

Rising Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan: Imperatives of a Comprehensive National Security Paradigm

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Abstract

Ethnonationalist and religious factors had been part of security challenges to Pakistan after independence with varying magnitude in different phases. Current ethnic nationalist forces in Pakistan blame the state for political and economic deprivation, using religious and ethnic sentiments to strengthen their struggle. This research aims to investigate the ethno-nationalist rebellions essentially in northern and south-western parts of Pakistan, their triggering grounds, and the consequences of these movements for the country's national security. Using a qualitative methodology, the study analyses historical and contemporary occurrences to identify impacts and responses to the Pashtun and Baloch ethno-nationalist movements. The theoretical framework encompassing social contract theory, constructivism, and neorealism offers insights into state-citizen contracts, identity issues, and state strategic reactions. While analysing the governance weaknesses and less successful national security policy, consequent threats to national security and various strands of revamped national security policy have been suggested to not only curb the sub-nationalist trends but also to ensure an inclusive political process as part of national reconciliation for the settlement of disputes.

Keywords: Ethno-Nationalism, Sub-Nationalism, Counterterrorism, National Security, Pakistan.

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Introduction

Pakistan came into existence under a common religious identity; the different regions of this country also maintain their distinct ethnic and cultural identities. Due to internal fissures, the ethno-nationalist movements flourished and shaped Pakistan's political, social and security outlook, posing constant threats to national integration. Initially, most of the uprisings were impelled by the demand for provincial autonomy; however, they occasionally converted to full-scale insurgences, threatening solidarity and national unification. Historical grievances, economic disparities, and political marginalisation, mostly in the three provinces of Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), acted as precursors for ethno-nationalist movements in these provinces. Perceived injustices, economic deprivation, identity politics, unequal resource distribution, weak state responses in addressing the problems and centralised policies under federalism were exploited by the handlers of these movements. While the state has employed both coercive and reconciliatory strategies, unrest continues, necessitating an understanding of the nuances of the issue. Additionally, external influences and cross-border linkages often exacerbate the ethno-nationalist activism, making it not just an internal security issue but also a regional security concern.

This study while covering mainly ethno-nationalist Pashtun and Baloch movements in Balochistan and KPK provinces, employs multiple theories to analyse these rebellions. Social contract theory, which is a critical component of this theoretical framework, points out that the states' failure to uphold the pact between the government and inhabitants to anti-state uprisings. Meanwhile, the theory of constructivism, which highlights the role of identity, ideas, and cultural values, emphasises conceptions of marginalisation shape political deeds of the state towards the disregarded communities having shared identities. Moreover, neorealism explains how the state reacts to these threats—whether through maximising its military power or through increasing its security measures—depending on the nature of the threats. Despite extensive literature on ethno-nationalist movements in Pakistan, the element of ethno-nationalist tendencies threatening national unity attracted little attention, with negligible focus on their direct implications for national security.

Most of the accessible studies focus on individual movements rather than an overarching security perspective. This research fills that gap by assessing ethno-nationalist uprisings within a broader security framework, offering policy recommendations for conflict resolution and national integration. By analysing the ethno-nationalism and national security under the aforementioned theoretical framework, this research examines the major aspects, including internal and external factors related to the ethno-nationalist movements and their impact on national security. The study also suggests some remedial measures for addressing the issue. A literature review entailing critical study offers the broader overview of accessible knowledge, identifying current key debates and unveiling gaps in existing academic work on the topic. The following literature review on ethno-nationalist movements and Pakistan's national security helps to establish an academic base, align the research questions, and refine the methodology.

Literature Review

Nationalist ideology shapes conceptions of collective identity, national spirit, citizenship, and ethnicity, which in turn impacts the social and political structures of a society. Some Western scholars scrutinise the normative aspects of nationalism as an ideology, considering its power to foster unity, solidarity, and social cohesion or concomitantly exacerbate conflict, differences, divisions, and exclusion based on ethnic, cultural, or nationalistic distinctions. In contrast, “the social scientists contend that ethno-nationalism represents a distinct form of nationalism characterised by its emphasis on narrowly defined cultural, linguistic, ethno-religious, and other ties within the composition of a nation (Vujičić, 2023). Furthermore, nationalism has been explained by various scholars according to the prevalent socio-political environment, whether some national entity was struggling against imperialist powers or they were resisting separation from their homeland due to perceived political marginalisation and economic deprivation. Ethno-cultural bondage is a fundamental attribute of communities aiming to break the clutches of foreign occupation or seeking their political rights from a dominant ethno-cultural group. “ Nationalism has been seen as the state of mind of human beings—a manifestation of certain ideological goals that they wish to realise through united efforts. Nationalism is believed to be strongly rooted in people's thoughts and behaviours (Upreti, 2006).

The tussle between ethnic groups leads to civil war, and the conflict threatens the national unity of the state. In some cases, states lose their identity and fragment into different ethnic enclaves. For instance, consider the civil war and subsequent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Zdeb, 2019). Scholars had also been dilating upon populism and populist sentiment of the far right, and the outcomes conflate three phenomena – populism, ethnonationalism and authoritarianism. All three are meant to thrive on nationalism, and far-right leaders use such emotions for their political agenda (Bonikowski, 2017). The multi-ethnic societies are vulnerable to ethnic frictions and resentment among various entities. While drawing inferences from the existing literature and scholarly debate, it can be summarised that violence is the main force to either change the ethnic balance through ethnic cleansing or absorb the weaker side into folds of majority groups. Therefore, this sensitive issue merits serious consideration by states and especially Pakistan, which is facing terrorism by ethnic groups combining their ethnic identity with nationalism and religion particularly in Balochistan and KPK. Respect for ethnic diversity and inclusive policies are likely to yield positive results during the process of national reconciliation (Subotic, 2018). South Asian political scholar Bishwa Chandra Upreti describes nationalism in South Asia as primarily sub-nationalism or secessionism (Upreti, 2006).

According to American political scientist Walker Connor, there are also instances wherein clandestine apparatus is utilised to silence agitation and pressure leaders to submit to the autocracy (Connor, 1994). Connor further alluded those nations have been there for centuries; it is only the idea which sparks a movement by a common and homogeneous group. To quote Connor on self-consciousness, “self-consciousness of

nations and the nation as 'idea' is an intuitive feeling of a common bond uniting all of its members and creating a chasm between its members and all others" (Connor, 1994). About Pakistani nationalism, a Malaysian author, Abdullah Al-Ahsan, referred to Iqbal's ideology of a Muslim state in South Asia as arguing, "One must note here a unique characteristic of Iqbal's view of nationalism, as Iqbal's perception of nationalism was humanitarian and universal, which recognised natural divisions within the human family" (AL-AHSAN, 2018).

However, a section of literature calls ethno-nationalism a constant problem in Pakistan, suggesting to authorities to recognise this fact and start social and political reconciliation (Ullah, 2023). The available literature has comprehensively covered the possible motives behind ethnicity-driven violence and lack of governance due to inequitable economic progress and corruption. However, the necessity of reviewing the prevalent national security paradigm has been given scant attention. This research aims at reviewing the existing model of national security and proffering a comprehensive national security paradigm so that such tendencies of violence are addressed with political dialogue and economic integration of federating units. While previous studies have provided general information about ethno-nationalism and highlighted its historical and political aspects in Pakistan. There is a significant lack of understanding about how these movements relate to today's ethno-nationalist trends and their threat to national security, especially considering the changing regional politics that fuel these conflicts. So, this study generates research questions on historical roots, causes of current ethno-nationalist movements, their impact on national security and states' responses in order to fill the aforesaid gap in the current literature.

Theoretical Framework

Because studying the complicated social, political, and economic issues requires a deeper understanding, various theories can examine the complex topics of ethno-nationalism and Pakistan's national security. Thus, a theoretical framework encompassing manifold theories has been applied in this research. Social Contract Theory is a rational approach that covers the roots and validity of political authority and the connection between people and the state. About the state of nature and social contract, Thomas Hobbes argues that individuals in the state of nature, characterised by disorder and uncertainty, willingly surrender their liberties to a sovereign authority in exchange for security and law and order (Schochet, 1967). This assumption of a social contract illustrates how the act of individuals surrendering their freedoms is essential to institute a stable political system and avert prevailing disorder. Meanwhile, John Locke judged that the state of nature was further collaborative and peaceful, but individuals accepted the government to safeguard their natural rights to life, freedom and possessions (Simmons, 1989). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, underscored that the social contract should manifest the "general will" to guarantee liberty and equality for everyone (Bachofen, 2015). Rousseau's state of nature requires the formation of a social contract based on the common desire, representing the collective safeguard instead of individual interests.

Pakistan's diverse ethnic composition has frequently prompted calls for increased self-sufficiency among authorities, equitable distribution of resources, and recognition of cultural identity, thereby highlighting a struggle for reevaluation of the current social structure. For instance, the Baloch ethno-nationalist uprising signals a noticeable fracture of the social order, and the state authorities are blamed for failing to protect the political, human, and economic securities of the Balochis. The ethno-nationalist groups in Balochistan and KPK commonly assert that when the state does not perform its duties under the social contract, it causes circumstances such as disputes, unrest and even separatist movements. The social contract theory, which emphasises ensuring equal social rights and opportunities for development for different communities in a state, reflects less implementation of the social contract in KPK and Balochistan, and therefore some ethno-national groups in these provinces challenge the legitimacy of the existing political order in the country. As adverse actors push the rebellious acts, uprisings, and manipulation in the two provinces, such conditions carry immediate consequences for various aspects of national security.

The theory of constructivism articulated by Alexander Wendt, which highlights the importance of social factors such as collective ideas, norms, shared knowledge, culture and language, etc., points out the reality of socially constructed international relations rather than those given by human nature (Spindler, 2013). Wendt argues that the structures of human association are not inherently material but are socially constructed through interactions and mutual understandings. Constructivism helps explain how, in the context of ethno-nationalism, particularly the Pashtun and Baloch movements in Pakistan, ethnic identities and narratives are not fixed but are shaped by historical, cultural, and political processes. To address issues of Pashtun and Baloch ethno-nationalisms through a constructivist lens, Pakistan's state is required to initiate broader negotiations, identify chronic grievances, and redesign the national security paradigm to foster a multicultural identity that accommodates ethnic diversity under the centric frame of state nationalism. Meanwhile, neorealism (offensive/defensive) is also an equally important theory while studying ethno-nationalism and the action of the state based on the national security strategy constraints. The offensive realism communicated by John Mearsheimer suggests that states inherently seek to maximise their power and dominance to ensure their survival in an anarchic international system. "The position, held by offensive realism, insists that states should assume the worst over others' intentions, thus essentially eliminating the uncertainty about others' intentions" (Tang, 2008).

In the context of Pakistan, this perspective might explain the state's centralised and often coercive approach to managing violent ethno-nationalists, particularly separatist movements, viewing them as threats to national unity and security. The offensive realism would justify Pakistan's strict actions against the violence in KPK and Balochistan as a necessary strategy to maintain state survival by preemptively neutralising security threats allegedly fuelled by external actors. Defensive realism, associated with Kenneth Waltz, argues that states prioritise maintaining their security and status quo rather than aggressively pursuing power. As defensive realism holds that the international system provides incentives for expansion only under certain conditions,

such as when the anarchy provokes a state to use all means available to increase its security (Taliaferro, 2000). From this lens, Pakistan's efforts to balance regional autonomy with central authority could be seen as a strategy to prevent internal fragmentation while avoiding excessive coercion that might provoke further resistance. We can attribute the interference of extra-regional forces in Pakistan's internal matters to international structures under neorealism.

This study employs historical analysis, case study evaluation, and documentary analysis of qualitative research to analyse Pashtun and Baloch ethno-nationalist uprisings in Pakistan and their implications for national security strategy. The historical method involves analysing past events and historical perspectives to understand ethnonationalism in KPK and Balochistan, its causes, and its effects on national security. The case study evaluation concerns a reasonable conclusion of two cases of Pashtoon and Baloch ethno-nationalism in KPK and Balochistan and their implications for national security. As for the documentary analysis, this method has been employed to assess government policies, research reports, academic literature (books and journal articles), and media sources on ethno-nationalism and national security. By looking at important ethno-nationalist movements like the Baloch insurgency and Pashtun activism, the study answers the research question and finds the main reasons for these movements and how they affect national security, government actions, and security issues.

Background of Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan

As for ethno-nationalism in South Asia and particularly in Pakistan, ethno-nationalism and religion seem to have been mixed for politico-economic power struggles in this part of the Asian continent. The Resolution of March 1940 eventually paved the way for the formation of Pakistan under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in August 1947 (Moore, 1983). The case of Pakistan, besides religion, it was one of the important components of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father's political narrative for public mobilisation that Islam is a code of life for a Muslim which regulates his life and his conduct (Hayat, 2001). After the early death of Mr Jinnah, Pakistan was ruled by civilian and military bureaucracies for a long time under an ad-hoc constitutional arrangement. The first constitution of Pakistan was crafted in 1956, followed by successive military rule holding the constitution in abeyance, which fuelled resentment among various ethno-nationalist entities of Pakistan. The cumulative impact of perceived constitutional injustices was the debacle of East Pakistan when the largest ethno-nationalist group of that part of the country decided to secede in 1971 due to alleged political deprivations and economic disparities – more of a constitutional framework problem (Fazal, 1999). Much before unrest in East Pakistan (current Bangladesh) due to the decline of recognition of the Bangla language, some of the areas in the rest of Pakistan, such as the former FATA region and Baloch-dominated districts of Balochistan province, also witnessed a law and order situation in the early 1950s, and the reasons for this chaos were constitutional difficulties.

The state of Pakistan has been grappling with a difficult situation of law and order and fragmented social fabric in Balochistan wherein other ethnic groups are

systematically targeted and killed. According to the literature, “the current conflict in Balochistan, the bloodiest since the 1970s, has broken a long period of relative peace between Baloch nationalists and the federal government” (Kupecz, 2012). The situation on the ground dictates that the resistance in the province has entered into a decisive phase of insurgency in which not only law enforcement agencies are facing the brunt, but non-Baloch ethnic groups are also being targeted to foment hatred among various communities, at the cost of respect for diversity, supposedly a strength of the Pakistani societal makeup. The debate of the state failing to deliver in terms of governance, resources and human development or anti-Pakistan forces interfering to destabilise the state of Pakistan notwithstanding, the urgency of tackling the current turmoil in Balochistan and parts of KPK cannot be overemphasised.

Due to the Afghan jihad (1970s/1980s), the bastion of terror in the former FATA region of Pakistan remained active till 9/11, 2001. After 9/11, particularly post the US invasion of Afghanistan, various terrorist groups, while using Pakistani border areas, violently reacted to the American-led foreign military aggression in Afghanistan, and the violence continues unabated. TTP, which is one of the remnants of terrorist groups that use the card of Pashtun nationalism along with religion, found safe havens in Afghanistan (Mercier, Silve, & Tremblay-Augur, 2023). Pakistan, as a state confronted with the worst terrorism and apathy of the Afghan regime, has been struggling to find a negotiated settlement of the dispute. Different ethnic Pashtun radical groups were unified under the headship of now-deceased militant Baitullah Mehsud in 2007, and this terrorist organisation used religion as a tool in order to obtain support from religious elements of the tribal areas of Pakistan (Congressional Research Service, 2023). On the other hand, the Baloch movement is a violent ethno-nationalist movement against Pakistan and generally seeks to attain political autonomy in Balochistan (Kareemi, 2018). Military-dominated national security policy and increased military footprints in violence-stricken provinces are, though, resented by the locals, yet, given the foreign interference and capacity deficits of civilian law enforcement agencies, military presence becomes inescapable.

Specific Factors Nurturing Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan

This section examined, various key factors involved in the ethno-nationalism of Baloch and Pashtun communities in Pakistan. The Baloch sub-nationalist groups resist because of misunderstandings from the past, military actions taken after attacks on the government and security forces, and lack of political and economic rights. On the other hand, Pashtun ethno-nationalism is influenced by historical ties to the Pashtun homeland and accusations of injustices related to political order, military operations, dislocation, and prejudice. The issue of cultural identity is a common issue in both the Baloch and Pashtun movements, which are fuelled by a sense of hostility from the federal government, perceived disparity in resource supply, and a wish for larger political shares and autonomy. The specific factors fostering a sense of deprivation and alienation discussed in this part of the article are as under:

➤ **Ethno-Nationalist and Religious Sentiments**

Ethno-nationalism can be employed for the mobilisation of common popular sentiment to pressure the opposing parties for political advantage, either as part of legitimate political struggle or in a conflict among various ethnic entities and the powerful one asserting to retain its influence (Gilbert, 2013). Encouraged by the two-nation theory, Pashtuns, Balochs, Sindhis and the Urdu-speaking population (muhajirs) started pursuing their cause for greater influence in national politics and economic benefits. The demands of ethno-nationalist movements, particularly in Balochistan, have been fluctuating between autonomy and independence (Khan R. , 2022). The typical ethno-national entity, like the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), reinforces the TTP by becoming its political mouthpiece and airing an anti-state narrative with a view to weaken the state and indirectly strengthen the TTP's hold in former FATA districts. TTP and ethno-nationalist entities support the Baloch sub-nationalists for the common cause of weakening/demoralising security forces conducting counterterrorism operations and seeking unconstitutional concessions.

➤ **Weak National Institutions and Poor Governance**

The provincial governments did little to strengthen the capacity of provincial police; they took refuge under military operations. Terrorist entities, disguised as nationalist movements, are exploiting this vacuum. According to a scholarly article, the weaknesses of civilian institutions have been one of the causes of the resurrection of terrorism in Pakistan in the post-2019 era (Shah & Mahmood, 2022). The absence of grassroots democratic institutions which promote awareness about national unity and encourage unity in diversity is also a reason for the rise of ethno-nationalist sentiment against the state. These estranged groups started to disregard a social contract meant to cement the bond between the state and the citizen. According to the literature, weak governance and limited access to justice have been major contributing factors to terrorism and extremism (Javed, Elahi, & Nawab, 2023). The systematic terrorism by TTP, using Pashtun ethnic affinity, and targeted attacks by Baloch sub nationalist groups are cases in point.

➤ **Reactive Counterterrorism Strategies**

The challenges erupted due to the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan and post-9/11 U.S. attacks on the country, forcing Pakistan to review its foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy in fluid situations. Particularly, in post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Afghan Taliban indifference towards Pakistan's security and adoption of ill-conceived reconciliation policy with TTP in 2022 by Islamabad pose a rare challenge to the country's counterterrorism strategy (Makki & Akash, 2021). Similarly, in this situation, all military operations in Balochistan failed to achieve sustainable political objectives.

➤ **Misguided Ethno-Nationalism and Foreign Interference**

The nationalist tendencies in Pakistan had been oscillating between legitimate demands of political rights and economic resource sharing in Balochistan. However, since the early 2000s, the confrontation has transformed itself into an insurgency-like situation, defeating the purpose of positive nationalist movements. In KPK, TTP is violating state sovereignty by inflicting unacceptable losses on security forces and the civilian population. It is pure terrorism for ulterior motives, and the state needs to tackle it on war footing. The foreign support, either by Indian intelligence agencies or the Afghan Taliban regime, is complicating Pakistan's counterterrorism campaign. Pakistan claims that the "Indian spying network is involved in promoting terrorist activities in Pakistan, which aim to destabilise Pakistan and label it as a failed state." (Khetran, 2017)

➤ **Foreign Investment in Economic Initiative**

After the launching of the Chinese strategic economic initiative – the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – in 2015, some tribal and estranged entities started to exploit states' vulnerabilities. Given the significance of investment for Pakistan's economic development and China's strategic connectivity, Beijing expressed concerns over the current waves of terrorism in Pakistan (Ziwem, 2025). Baloch subnationalists are impeding CPEC by blaming the Government of Pakistan for exploiting their natural resources at the cost of local development, which is far from reality. TTP has also been involved in anti-Chinese terrorist activities in different areas of Pakistan (Ahmad O. , 2024).

➤ **Turbulent Afghanistan and Fallouts**

Afghanistan had always been a source of destabilisation for Pakistan, from inception to recent times. The instability was cultivated either through the fuelling of ethno-national sentiment or with the presence of extra-regional forces in the 1980s and 2000s. Except for a short hiatus in the 1970s, Pakistan remained under constant threat from Afghanistan. Since the installation of the current Afghan Taliban regime, the TTP is being supported and protected, which is attacking Pakistani security forces and civilians with impunity. Unless the interim Afghan regime realises its responsibility, the unrest in the region is likely to persist (Shah, Mahmood, & Kamran, 2024).

Major Findings

This study examines how ethnonationalism in Pakistan, particularly among the Baloch and Pashtun radical movements, is posing significant challenges to national security. Accordingly, this evaluation offers the following major findings:

➤ **Military Security Dominating Security Policy**

The rationale and national security compulsions to keep the military in the lead merit explanation by the political leadership along with a comprehensive action plan to bolster the capacity of police and civilian law enforcement agencies. Another important element is soft policy, as the scholars emphasise Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy

beyond the hard military actions to counter violent extremism while recognising and giving precedence to soft measures too (Muhammad Makki, 2020).

➤ **Neglected Ideational Domain**

The constructed or deconstructed narrative being promoted through social media is highly damaging not only to the national security of the country but also to the prestige of the armed forces of Pakistan. The multiple actors for financial gains and political mileage are out in the field without realising the damage to national security and unity are wittingly or unwittingly mutually supporting each other.

➤ **Weak Democratic Institutions**

Leadership, national institutions, and governance play crucial roles in the development of any country. It is unfortunate that Pakistan lacks institutions of dignity that can sustain and strengthen the democratic process. Meritocracy, a constructive legal framework and an impartial/empowered election commission are critical to revive the democratic institutions in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2015).

➤ **Economic Fragility**

The fragile state of foreign exchange reserves, high commodity prices, spiralling unemployment and a decline in quality of life of the middle class to lower middle class are indicators of deepening economic crises. Pakistan's stability increasingly depends on the outcome of an ever-worsening economic crisis, which is also linked to violence and terrorism (Rana, 2023). The political infighting with ad-hoc economic recovery initiatives is further spoiling the prospects of economic recovery. Pakistan lacks innovative initiatives to dilute the impression of terror bastion and attract foreign investment, a dire need of the fledgling economy of the country. Terrorism or violent activities committed by ethno-nationalists have significantly influenced Pakistan's foreign policy, with oft-repeated ill-founded allegations of supporting terrorism despite being a victim of terrorism itself (Haqqani, 2023).

➤ **Internal Polarization**

The division on various accounts (political, ethnic and sectarian) is deepening, and the worsening economic conditions are further compounding the problem. Political instability and credible elections are the solution. However, without a meaningful prior minimum national agenda to forge national unity, any attempt to bridge the gap would be a futile exercise (Davies, 2023).

➤ **Neglected Human Security**

Undoubtedly, human security is critical if any society wishes to prosper by investing in human resources and ensuring the provision of basic necessities. Violence and exploitation of opponents on any account is a blatant violation of human rights. Terrorist and violent activism in Pakistan directly challenges human security by disrupting human development programmes (Alsawalqa, 2021).

Key Recommendations

The recommendations section outlines practical strategies to tackle the challenges of ethnonationalism in Pakistan and its impact on national security:

➤ **A Revamped National Security Policy**

An all-encompassing national security policy should be crafted by taking all stakeholders on board so that criticism of military-dominated security policy is addressed for much-desired national consensus. Pakistan's genuine security concerns cannot be condoned; however, its current national security policy (of 2022-2026) needs an objective review and pillars like human security, economic security, and military security, etcetera, should be revisited with adequate resource allocation and political emphasis.

➤ **All-Encompassing National Counterterrorism Strategy**

The National Action Plan 2015 should be further refined and improved for hard/soft i.e. counterterrorism and antiterrorism measures. Correct interpretation of religious obligations, interfaith harmony and socio-economic development in terrorism-stricken regions with short, medium and long-term implementation plans should be prepared by NACTA under the guidance of the Ministry of Interior with input from all stakeholders, including the military.

➤ **Constructive National Dialogue**

A genuine, impartial and constructive national dialogue, rising above all personal or party/institutional interests, is the most appropriate solution to steer the country out of the current crisis situation. The political leaders should agree on a minimum agenda of mutual respect and co-existence with resolve to restore national pride and unity. The identified politico-economic irritants or disparities should be rectified through an appropriate constitutional framework. The ideologically (mis)guided or political ideologues are exploiting the void and polluting the minds of youth and common Pakistanis alike. A comprehensive national counter-ideological narrative to be jointly pursued through the Ministry of Broadcasting and Information and other institutions working behind closed doors is felt urgent than ever before.

➤ **Economic Revival: Prerequisite for State Security**

Human security should be granted priority so that human empowerment actually strengthens the state rather than a strengthened state relegates human security. Factors like politico-economic empowerment, individual/community security, and environmental and societal security sectors must be incorporated in national development plans. Pakistan's weak economy is a constraint in safeguarding its vital national security interests. The political leadership should work out a consensus charter of economy, which should be approved by the parliament as an inviolable document under any ruling party or circumstances.

➤ **Institute System of Grooming Political Leadership**

Democracy is a way of governance rather than coming to power through ballot and bulldozing all democratic norms for personal gains. The parliament should play its role to ensure unblemished conduct of parliamentarians and monitor performance of other institutions through democratic oversight mechanisms. The prestigious educational institutions of the country running leadership and management courses should take the lead in creating suitable modules and conducting training of young and potential future leaders, nominated by the political parties or joining voluntarily. The culture of training leaders, at least for technical departments and ministries be instituted as a first step.

➤ **Proactive Foreign Policy**

Pakistan needs to utilise all possible assets to restore its image and adopt an innovative approach to improve its relations with other countries of the world, including major powers. Not only should most professional diplomats lead the initiative, but political leadership should take the onus of a proactive strategy of capitalising on all levers to protect the vital national interests of the country. The issue of foreign interference and non-cooperation by the Afghan regime needs to be highlighted forcefully on all important platforms.

Conclusion

The ethnonationalist movements of the Balochs and Pashtuns pose significant threats to Pakistan's national security. Historical grievances, economic inequalities, and political segregation are the factors that encouraged the ethnonationalist movement to fuel the insurgencies and unrest in provinces of Balochistan and KPK. Basically, the aim of the Baloch nationalist struggle was driven by demands for greater autonomy and resource equal distribution, but this movement has led to armed resistance against the state, while Pashtun ethnonationalism, intensified by years of fighting and dislocation, has displayed in organisations like the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and connected to militant groups. These tensions not only disrupted the affected territories but also impacted Pakistan's security machinery, distracting economic resources from extensive national progress to antiterrorist measures. Furthermore, external factors, such as India and Afghanistan, have been accused of exploiting these movements to undermine Pakistan's stability. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and dialogue with marginalised communities. Without resolving the underlying causes of ethnonationalism, Pakistan's national security will remain vulnerable to internal fragmentation and external interference, hindering its path to long-term stability and prosperity. A concerted effort for national dialogue to address constitutional imbalances, economic disparities and the looming threat of climate change devastating the agrarian economy must be addressed as a priority. Cherry-picking issues with ad-hoc resolution is the recipe for disaster, to say the least.

Disclosure Statement

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