, and political integration.

This paper argues that a multi-dimensional approach—anchored in David Galula's counterinsurgency theory—offers the most viable pathway to long-term stability. By integrating CPEC investments, federal and provincial development projects, and youth empowerment initiatives, Pakistan can address the root causes of insurgency and build a peaceful, inclusive future for Balochistan.

DAVID GALULA'S COUNTERINSURGENCY FRAMEWORK

David Galula, a French military officer and theorist, is widely recognized for developing one of the most enduring frameworks in counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, particularly articulated in his seminal work *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964). Galula posited that insurgency is not

merely a military problem but a fundamentally political struggle. The true objective, he argued, is not controlling territory but winning the population's support, as the people—not the enemy—are the true center of gravity in any insurgency (Galula, 1964; Jones & Smith, 2017).

A cornerstone of Galula's approach is the Clear-Hold-Build strategy, a sequential model of military and civil engagement. The "Clear" phase involves removing insurgents through kinetic military operations. The "Hold" phase stabilizes the area by deploying security forces and administrative presence to maintain order. The final "Build" phase focuses on long-term political and economic integration—restoring essential services, rebuilding institutions, and re-engaging communities (U.S. Army, 2006; Fishman, 2015). Galula warned that even the most successful clearing operations would fail without corresponding investments in legitimacy and governance.

Galula famously argued for an 80/20 split between non-kinetic and kinetic measures. Only 20% of COIN operations, in his view, should be military in nature, while 80% must focus on political solutions, economic development, education, and institutional

reform (Nagl, 2005; Rabasa et al., 2010). This paradigm is especially relevant to Balochistan, where prolonged military operations have not delivered peace due to the neglect of development, social inclusion, and governance reform. His framework complements Pakistan's *National Security Policy 2022–2026*, which emphasizes economic and human security as foundational pillars of national resilience (Government of Pakistan, 2022).

Galula's emphasis on legitimacy has found strong empirical support in modern counterinsurgency studies. Berman, Shapiro, and Felter (2011), in their analysis of Iraq and Afghanistan, demonstrated that when governments provide reliable public services—such as justice, healthcare, and infrastructure—insurgent activity declines. This empirical relationship underscores Galula's claim that populations respond to protection and services, not force alone, highlighting the critical role of state credibility in COIN environments.

Expanding on the framework's operational vulnerabilities, Long (2016) argues that the "Hold" phase remains the most neglected and strategically sensitive aspect of COIN efforts. His research on U.S. and NATO interventions in Afghanistan shows that the failure to

adequately secure and govern cleared areas often leads to insurgent resurgence. Without trusted local security and sustained investment in public services, any tactical military success is quickly reversed—reinforcing Galula’s view that long-term peace depends on governance, not firepower.

The validity of Galula’s 80/20 principle is further confirmed by Johnston (2012), who analyzed the impact of kinetic-heavy operations in Iraq. His findings reveal that military dominance alone fails to achieve durable stability unless combined with efforts like employment generation, local reconciliation, and institutional outreach. In Balochistan, the repeated failure of force-only strategies to

address underlying grievances illustrates the enduring applicability of Galula’s vision.

Finally, Galula’s advocacy for contextualized, adaptive governance is reinforced by Arjona (2016), whose fieldwork in Colombia revealed that COIN campaigns succeeded only when aligned with local norms and traditional authority structures. She found that insurgent and state actors who respected community leadership and involved local stakeholders were more successful in maintaining long-term control. This insight is highly relevant to tribal and decentralized societies like Balochistan, where legitimacy must be negotiated, not imposed.

KINETIC VS. NON-KINETIC STRATEGY BREAKDOWN

Approach	Tools/Methods	Weight
Kinetic (Hard Power)	Military operations, Security patrols, IBOs,	20%
Non-Kinetic (Soft Power)	Development projects, Education, Good Governance, Political inclusion	80%

APPLICATION OF GALULA’S COUNTERINSURGENCY FRAMEWORK TO BALOCHISTAN’S CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

Galula’s framework provides an effective lens for analyzing counterinsurgency in Balochistan. Military operations, including Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, have had tactical success in

"clearing" areas (PIPS, 2023). However, limited follow-up in the "hold" and "build" phases—due to weak provincial institutions and lack of local trust—has allowed cycles of violence to continue. The South Balochistan Development Package, CPEC vocational training programs, and local governance reforms represent attempts to implement non-

kinetic strategies. Yet their impact remains limited by issues of implementation, transparency, and community inclusion (ICG, 2023; Khan, 2023). Incorporating Galula's model could help Pakistan design a more balanced, legitimacy-focused counterinsurgency strategy in Balochistan—one that pairs security with sustainable development and civic empowerment.

Scholars examining counterinsurgency success in tribal societies argue that external force without localized governance is insufficient. Staniland (2012) emphasizes that social organization and rebel-state linkages determine COIN success. In Balochistan, the disconnect between security forces and tribal networks undermines the “hold” phase. Galula's call for co-opting local institutions suggests Pakistan must strengthen its engagement with tribal leaders, youth councils, and district administrators. This mirrors successful COIN models in Indonesia and the Philippines, where community-aligned governance played a stabilizing role (Staniland, 2012).

Moreover, poor state legitimacy and service delivery continue to hinder the “build” phase.

Based on fieldwork in Pakistan, Shah (2014) notes that informal governance often fills the vacuum left by state neglect in conflict zones. In Balochistan, where health, education, and infrastructure are inadequate, insurgents exploit governance gaps to claim moral authority. Galula's emphasis on public legitimacy suggests the need for visible, people-centered service delivery, such as mobile health units, community education projects, and culturally rooted development programs (Shah, 2014). These would serve not only development objectives but also strategic goals of state consolidation.

Finally, effective COIN under Galula's theory requires adaptive civil-military coordination, something Pakistan has struggled to institutionalize in Balochistan. Galula's insights emphasize the importance of unified command, where development, security, and governance arms operate with shared objectives and local accountability. The establishment of integrated civil-military committees at the provincial and district level could streamline resource delivery and improve legitimacy.

COUNTERING EXTREMISM IN BALUCHISTAN: METHODS AND APPROACHES

1) NATURE AND ROOTS OF EXTREMISM

Extremism in Baluchistan is deeply rooted in a complex interplay of historical, political and economic grievances. Since 1947, Baloch nationalist sentiment has been shaped by the belief that the region has been exploited economically and denied political autonomy (Harrison, 1981; Siddiqi, 2020). This sense of alienation has manifested in multiple insurgencies over the decades, the most recent of which gained momentum in the early 2000s. Militant groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Republican Army (BRA), and Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) have carried out targeted attacks on state institutions, security forces, and non-Baloch civilians. These groups often frame their struggle in anti-colonial terms, seeking either greater autonomy or complete independence (ICG, 2023). In recent years, CPEC projects and Chinese nationals have become primary targets, viewed by separatists as symbols of external exploitation and demographic transformation (PIPS, 2023). The targeting of

Gwadar Port, highways, and construction workers reflects the militants' strategy to undermine state-led development and deter foreign investment.

2) EXISTING COUNTER-EXTREMISM METHODS

In response, the Pakistani state has adopted a multifaceted counter-extremism strategy combining kinetic and non-kinetic tools. The security forces conducted extensive intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in Balochistans, significantly disrupting militant networks (PIPS, 2023).

Additionally, the government has offered amnesty and rehabilitation programs for surrendering militants. Dozens of former fighters have laid down arms, with some receiving vocational training and small business grants to reintegrate into civilian life (Gul, 2023).

Pakistan has also enhanced border security, particularly with Iran, by fencing hundreds of kilometers to curb cross-border militant movement and smuggling routes (Dawn, 2023). Simultaneously, media campaigns and religious deradicalization efforts have been launched to counter extremist narratives. Government-backed scholars and clerics

promote moderate Islamic values, while civil society organizations conduct community outreach, particularly among vulnerable youth populations (Yousaf, 2023).

While these efforts have yielded tactical gains, the absence of consistent development, inclusive governance, and political reconciliation continues to fuel unrest. A long-term solution will require shifting from reactive military strategies to inclusive, legitimacy-based governance.

ROLE OF CPEC IN COUNTERING INSURGENCY

1) STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a cornerstone of Pakistan’s economic development strategy and a flagship project under China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). With an estimated investment of over \$62 billion, CPEC aims to connect western China to the Arabian Sea through a network

of roads, railways, energy pipelines, and industrial zones. At the heart of this corridor lies Balochistan, specifically Gwadar Port, envisioned as a regional trade and logistics hub (CPEC Authority, 2023).

Balochistan’s geographic location gives it unmatched strategic value. Gwadar provides China with its closest warm-water access and offers Pakistan economic diversification beyond its eastern trade routes. For Pakistan, integrating Balochistan into CPEC is not only an economic goal but also a counterinsurgency imperative. Enhanced connectivity, job creation, and infrastructure development can reduce the socioeconomic disparities fueling insurgency in the province (ICG, 2023).

2) COMPLETED AND ONGOING CPEC PROJECTS IN BALOCHISTAN

Despite persistent security challenges, several major CPEC projects have been completed or are under implementation in Balochistan:

TABLE 1: KEY COMPLETED AND ONGOING CPEC PROJECTS IN BALOCHISTAN

Project	Status	Impact
Gwadar Port & Free Zone (Phase I)	Operational	Increased cargo handling capacity; trade hub in the making
Gwadar East Bay Expressway	Completed (2022)	Connects port to Makran Coastal Highway; facilitates logistics
Gwadar International	Under	Enhances domestic and international

Airport	Construction	connectivity
Vocational Training Institute	Completed	Provides technical training to local youth in logistics and marine trades
Desalination and Health Facilities	Ongoing	Improve access to clean water and basic healthcare for Gwadar residents

The East Bay Expressway was inaugurated in 2022 and significantly reduces the logistical bottleneck for cargo movement from Gwadar. The Gwadar Free Zone (Phase I) has attracted foreign firms and created initial employment opportunities, though hiring of local labor remains limited (Ahmed, 2023).

Meanwhile, the Gwadar Vocational Training Institute, funded by Chinese grants, aims to equip Baloch youth with market-relevant skills—though outreach beyond Gwadar city is

still minimal. Similarly, desalination plants and a 100-bed hospital aim to address urgent water and healthcare needs (CPEC Authority, 2023).

3) FUTURE CPEC PROJECTS

CPEC’s second phase envisions large-scale industrial and urban development in Balochistan. These projects are expected to deepen economic integration and address regional disparities:

TABLE 2: PLANNED AND FUTURE CPEC PROJECTS IN BALOCHISTAN

Project	Status	Key Benefits
Gwadar Free Zone Phase II	In Progress	2,200 acres allocated for industrial growth; job creation potential
Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan	Approved	Urban planning, digital infrastructure, and housing development
300 MW Gwadar Coal Power Plant	Under Implementation	Reliable electricity supply for port and city
M-8 & Basima-Khuzdar Highway Links	Ongoing	Boost connectivity between Balochistan’s interior and national highway grid
Iran-Gwadar Rail Link (Proposed)	Feasibility Stage	Enhances regional trade with Central Asia and the Middle East

The Gwadar Free Zone Phase II, significantly larger than Phase I, is designed to house export-oriented industries and logistics hubs. The Smart City Master Plan aims to transform Gwadar into a planned, tech-enabled urban center. Moreover, the 300 MW power plant is crucial for energy self-sufficiency in Gwadar, which currently suffers from power shortages (Khan, 2023).

These projects—if executed transparently and inclusively—have the potential to reshape Balochistan’s economic landscape and reduce militant appeal. However, local skepticism remains high due to past experiences with unmet promises.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE AND INTEGRATION

Despite its challenges, CPEC also offers a transformative opportunity for Balochistan—if implemented inclusively and equitably. By improving physical infrastructure, energy access, and regional connectivity, CPEC has the potential to bridge Balochistan’s historic isolation from the rest of the country. It can also provide jobs, enhance local markets, and promote cross-border trade through Iran and Central Asia.

To fully realize this potential, several key shifts are necessary:

1. **Local inclusion in planning and oversight** — through parliamentary committees, civil society engagement, and local government leadership.
2. **Priority hiring of Baloch youth** in technical and administrative roles via quota systems and scholarship programs.
3. **Transparency and information-sharing** on CPEC budgets, contracts, and timelines to reduce misinformation and suspicion.
4. **Human development investments**—particularly in education, healthcare, and digital inclusion—to build long-term community resilience.

The UNDP (2023) emphasizes that development must be human-centered to be sustainable. If CPEC evolves beyond a top-down, extractive model into a participatory, rights-based approach, it can become a core pillar of peacebuilding in Balochistan—reducing the appeal of militancy and integrating the province into the national economy on more equal terms.

DEVELOPMENT-BASED

INTERVENTIONS BY FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

1) FEDERAL INITIATIVES

Over the past two decades, the Government of Pakistan has increasingly recognized that addressing the root causes of insurgency in Balochistan requires more than kinetic operations. Development-driven strategies, particularly from federal institutions, have aimed to close the province's socioeconomic gap with the rest of the country.

The Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan Package (AHBP), introduced in 2009, marked an early attempt at reconciliation through policy reforms and economic investment. Comprising 61 measures, the package promised greater provincial autonomy, enhanced representation in federal services, increased job quotas for Baloch youth, and expanded health and education facilities. Although symbolically significant, implementation was slow and uneven, leading to widespread criticism regarding its ineffectiveness (Ahmed & Baloch, 2016).

In 2020, the federal government launched a more comprehensive initiative—the South Balochistan Development Package (SBDP)—

with over Rs. 600 billion allocated for 199 projects in Makran, Gwadar, Kech, Awaran, Lasbela, and Khuzdar. The plan focused on improving water access through the construction of 16 dams, expanding educational infrastructure by building colleges and upgrading schools, and offering technical training to over 35,000 youth to prepare them for CPEC-related employment. The package also included road and energy infrastructure development, rural electrification, solarization of off-grid villages, and enhanced coastal tourism (Planning Commission, 2023). Despite these ambitious goals, ground-level implementation has been slow due to bureaucratic hurdles, limited provincial capacity, and political instability (Khan, 2023). Balochistan's share in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) has also seen gradual increases. In 2023–24, over Rs. 70 billion was allocated for road construction (such as the M-8 and N-85 highways), energy access, and expansion of social services, particularly in maternal healthcare, education, and digital inclusion (Finance Division, 2023). These federally driven projects are crucial for enhancing connectivity, delivering services to remote areas, and generating employment.

2) PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

The provincial government, while constrained by limited institutional and financial capacity, has initiated programs aimed at strengthening basic service delivery and supporting economic participation.

The Balochistan Education Sector Plan (BESP) (2013-2020), developed in collaboration with UNESCO, sought to improve access to education, reduce dropout rates, and enhance teacher training. The plan led to the training of thousands of teachers and rehabilitation of more than 1,200 schools, particularly in underdeveloped districts. Despite these efforts, the province continues to have the lowest literacy rate in Pakistan, especially among girls, reflecting structural barriers that go beyond physical infrastructure (UNESCO, 2021).

In healthcare, the provincial government has prioritized expanding Basic Health Units (BHUs) and deploying mobile health units in remote and conflict-affected areas. New telemedicine centers in Lasbela and Turbat aim to provide rural populations with remote consultations, while targeted immunization campaigns have helped mitigate health disparities in districts such as Panjgur and

Washuk (Balochistan Health Department, 2023). Nonetheless, the sector faces chronic challenges, including doctor shortages, lack of equipment, and poor infrastructure maintenance.

To stimulate industrial development, the province has partnered with federal agencies to develop Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Lasbela and Gwadar. These zones focus on seafood processing, mineral extraction, logistics, and light manufacturing. Although the potential for employment and export growth is significant, delays in utility provision, land disputes, and regulatory red tape have hindered progress (BOI, 2023).

3) LINK TO COUNTERINSURGENCY

Development-based interventions are not isolated policy measures; they are part of a broader non-kinetic strategy aimed at undermining the root causes of insurgency. In regions like Balochistan, where communities have long felt economically exploited and politically marginalized, the expansion of services, infrastructure, and employment is essential for restoring public trust.

According to David Galula's counterinsurgency framework, sustainable peace is achieved not through force alone, but

by establishing the legitimacy of the state and integrating the population into political and economic systems (Galula, 1964). In Balochistan, new highways reduce isolation and allow faster access for emergency and development services. Educational reforms counter extremist recruitment by offering alternative pathways for young people. Health facilities reduce dependency on external aid and build local resilience.

To maximize impact, development must be paired with institutional reform and local ownership. Programs should involve tribal elders, elected representatives, and youth in the design and implementation process. Fiscal transfers from the center should be matched with improved provincial capacity to execute and monitor development projects. Only through such integrative, inclusive, and sustained efforts can development become a meaningful tool of counterinsurgency in Balochistan.

YOUTH INITIATIVES AND SOFT POWER APPROACHES

1) YOUTH DEMOGRAPHIC AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Youth are both a strategic opportunity and a potential risk in conflict-affected regions like

Balochistan. With over 60% of the province's population under the age of 30, youth represent a demographic majority that can either fuel unrest or drive peacebuilding—depending on how they are engaged (UNDP, 2023). Historically, the governments have failed to offer meaningful pathways for political inclusion, skill development, or employment. This has made young Baloch individuals vulnerable to recruitment by militant groups, especially in southern districts where state presence remains limited (PIPS, 2023).

Lack of representation in local government, absence from national discourse, and limited access to education and jobs reinforce a narrative of exclusion. Insurgent groups exploit this disconnect, offering an alternative identity based on nationalism and resistance. However, if equipped with education, voice, and economic opportunity, Baloch youth can play a transformative role in reshaping their province.

2) EDUCATION ACCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION

In recent years, both federal and provincial governments have invested in improving educational infrastructure across Balochistan,

though gaps remain significant. One of the most symbolic initiatives is the establishment of the University of Gwadar in 2021. Located in the heart of the CPEC corridor, the university aims to provide quality higher education in disciplines aligned with the region's development needs, such as port management, marine sciences, and trade logistics (HEC, 2023).

The Balochistan University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Khuzdar, has also seen upgrades in labs, faculty, and student enrollment, funded through PSDP allocations. Under the South Balochistan Development Package, 16 new colleges and 49 schools are under construction, particularly in underserved districts like Kech, Awaran, and Panjgur (Planning Commission, 2023). Despite these efforts, enrollment rates remain low, especially among girls. Rural schools often lack qualified teachers, infrastructure, and transportation.

To address these issues, several pilot programs have introduced mobile learning units and digital learning labs, enabling students in remote areas to access online education. Partnerships between the provincial government, NGOs, and donor agencies have

helped launch tele-education platforms, particularly in conflict zones, where access to brick-and-mortar schools remains disrupted by security concerns (UNESCO, 2021).

3) SCHOLARSHIPS AND TRAINING

In parallel with infrastructure, efforts to promote educational inclusion also focus on scholarships and skills training. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has designated reserved seats and scholarship quotas for Balochistan students at universities across Pakistan. Programs like the Pak-USAID Merit and Needs-Based Scholarship and Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Program have helped thousands of Baloch students attend universities they could not otherwise afford (HEC, 2023).

At the international level, China has offered fully funded scholarships to students from Gwadar and surrounding districts, enabling them to study in fields aligned with CPEC needs, including engineering, logistics, and renewable energy (Chinese Embassy, 2023). These opportunities not only upskill the local youth but also contribute to soft diplomacy and people-to-people ties between Pakistan and China.

Most notably, in 2024, the Chief Minister (CM) Balochistan PhD Scholarship Program was launched, offering over 385 fully funded scholarships for Baloch students to pursue doctoral studies at top 200 QS-ranked international universities. The program, overseen by the Planning and Development Department in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission, aims to develop advanced academic capacity within the province, particularly in priority fields such as water management, public health, engineering, and social policy. This initiative reflects a strategic shift toward investing in long-term human capital and aligns with Galula's non-kinetic approach by enhancing education as a tool of stabilization and empowerment (Government of Balochistan, 2024).

In vocational training, institutions such as NAVTTC (National Vocational and Technical Training Commission) have expanded operations in Balochistan. CPEC-linked vocational centers in Gwadar and Khuzdar offer training in port operations, electrical work, carpentry, IT, and marine services. Between 2020 and 2023, more than 20,000 Baloch youth received vocational certifications,

with varying degrees of job placement success (NAVTTC, 2023).

4) YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Unemployment remains a critical issue in Balochistan, where formal private sector activity is limited and most young people work in informal labor or agriculture. In response, the federal government has introduced programs like the Kamyab Jawan Program, which provides low-interest loans and entrepreneurship grants to youth-led startups. In Balochistan, the program has supported ventures in IT, agriculture, transportation, and food services, particularly in Quetta, Turbat, and Lasbela (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023).

CPEC has opened up some employment avenues, particularly in Gwadar Free Zone, where job quotas have been reserved for locals. However, implementation has been inconsistent. Many youth complain that jobs still go to skilled laborers from other provinces, leaving locals with only low-paying, unskilled roles (Ahmed, 2023). To address this, Gwadar Port Authority has begun a Local Hiring Policy in coordination with Chinese contractors, though its effectiveness remains to be independently evaluated.

Government and donor-funded startup incubators have also been launched in Quetta and Khuzdar. These centers provide young entrepreneurs with training, mentorship, and seed funding. However, connectivity issues, lack of access to finance, and weak business ecosystems limit broader scale-up potential.

5) CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Perhaps the most important yet underdeveloped area of youth policy in Balochistan is civic engagement. Youth remain largely excluded from political processes and peacebuilding forums. To counter this, several NGOs—such as the Youth Development Foundation and SCSPEB—have initiated peacebuilding workshops, inter-community dialogues, and leadership training programs. These efforts aim to empower youth as peace ambassadors, particularly in districts affected by sectarian and ethnic violence (YDF, 2023).

Cultural programs and sports festivals have also emerged as essential tools for social cohesion and counter-radicalization. Events like the Gwadar Cricket League, Makran Youth Festival, and the newly announced Balochistan Football League, began on 15 July 2025, reflect growing state commitment to

youth-led, inter-ethnic engagement. The Football League—organized by the Sports Department and the Youth Affairs Directorate—will feature teams from across 18 districts and is projected to reach over 10,000 participants and spectators (Government of Balochistan, 2024). These events offer alternatives to violent ideologies by creating shared spaces for identity, pride, and cooperation.

On the digital front, the Digital Counter-Narrative Training initiative launched by local universities and civil society groups trains youth to identify online extremist content, develop inclusive messaging, and act as peer educators. This is especially important given that many young people are first exposed to radical ideologies through social media platforms (PIPS, 2023). These digital efforts are backed by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and supported by Balochistan's IT Department.

Recognizing the need for direct economic empowerment, the provincial government launched the Balochistan Youth Business Loan Scheme in 2023. Managed by the Industries and Commerce Department, the scheme offers interest-free loans up to Rs. 500,000 to young

entrepreneurs across all 34 districts. Over 3,000 youth have already benefited from this initiative, with start-ups ranging from livestock farming and fisheries to IT services and vocational training institutes (Industries Dept. Balochistan, 2024). This not only boosts economic participation but also anchors youth within the legal economy—an essential part of Galula’s non-kinetic counterinsurgency framework.

Additionally, provincial programs have begun integrating youth into local government bodies and advisory councils. Institutions like the Balochistan Youth Assembly and District Youth Committees are platforms where young voices contribute to development planning, budget consultations, and governance reform. Though still nascent, these efforts help institutionalize youth participation, which is essential for long-term peacebuilding.

The youth of Balochistan are at a pivotal crossroads. On one hand, the combination of political exclusion, limited economic opportunity, and insecurity places them at risk of radicalization. On the other hand, targeted investments in education, employment, civic engagement, and leadership can turn youth into agents of peace, reform, and development.

The success of CPEC and broader state-building efforts in Balochistan hinges not just on infrastructure—but on how effectively youth are empowered, heard, and included in the province’s future.

CONCLUSION

The insurgency in Balochistan is rooted in a complex web of historical, political, and socioeconomic grievances. As this paper has argued, resolving the conflict requires more than military action—it demands a multi-dimensional strategy that integrates development, governance, and youth engagement. David Galula’s counterinsurgency framework, which emphasizes an 80:20 balance between non-kinetic and kinetic measures, provides a valuable lens through which to understand the long-term solution: legitimacy, not just control, is the cornerstone of peace.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), if managed inclusively, has the potential to act as a peace catalyst by addressing long-standing economic deprivation. However, without equitable benefit-sharing, local hiring, and transparent governance, CPEC risks exacerbating existing tensions. Federal and provincial development initiatives,

such as the South Balochistan Development Package and education reforms, show promise—but their success hinges on effective implementation and community ownership. Most crucially, the empowerment of Balochistan's youth through education, employment, and civic participation must remain central to any peace strategy. Youth engagement is not merely a development goal; it is a strategic imperative in countering extremism and building durable stability. Sustainable peace in Balochistan will only be achieved through a model that balances security with inclusion, opportunity, and shared prosperity.

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