

Balochistan Think Tank Network



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About BTTN

Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) was established at Quetta, on March 1, 2021. It is an autonomous, non-profit, non-partisan, and multidisciplinary Research Center with a focus not limited to Balochistan only but includes the regional and global dynamics which can influence Pakistan. Broadly, BTTN endeavors to undertake in-depth research of provincial issues with a view to developing the socio, political, and economic status of the province. Its interests also include issues of Energy, Regional Stability, Strategic Stability, Peace and Security, Arms Control and Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Technology, Conflict Resolution, Regional Connectivity, and Socioeconomic development at the national level. Geopolitically, besides South Asia, BTTN's research areas also include regions of Europe and Africa.

BTTN OP-EDs

Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) Faculty of Research has been writing op-eds on a regular basis on different contemporary issues that are published on various international and national platforms. The opinions expressed in this edition are the authors' individual views and do not reflect the official policy of BTTN or any governmental organization. This electronic review is compiled monthly.

SUMMARY OF OP-EDs

Income Inequality in Balochistan

Shahmeer

January 01, 2025

Income Inequality in Balochistan has widespread implications for the social fabric and economic development of the province. It jeopardizes social cohesiveness and national unity by leaving the populace vulnerable to misleading narratives in a volatile place like Balochistan. The following piece aims to unveil the non-income determinants of income inequality in Balochistan and suggests doable mitigating strategies.

US Partiality and its repercussions for Strategic Stability in South Asia

Alamgir Khan

January 02, 2025

This opinion piece discusses the recent sanctions imposed by US on Pakistan's Ballistic Missile Program. It also highlights US partiality and support in Indian defence and strategic capabilities, which includes advanced missile systems and high-end technology transfers that have significantly improved Indian military capabilities. These developments are viewed as creating a strategic imbalance in the South Asian region and highlights the ``Double Standards`` of US Foreign Policy.

Essential Reforms for Pakistan's Economic Health

Hamza Nasir

January 07, 2025

This piece discusses Pakistan's ongoing financial struggles, including high debt, poor tax collection, and rising government expenses. Experts at the "Fixing Fiscal Policy" conference emphasized the need for tax reforms, controlled spending, and better debt management. By improving revenue collection and cutting unnecessary costs, Pakistan can invest more in education, healthcare, and infrastructure for a stronger economy.

India's Soft Power Paradox

Sadia Zahra

January 17, 2025

The op-ed "India's Soft Power Paradox" examines India's growing global influence through cultural, diplomatic, and economic means, despite challenges in leveraging its soft power. It discusses the country's rich cultural heritage, the global appeal of Bollywood, yoga, and democracy, while addressing contradictions like domestic political tensions and human rights concerns. The piece argues that while India's soft power potential is vast, it faces a paradox, as internal issues hinder its ability to present itself as a consistent global leader.

India's Act East Policy – Implications for South Asia

Shahmeer

January 21, 2025

In the Early 1990's, India introduced the "Look East Policy" – a strategic initiative designed to advance ties with the Southeast Asian Nations and position the region as a gateway for Indian advances in the India Ocean Region (IOR). New Delhi sought to utilize the high seas of the IOR to foster economic growth and enhance diplomatic engagement. India's Act East Policy transitions from economic engagement to safeguarding regional stability amid China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific. Thus, the study aims to unveil India's growing pivot to the East, including its military modernization, diplomatic engagement, economic interdependence and its possible implications for Pakistan and South Asian Strategic Stability.

Youth Unemployment in Balochistan: A Call for Action

Sadaf Nadeem

January 24, 2025

Balochistan's youth, making up nearly 60% of the population, face challenges like low literacy (42.01%) and high unemployment due to a gap between education and market-required skills. The reliance on government jobs limits career growth, while industries remain underutilized. To address this, vocational training, industry linkages, and entrepreneurship programs must be promoted. Strengthening key sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism can create jobs. A joint effort by the government and private sector is crucial to equipping youth with skills and opportunities for economic progress.

Reallocating resources for the war on terror

Nomeen Kassi

January 24, 2025

This opinion piece discusses the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award of 2009, which allocated special budget for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to combat terrorism. Given the improved security in KPK and the escalating insurgency in Balochistan, this piece explains for reassessing this allocation. Redirecting resources to

Balochistan could address its security challenges and foster development, improving security in Pakistan as a whole.

Policy Changes in MTCR Implications for South Asia

Zafar Khan

January 30, 2025

This opinion piece elaborates the new US policy changes in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and its implications on the South Asia region. It argues that the perceived changes by the US for meeting its own national security interest would undermine the rationale of this regime and therefore will increase the arms race, security dilemma and crisis instability between the rivals.

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Income Inequality in Balochistan

Shahmeer

January 01, 2025

Income Inequality in Balochistan has widespread implications for the social fabric and economic development of the province. It jeopardizes social cohesiveness and national unity by leaving the populace vulnerable to misleading narratives in a volatile place like Balochistan. Income inequality is a highly ignored issue in Balochistan. Past Studies have mainly focused on the disparities between Balochistan and other provinces of Pakistan or used income-based metrics such as Gini Coefficient to measure the gap between haves and have-nots. In addition, no study has examined the structural causes of disparities in Balochistan and offered workable solutions for their mitigation using a strong regression model backed by pertinent theoretical frameworks. The non-income factors that include broader social, political, and economic factors have been left widely ignored. By focusing on the non-income variables of income inequality, this study explores the reasons for income disparity in Balochistan and provides recommendations for its mitigation.

Stratification is inescapable and universal in all societies. It is one of the key ideas in the study of social thought that although some people in society continue to be severely impoverished, others benefit enormously from it. Every society has a different system of social stratification. Sometimes society was still divided along caste or slavery lines, while other times it was divided along estate lines. As a result, research on social stratification has been around since antiquity and has changed over time. However, the most cited work on stratification was presented by Max Weber. Class, social standing, and party were the three pillars upon which he built his thesis on stratification.

Building on Max Weber's Theory of Stratification which delineates multifaceted reasons for disparities in a society, the study asked 200 individuals from across Balochistan selected through Simple Random Sampling following a well-structured questionnaire consisting of six variables such as Land Inequality, Digital Divide, Unbalanced Employment Structure, Educational Disparities, Urbanization and Inefficient Economic Policies, and its data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences

(SPSS) to identify patterns and correlations. The study found that most respondents (55%) think that the main cause of income disparity is land inequality, 42.5% point to the digital gap, and 40% blame the uneven job structure. Likewise, 39% mentioned inequalities in education, 37.5% said ineffective economic policies, and 30% mentioned urbanization.

As the data reveals that economic disparities in Balochistan are multifaceted, it requires a coherent strategy for its mitigation. The study proposes Human Capital Theory as the strategy to address income disparities in Balochistan. Basically, Human Capital Theory assumes that the advancements in fundamental science, technology, business management, education, and training that support production are all considered to be part of society's intangible capital. These advancements can be the consequence of intentional individual or group investments for financial gain or unintended byproducts of attempts to accomplish other objectives.

First, the main idea of the study for the mitigation of income disparities as said before pivots around the concept of investment in human capital: its knowledge, education, skills, and digital awareness. The idea also encompasses that for ensuring these dexterities improvements in basic science, technology, business administration, and education and training are needed to enable laborers to attain dexterities. These skills can push people for upward economic mobility. It is also important to integrate Madrasa students into the mainstream economic activities in Balochistan. The province has 506 licensed madrasas and 3004 unregistered madrasas, with about 1 million youngsters enrolled. The number of madrasas is growing annually, according to the Directorate General of Religious Education. They only learn religious matters in school, and there is no official system in place to give them skills that will enable them to earn reasonably. After graduating from madrasa, individuals can choose to work as a teacher in a madrasa or as an imam in a mosque because they lack the necessary abilities and dexterity, they make relatively little money in both situations.

Second, Balochistan's land distribution has been skewed in favor of a small elite, with large landholdings concentrated in the hands of tribal chiefs, feudal lords, and a select

few powerful families. Due to their reliance on small, dispersed land parcels or labor without property, the great majority of people, especially in rural areas, have had little access to economic mobility. A cycle of poverty and social injustice has been sustained by this unfair land distribution. By redistributing land, the state can reduce wealth inequality and increase the economic agency of marginalized communities.

Third, the lack of on-the-job training and capacity building of the existing laborers or employees is another issue that stagnates their economic growth. The chances of upward economic mobility in such conditions become so modest. Compared to corporate services where the chances of exposure are satisfactory, unregulated businesses and government sector jobs provide very meager opportunities for on-the-job training in Balochistan. This area also needs much focus.

Fourth, along with technical skills, the upgradation of soft skills of the laborers and employees is also significant. These skills include communication and leadership skills, teamwork and collaboration, adaptability and resilience, problem-solving, time management, conflict resolution, tolerance, and creativity and innovation. The biggest benefit of these issues is that they curtail innovation and creativity and prevail in a hostile and competitive environment.

Fifth, rural-urban disparities also need attention. The major chunk of the population of Balochistan lives in rural areas where basic amenities, needed infrastructure, and opportunities for economic growth are very meager compared to urban centers where these facilities are in functional form. As a result, the people in urban areas are economically more stable. To reduce this gap, the government must invest in rural infrastructure in the shape of constructing schools, initiating vocational training centers, and introducing reforms in the agriculture sector. It is also needed that the government diversify sources of earnings in rural areas in the shape of E-commerce and other digital platforms.

Sixth, in the digital realm, it is crucial to expand digital infrastructure and access, improve digital skills, create e-governance services, encourage digital transformation,

and protect cybersecurity and rights. On these six principles, the Balochistan Government declared the Balochistan Digital Policy (2021). However, after 2021 till date the policy existed in letter not in spirit and has not been renewed. Such initiatives are important for the mitigation of disparities as they equip people with more relevant skills that can bring reasonable wages and increase delivery and services.

To conclude, the increasing income disparity demands significant attention from the pertinent parties in a volatile region such as Balochistan. The increasing inequalities in the province are concerning and detrimental to regional development. It might further obstruct national development and progress and leave the populace open to misleading narratives. Land inequalities, the digital divide among Balochistan citizens, educational disparities, an uneven employment structure, growing urbanization, and extremely inefficient economic policies that cause chaos in the province's economic structure are the most significant and frequently disregarded non-income factors that contribute to the disparities. Therefore, the study advocates the implementation of targeted intervention by the authorities primarily focusing on the development of human capital. Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz rightly puts it, "Development without equity is not sustainable. Inequality is not only a barrier to economic growth but also a source of social instability."

US Partiality and its repercussions for Strategic Stability in South Asia

Alamgir Khan

January 02, 2025

Security generally refers to the absence of perceived threats from internal or external sources, such as economic disparities and inequalities. To address threats, nations seek power (economic, political, and military) and take measures to mitigate their impact. They also aim to acquire more power. Pakistan's founder, the Quaid-i-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, once stated that "the weak and defenseless, in this imperfect world, invite aggression from others." Therefore, efforts are made to create a sense of security among citizens while developing tactics and strategies to address potential threats and negative situations.

International politics is characterized by power and economic disparities. Smaller nations face additional security challenges due to the lack of a supranational institution, such as a world government, to regulate interstate relations. Given the nature of the current international, regional, and domestic environment, Pakistan faces numerous security challenges. Since its inception, Pakistan has had to contend with external threats to its independence and territorial integrity. The situation was further complicated by internal subversion, recurring domestic issues, and upheavals. Pakistan is positioned between India and Afghanistan, and its current relations with both countries have a significant impact on how it views security. To be more specific, India has been the main cause of security problems. Three threats currently confront Pakistan: the persistent threat of growing terrorism emitting from Afghanistan, the threat from India, and the threat resulting from changing domestic circumstances. India's threats present a difficult problem for Pakistan's security strategists.

Pakistan has probably suffered more material destruction and fatalities than any other nation when it comes to challenges to the security of the country and its people. Pakistan's engagement in the War on Terror has resulted in the deaths of nearly 37,000 civilians, over 6,700 military personnel, and over 15,000 troops. It is widely acknowledged that about \$123.13 billion worth of material harm has been inflicted upon Pakistan.

The nation's defense policy and the defense sector are directly impacted by and connected to all of the listed challenges. To begin with India, it is not essential to get into specifics. India has long been thought to be Pakistan's greatest rival, the greatest threat to the very existence of the nation. India is investing significant resources in strengthening its armed forces due to its economic success and aspirations as a key actor in global politics. The country is not only a threat to Pakistan but also to China as it sees China as a competitor in the region and sees Pakistan and China as forces that hinder its aim of regional hegemony.

India's such adventurous recklessness and extremely high spending in the arms sector mounts pressure on Pakistan to make more use of its limited defense budget. For instance, the country is investing over \$75 billion, which is a potentially dangerous development that raises concerns. With a primary focus on the US relationship with India and Pakistan, the geopolitical dynamics in South Asia have drawn more attention from around the world. A close look at US sanctions against Pakistan and expanding strategic alliances with others reveals a blatant geopolitical bias. For example, there is a clear pattern of American preference for India, coupled with a policy of restricting Pakistan and penalizing other nations for doing business with it. This partiality demonstrates how the US views and handles Pakistan through an Indian perspective. Which is ironic.

Other nations face restrictions in pursuing peaceful activities aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, while India benefits from exceptions to military technology regulations supported by the US. Recently, the US has begun to impose penalties on Chinese and other businesses for allegedly providing Pakistan with military equipment. The latest US sanctions on Pakistan's ballistic missile program are deemed discriminatory and pose a threat to regional peace and security, the penalties, according to a statement issued by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday, "have dangerous implications for strategic stability of our region and beyond."

Pakistani leaders are extremely alarmed by the recent sanctions the US imposed on their country, believing that this action demonstrates a double standard in US foreign policy. This sentiment is further intensified by Washington's growing defense partnership with India, including advanced missile systems and high-end technology transfers that have improved India's military capabilities. These developments are viewed as creating a strategic imbalance in the South Asian region.

Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States, has stated that the latest sanctions imposed by the US government, allegedly related to Pakistan's Ballistic Missile Program, will have no impact on the country's missile capabilities or slow its progress. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also condemned the sanctions stating that, "240 million people have placed their sacred trust in Pakistan's leadership to carry out its strategic program. There is no way to undermine the integrity of this trust, which is revered by people of all political persuasions."

Whereas US partiality and double standard policies are clearly seen as how it ignores India's massive investment on defense sector and violations of International Standards. There are many hard facts about such violations as in August 2024, a group of individuals was found with illegal possession of highly radioactive material, Californium, valued at US\$100 million in India.

The incident is just the tip of iceberg. Pakistan has repeatedly voiced concerns about such incidents, which cast doubt on India's nuclear safety and security. These incidents expose the myth of India's 'spotless' non-proliferation record. It is crucial to evaluate the implications for India, international non-proliferation initiatives, and nearby nations like Pakistan that may be targeted by terrorists using dirty bombs or radioactive material.

<https://strafasia.com/us-partiality-and-its-repercussions-for-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/>

Essential Reforms for Pakistan's Economic Health

Hamza Nasir

January 07, 2025

In Pakistan, fiscal mismanagement has been a major challenge for the federal and provincial administrations throughout all of the country's history of economic growth and development. This lingering problem has brought about persistent problems regarding fiscal policy, tax administration, and debt management-fiscal stability-that the country so desperately needs if it is to realize sustainable growth.

Government expenditure has risen progressively with no proportionate rise in receipts, thus characterizing the fiscal deficits on a continuous basis. Such an imbalance is further enhanced with the continuously increasing ministries and agencies that add to the cost of salaries, benefits, and pensions. Further, the increase in social welfare programs results in a significant increase in subsidies and consequent allocations towards social protection.

First, addressing these challenges requires downsizing the size of government to reduce the level of debt. Government debt has increased significantly in recent years, limiting fiscal flexibility and crowding out resources used for important public services. Policymakers thereby have strong incentives to seek strategies for making government operations leaner. Administrative overhead should be cut, and less essential areas of spending reduced, allowing the government to take some of the sting out of the debt burden and free resources for perhaps more economic resilience.

The "Fixing Fiscal Policy" Round Table Conference provided just that rare conclave where, from the policymaker down to the economist, experts developed a coherent road map designed for the peculiar economic setting of Pakistan. Discussion focused on the need for targeted reforms in tax administration and expenditure management, including debt review, to ward off the pressures of a rising fiscal deficit. Participants in the session contended that Pakistan could create room through better efficiency in tax collection to

improve revenue generation and lend less dependence on foreign debt, which has dramatically defined the contours of the fiscal environment of this nation.

Along with the ever-growing public debt and widening fiscal deficit, the government now has to implement reforms that will help in improving tax revenues, expenditure management, and tackling its debt liabilities. By negotiating terms from its creditors, Pakistan can redeploy funds into investment in education, health, and infrastructure sectors that are vital for long-term economic stability and development.

Streamlining revenue collection methods can boost government revenue tremendously and reduce dependency on foreign debt. Clearing the loopholes in the existing tax policy and widening the base will help the government ensure that all sectors equitably contribute to national finances. According to experts, countries that have managed to put their fiscal situation in order often cite a good tax system as one of the reasons for achieving accountability and compliance.

Besides this, it is necessary to dispose of the public expenditures efficiently. It will be required to analyze government spending closely, cut off unnecessary expenses, and ensure the availability of these resources to such important sectors as education, health, and development of infrastructure. Investment within these fields is not just spending, but building economic resilience for more extended periods, contributing to a better quality of life for the citizens.

The major fiscal challenges facing Pakistan require a multi-pronged approach with effective governance and economic reform. Prioritization of shrinkage in government size, enhancement in processes of tax collection, and efficient management of public spending would enable Pakistan to construct a more viable fiscal framework. Insights from the recent "Fixing Fiscal Policy" Round Table Conference highlight the critical need for focused reforms in tax administration and expenditure oversight.

Considering this, the government will be prepared to negotiate with creditors for favorable terms that support the shifting of resources toward much-needed investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure of all areas that are not only pertinent to

immediate social needs but will also underpin long-term solid economic resilience. As Pakistan navigates its fiscal challenges, a focus on these reforms will be paramount to constructing a more stable and prosperous country for its people.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/07012025-essential-reforms-for-pakistans-economic-health-oped/>

India's Soft Power Paradox

Sadia Zahra

January 17, 2025

It could be argued that soft power is India's strength, but in 2024, the flaws that exist in the structure became evident. Its soft power imperative set to diminish, compounded by domestic ironies, geopolitical blunders, and an inability to assert its cultural diplomacy beyond its borders. According to Joseph Nye, the soft power option entails attraction and co-option, unlike the hard power option which entails coercion. India's soft power is increasingly undermined by domestic inconsistencies, including religious persecution and crackdowns on dissent. India's soft power assets are vast – the Bollywood movie industry, Yoga, Indian food, and the Indian story of democracy amidst growing authoritarianism around the world. These aspects along with the country's history of challenging colonial powers and its tradition of being a democracy offer it a vantage point from which to operate. However, it is limited by internal incoherence and only covers the ugliness of Indian Strategic Culture which the world fails to see.

One of India's glaring weaknesses is the fading of its cultural distinctiveness due to the growing adoption of Western culture at home while failing to export its influence abroad. The irony is stark: when India allows accessibility of cultural, social, and media-related Westernization, it slowly and gradually surrenders its competitive global edge. Bollywood, which was once synonymous with Indian soft power overseas, has become a copy of Hollywood in that regard and has lost its uniqueness.

Likewise, India's youth dreaming of imitating Western fashion, music, and ethics are not so interested in exhibiting or propagating their cultural products. Two major aspects of India, namely Yoga and Ayurveda seem to linger as culturally dominant representations while their narrow focus suggests that India has not been able to cultivate and sustain narratives that hope to enthrall the rest of the world. On the other hand, nations such as China have developed clear hypotheses on how to spread the culture internationally as well as preserving their own. This paper finds that through such cooperative establishments as Confucius institutes as well as using cultural diplomacy, China has popularized its language, education, and values as seen in the world today. However,

the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) – the major organization of India set up to promote INDIA’s culture and soft power abroad – has far fewer centers than these systematic patterns: less than forty in the entire world. Bollywood’s Westernization has diluted its cultural uniqueness, weakening its global appeal as a soft power asset.

The world also questioned India’s reliability as a global partner. It has taken a rather neutral position in the Russian-Ukraine crisis, thus putting it on a collision course with Western powers. This has left them with short-term geopolitical interests at the cost of global principles such as joining together to punish Moscow by siding with Russia. This has made India unpredictable in the eyes of its Western partners—the United States of America and Europe—thus lessening its reliability as a world ally. The internal dynamics of India continue to weaken the country’s soft power even more. Claims of religious persecution and crackdown on opposition together with increasing numbers of rich and poor, erode the facades of plurality and diversity of this democracy. Violent attacks on ethnic or religious minorities as well as crackdowns on dissenting voices erode India’s integrity reducing its capacity to present itself as a responsible leader of the global community.

Internationally, India continues to worry its neighbors about its capabilities. It could not perpetrate positive diplomacy as a stabilizing force in South Asia because of the sour relations with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Separation of the boundary with China and the continued territorial tensions over the Line of Control running through the Kashmir region have also attracted global condemnation, thus erasing any attempt by New Delhi to paint a new image for India as a civil and cooperative nation. These latest diplomatic gaffes only eclipse India’s efforts to establish its hegemony in South Asia and the world order.

New Delhi suffers from a lack of identity and priorities, and the symptom of this disease is a decline in India’s soft power. Forcing cultural and diplomatic muscle, India has gradually turned passive, allowing other countries to dictate the pace of relations. The rise of Westernization in homes has weakened India’s uniqueness; the lack of effective

and proper soft power addresses the lack of strategic communication with Western society. India's neutral stance in the Russia-Ukraine crisis has raised questions about its reliability as a global ally.

India stands at a crossroads. If its contributors do not stop to refine and change from its petty cultural bastardization to geopolitical disparity and domestic incompatibility, then it could not claim to be one of the world's leading countries. India, once aspiring to become one of the world's leading soft powers, is now increasingly positioning itself as a nation striving to appear more influential in soft power than it is.

<https://stratheia.com/indias-soft-power-paradox/>

India's Act East Policy – Implications for South Asia

Shahmeer

January 21, 2025

In the Early 1990's, India introduced the "Look East Policy" – a strategic initiative designed to advance ties with the Southeast Asian Nations and position the region as a gateway for Indian advances in the India Ocean Region (IOR). New Delhi sought to utilize the high seas of the IOR to foster economic growth and enhance diplomatic engagement. India's Act East Policy transitions from economic engagement to safeguarding regional stability amid China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific.

However, India's role evolved in response to the changing geopolitical landscape, particularly China's attempts to alter the regional status quo. This prompted New Delhi to adopt a doctrinal shift from 'using seas to securing seas'. In 2014, India redefined its policy as "Act East" emphasizing the IOR and the Asia-Pacific as the biggest geopolitical arena of the 21st century. The Act East Policy is an essential component of India's Diamond of Necklace counter strategy against China's String of Pearls. It is framed as peaceful and solely meant to safeguard Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), which India views as integral to its power projection capabilities.

The multi-pronged strategy involves building ports, extensive coastal surveillance radars, operating airports in neighboring countries, expanding defense ties, and advancing bilateral relations. India's pivot to East policies also enjoys synergy with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific and South Korea's New Southern Policy, which advocate for a rule-based regional order in the Asia-Pacific.

The primary impetus for India's Act East policy stems from the perceived strategic challenge posed by China which stands as the leading trading partner for Asia-Pacific nations and a significant investor in their infrastructure development. China's rapid military modernization, its growing power projection capabilities, wolf warrior diplomacy, and economic growth coercion are contributing to the emergence of a complex and contested Asia-Pacific, potentially undermining and challenging the long-term strategic objectives of major powers in the region, including India.

New Delhi sees the intensifying great power competition in the Asia-Pacific as an opportunity to enhance its regional presence, assert its role as a major power, and strategically leverage partnerships to safeguard its core strategic objectives. The frequency and scope of India's defense diplomacy, military exercises, ministerial visits, and arms sales have significantly increased. The India-ASEAN trade volume has grown from USD 9 billion in 2002 to USD 131.75 billion in 2022-2023, emphasizing economic synergy. It has accelerated its naval modernization plan that calls for the purchase of over 200 naval aircraft, modern warships, Scorpene-class, and nuclear-powered submarines to increase its power projection capabilities effectively. In addition, New Delhi is also a part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a strategic partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and has bilateral relations with the Island states and littorals of the Asia-Pacific region.

The abrupt changes in the global economic outlook at the End of the Cold War and India's liberalization plans strengthened the notions of multifaceted trade relations with the East. These imperatives forced New Delhi to look east, which began by trade relations but rapidly extended to other areas. In 1992, India began formal engagement with the ASEAN countries as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner which was elevated to the status of Dialogue Partner in 1995. This relationship further advanced when New Delhi's status was upgraded to Summit-Level Partner in 2002, culminating in the establishment of a Strategic Partnership in 2012, primarily focused on "4Cs": Culture, Connectivity, Commerce and Capacity Building.

The trade volume between India and the ASEAN expanded from USD 9 billion in 2002 to USD 131.75 billion in 2022-2023. Projections estimate that the volume of the trade will surpass USD 150 billion by 2023. Through the India-ASEAN Free Trade Area, the countries aim to reduce and eliminate duties 76.4 percent on goods and aim to further advance connectivity and trade. Technology is another significant sector. India and Singapore have signed a MoU on the semi-conductor agreement, highly indispensable for economic growth in the 21st century.

India's Act East Policy encompasses a wide array of strategic and economic benefits for India including enhanced power projection capabilities, military modernization, diplomatic engagement, and economic growth which position India in a relatively advantageous position to Pakistan. It would further intensify Pakistan's threat perception toward India and profoundly affect strategic stability in the region. It will usher in a new phase of insecurities in the security establishment of Pakistan and could have profound implications for the region's strategic stability. New Delhi's naval modernization, including six SSBNs with MIRV-equipped SLBMs by 2040, poses challenges to regional maritime security.

New Delhi's growing naval capabilities – including modernization efforts, increasing asymmetries, and power projection enhancements – can pose a significant challenge to Pakistan's maritime security. Estimates project that India will have incorporated six SSBNs with MIRV-equipped SLBMs, an additional 6 SSN submarines and several aircraft carriers and destroyers by 20240 plus enjoys a 'privileged' role in the US grand strategy as an offshore counterbalance against China that will help it further increase these capabilities. These implications are two critical developments. One, India continues to enjoy unhindered Eastern and Western support for developing its arsenal, and Pakistan faces isolation in its efforts to maintain strategic and deterrence stability. Second, the arms control efforts will remain highly elusive, further complicating the regional security landscape.

As China modernizes its nuclear and conventional forces to achieve greater strategic leverage over the US and its allies particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, India will be pretending to face mounting pressure to pursue modernization and power projection efforts. These dynamic risks exacerbating strategic imbalances, and miscalculations, fueling an arms race and turning elusive strategic instability in India-Pakistan relations. In the prevailing hostile geopolitical environment, the prospects for risk reduction measures and confidence-building frameworks appear unattainable in South Asia. However, arms control measures seem to be the future promising effort between the South Asian rivals to help mitigate the growing arms race undermining the broader

strategic stability in South Asia. Strategic restraint regime negotiations between India and Pakistan could help reduce tensions and promote stability in South Asia.

Establishing a bilateral negotiation for the already proposed strategic restraint regime between the South Asian nuclear rivals may foster the development of normative regulations on critical issues, thereby fostering regional stability.

<https://stratheaia.com/indias-act-east-policy-implications-for-south-asia/>

Youth Unemployment in Balochistan: A Call for Action

Sadaf Nadeem

January 24, 2025

Youth, usually defined as people aged 15 to 29, form a large portion of Balochistan's population. Out of 12.34 million people, nearly 60% are under the age of 30, highlighting the potential of this Demographic population to drive progress and development. Unfortunately, this potential is not being utilized effectively. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the literacy rate in Balochistan is 42.01% the lowest among all provinces, as per the 2023 census. Additionally, only 38.6% of the population is part of the labor force, indicating widespread unemployment. Those who are employed often find themselves in low-paid, informal jobs with little to no opportunities for growth. These figures tell a grim story of thousands of young people who are unable to achieve their dreams due to limited access to education and decent job opportunities.

The core issue of employment and youth empowerment in Balochistan lies in the significant gap between education and the skills required in the job market. According to the University of Balochistan (2022), universities tend to prioritize theoretical knowledge, while industries demand practical, market-oriented skills. This leaves thousands of graduates each year either unemployed or stuck in low-paying jobs. Another major contributing factor is the prevalent mindset that young people in Balochistan aim only for government jobs, believing that they offer the stability and security they need. However, this is far from the reality. Government jobs are limited in number, and each year, a large number of graduates flood the job market, making it impossible for all of them to secure a position. This narrow focus on government employment prevents graduates from developing skills aligned with market needs, and they often fail to explore alternative career opportunities. Consequently, this mindset not only leads to widespread frustration but also stifles potential for growth and innovation. Unless this mindset shifts, the issue of unemployment will continue to worsen.

It is also important to establish a link between universities and industries. Internship programs should be a part of every university curriculum to allow students to align their

skills with market demands through practical exposure. According to a Study titled, “Industry Bridging the Gap Between Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship” highlights the importance of moving beyond theoretical teaching. It emphasizes the need to equip students with practical skills and tools that prepare them effectively for the job market.

Without skills development, youth cannot be a part of the workforce. Hence, the provincial government, in collaboration with the private sector, needs to initiate vocational training and technical education programs. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs are essential for preparing a skilled workforce for the mining, fisheries, and tourism industries, which are crucial for Balochistan’s economy. The National Incubation Center (NIC) Quetta’s model should be replicated by creating entrepreneurial hubs in every district, offering youth the platform to start their own businesses. These hubs promote entrepreneurship and provide youth with the opportunity to improve their own lives and the lives of others through self-employment. To boost employment opportunities, both the provincial and the federal governments need to prioritize the empowerment of local industries. Key sectors like agriculture, fisheries, minerals, and tourism form the backbone of Balochistan’s economy but remain underutilized. By channeling investment and integrating modern technology into these industries, significant job creation can be achieved. This perspective aligns with insights from the Government of Balochistan (2024), as highlighted in “Pakistan: SIFC A Lifeline for Balochistan’s Minerals Economy.”

Moreover, addressing the challenges faced by the youth of Balochistan requires a focus on bridging the gap between education and skill development. Empowering local industries like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, along with fostering vocational training and entrepreneurship, can create vital economic opportunities. Furthermore, expanding civic participation and leadership programs, while utilizing digital platforms for advocacy and income generation, will enable youth to play a significant role in their community

and economy. A collaborative effort from both the government and private sectors is crucial to unlocking the potential of Balochistan's youth.

In conclusion, the youth of Balochistan hold the key to the future, yet their potential remains largely untapped due to gaps in education, skills training, and employment opportunities. While a large portion of the population is young and eager to contribute, the disconnect between educational systems and market demands leaves many struggling to find suitable employment. The pervasive mindset that government jobs are the only path to success limits the scope for growth and innovation. To change this, Balochistan must shift its focus towards skill-based education, promote vocational training, and create more opportunities for entrepreneurship. By aligning education with industry needs and encouraging the growth of local industries, the province can empower its youth, offering them the tools to not only secure meaningful employment but also drive the region's economic progress. The future of Balochistan lies in the hands of its youth, but it is up to all stakeholders—government, educational institutions, and industries—to ensure they have the opportunities and skills to thrive.

<https://policywatcher.com/2025/01/youth-unemployment-in-balochistan-a-call-for-action/>

Reallocating resources for the war on terror

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The National Finance Commission changed the landscape of the resource distribution mechanism in Pakistan with its 7th Award in 2009. For the first time, the distribution formula shifted from 100 percent population criterion to Multiple Indicator Criteria (MIC). It included multiple indicators such as poverty and backwardness (10.3 percent), inverse population density (2.7 percent), and revenue generation (5 percent) – reducing the share of the population to 82 percent. Amidst the 7th NFC award, KPK was fighting a war on terror. The region had suffered endless terrorist attacks that needed to be countered. Consequently, the 7th NFC Award also formulated a special budget for KPK to fight the war on terror, as it was placed at the heart of the conflict. Legally, the NFC awards should be debated and revisited every 5 years. However, the 7th NFC award has been in place since 2009, for 15 years now. A new award has not been announced since then.

The NFC award is the resource distribution mechanism in Pakistan. It distributes resources vertically between federation and provinces and horizontally, among provinces. KPK, Sindh, and Balochistan were not satisfied with the previous awards which had population as the sole criteria, with each having their concerns. The 7th NFC Award facilitated the concerns and grievances of all the provinces opposing the original NFC mechanism: having the population as the sole criteria. The 7th NFC award allocated resources on the MIC formula. Balochistan is believed to be the greatest beneficiary as it now receives 9.09 percent compared to the prior 5.11 percent. KPK was given “grant for the war on terror”, which is 1 percent of the total divisible pool and equivalent to 1.8 percent of the provincial share in the net proceeds of the provincial divisible pool. Historically, KPK has been the region most affected by terrorism, thereby the one-percent special budget was granted for counterterrorism operations. Since 2004, prolonged insurgency has widely damaged the province’s socio-economic condition. Notably, the region has faced massive infrastructural destruction, loss of economy, and strain on social services. Much of the province’s budget was spent on

counterinsurgency operations. The province could not allocate finances to social needs of the province, as the largest chunk was consumed by the counterterrorism operations. As compensation for this sacrifice, KPK was given this special one percent to spend enough on these operations so that it can rebuild and rehabilitate. Since 2000, till date, KPK has faced 8458 terrorism incidents. Over time, the security situation in KPK has improved comparatively. The number of attacks has reduced significantly, although sporadic threats still exist. The two military operations, Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, severely weakened the militant groups. There is relative stability in the region and the urge for continued grants for war on terror has been reduced. However, the current scenario has changed the security dynamics. Today, Balochistan faces equally pressing challenges. The situation raises the debate of whether budgetary compensation should now be redirected to Balochistan.

Currently, the insurgency in Balochistan is affecting a huge area and its population, resulting in socio-economic loss. The insurgency is fueled by grievances over natural resource exploitation and lack of political participation. Many global actors are behind these attacks fueling the insurgency for their political purposes as the province has great geopolitical and geostrategic importance. The terrorists demand separation from Pakistan. Notably, there is a massive increase in the insurgent activities in the province. KPK has been receiving a substantial portion of the NFC award, however, it needs to be reassessed and should now be reallocated to Balochistan due to the province's unique and growing security concerns and insurgent activities. The current security situation is the biggest rationale.

While KPK continues to face some security challenges, particularly related to cross-border terrorism, the need for large-scale financial support for counterterrorism activities has significantly reduced. Whereas the increasing terrorist activities in Balochistan requires the need for financial support. Over the years, Balochistan has experienced a combination of separatist movements, insurgent activities, and militancy that have hindered the development of the province. Unfortunately, Balochistan is not getting the same level of financial resources directed towards its security and development, despite

facing security threats continuously, keeping in mind its geostrategic location. Fostering economic growth in Balochistan would provide opportunities for the youth, address grievances, and reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies, benefiting Pakistan as a whole. It is time to reassess national priorities and ensure that all provinces, particularly Balochistan, receive the resources necessary to overcome their challenges and contribute to national growth.

The insurgent groups are engaged in violent activities, ranging from attacks on military and law enforcement personnel to sabotage of infrastructure projects, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor routes passing through Balochistan. The involved global actors aim to weaken the geostrategic location of the province by promoting instability in the region. Notably, the number of terrorism-related incidents shockingly reached 451, alone in 2024. These incidents have caused severe instability, and the local population continues to suffer.

Additionally, the economy of Balochistan is stressed because of these incidents. The provincial government cannot allocate properly for the province's development projects. One of the reasons for this insurgent uprising is the underdevelopment and the mismanagement of natural resources. The region's economic neglect has contributed to feelings of alienation and resentment. With this reallocation, the province's economic burden will be reduced, thereby helping the government focus more on addressing underdevelopment, education, and improving health facilities. Resultantly, it will help counter the insurgency in the long run. Fostering economic growth in Balochistan would provide opportunities for the youth, address grievances, and reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies, benefiting Pakistan as a whole. It is time to reassess national priorities and ensure that all provinces, particularly Balochistan, receive the resources necessary to overcome their challenges and contribute to national growth.

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Policy Changes in MTCR Implications for South Asia

Zafar Khan

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The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) is an informal and voluntary export control regime that bears a political understanding between the member states to curb the presumed proliferation of Category I and Category II missiles and missile technology. The MTCR is not a formal and legally binding treaty between the states such as the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), formed in 1968 and enforced in 1970 (Missile Technology Control Regime). Today, the NPT is the largest nonproliferation treaty having 191 members. India, Israel, and Pakistan have never been part of the NPT since its inception while North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 before it conducted its nuclear weapon tests in 2006 (the NPT). The U.S. policy shift in MTCR will blur the lines between members and non-members, making missile control measures increasingly ineffective.

The MTCR, unlike the NPT, works voluntarily and is subject to amendments from time to time. It was formed in 1987 by the G-7 technologically advanced countries. Currently, it has 35 members including that of India that joined the MTCR in 2016 after the special waiver by the US provided to India in terms of the so-called India-US civil nuclear deal. The global rising China is not part of the MTCR. Although China, the perceived rival of the US and India requested its membership in 2004, the membership was not offered due to obvious geopolitical and geostrategic rivalry. Pakistan is also not part of this informal political understanding of the MTCR.

The fundamental rationale of the MTCR regime, including both its Category I and Category II is to curtail the export of missiles and missile technology that has a range of 300km with the ability to carry a payload of 500kg of any type of weapons of mass destruction. The US and its strategic allies and partners often consider this restraint outdated and thereby they consider that such guidelines need to be updated and/or modified in accordance with the US interpretation of the changing strategic environment where the US and its allies and partners consider themselves to be threatened by the perceived archrivals and their partners. That said, the US made exceptions for Ukraine

and South Korea for their development of such missiles supposed to be denied, otherwise (U.S. Reinterprets MTCR Rules, September 2020).

The Rationale of the US MTCR Policy Shift

More recently, the Biden-Harris Administration “Introduced New Guidance for Missile Technology Exports to Advance Nonproliferation Goals and Bolster Allied Defense Capabilities.” On January 3, 2025, President Biden issued a National Security Memorandum (NSM) regarding the MTCR voluntarily. The January 3 fact sheet argues that “These updates reflect a renewed US commitment to non-proliferation while advancing the President’s goals of strengthening allied defense capabilities, bolstering the US defense industrial base, streamlining defense trade, and deterring adversaries.”

The fact sheet opines that “These policy changes will help the United States advance shared defense objectives with close allies, including the implementation of AUKUS while maintaining a strong leadership role on nonproliferation and export control policy. Also, this politically voluntarily modified policy establishes a memorandum that “the MTCR is not designed to impede national space programs or international cooperation in such programs as long as such programs could not contribute to delivery systems for WMD” (FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration, January 7).

This is not the first time the US has attempted to modify the changes voluntarily. In 1992, the US with its allies and partners modified the MTCR by putting restraints on the export of missile technology that may help deliver all types of weapons of mass destruction including chemical and biological weapons. During President Trump’s first tenure, the US modified the MTCR guidelines for sharing drone technology such as the Predatory and Reaper drones that go beyond the then-existing ranges and payloads as initially described by the MTCR. Pakistan’s missile program remains India-specific, reinforcing deterrence amid evolving U.S. strategic policies favoring India.

For example, Clarke Cooper, the assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs argued “We think this kind of reform is necessary in order to respond to a rapidly changing technological environment. With the growing proliferation of [the] technology, particularly by China, coupled with a growing demand for Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) for both military and commercial applications, we need to adjust US policies to address US national security concerns” (U.S. Reinterprets MTCR Rules, September 2020).

In this regard, the White House Statement also reflected the similar imperative Cooper argued: “Not only do these outdated standards give an unfair advantage to countries outside of the MTCR and hurt United States industry, but they also hinder our deterrence capability abroad by handicapping our partners and allies with subpar technology,”.

Challenges and Opportunities

The new MTCR policy initiated by the US will help boost US arms sales to its strategic allies and partners. The US considers itself lagging in terms of sales for both commercial and military purposes, while countries outside the MTCR are exploiting such advantages. For example, many in the US think that China and Israel are already capturing the markets. This reflects the realpolitik of the international system based on geopolitical and geostrategic values.

The new US MTCR policy will make the broader standing of the MTCR irrelevant, ineffective, and biased whether one is part of the MTCR or not. Membership may not make any better difference between those who are members and those who are out of the MTCR. In other words, it undermines the credibility of this informal multilateral regime aimed at curbing the proliferation of missiles and missile technology. On the one hand, the US considers this policy shift as a better opportunity for its allies and partners to acquire missiles, the UAS, and the Space Launched Vehicle (SLV) with increasing

ranges and payloads contrary to the traditional MTCR constraint measures. But, on the other hand, the US claims to be active while following the nonproliferation measures.

In this context, it is interesting to note the critique of Henry Sokolski, executive director of The Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, who argued that “Our government may want to make love by sharing dangerous missile technology with countries it views as ‘people like us.’ That’s a policy decision. But in this case, the White House is trying to dress this love up as if it’s making nonproliferation. It’s not” (Breaking Defence, January 8). The shift in MTCR policy reflects geopolitical realpolitik, where arms sales and security alliances dictate nonproliferation measures. Many may consider that the US remains responsible for proliferating the long ranges and payloads to its strategic allies and partners, which in turn will increase, an arms race, security dilemma, and dangerous military escalation between the rivals.

There will be more cracks in the MTCR export control regime. Those who have already gotten rid of their missile capabilities to become part of the MTCR may regret their past voluntary decisions in the growing complex world where security continues to be supreme as part of the state’s policy. Those countries as part of the MTCR who initially got rid of their missile capability of the prescribed rates and load might also ask for exceptions because of the increasing security threat in Europe due to the Russia-Ukraine war. Such measures based on the new US policy change will further undermine the spirit of the regime, making exceptions for some while restricting others. It will further boost a big industry push for making and selling missiles and their related technology both within the US and abroad.

Implications for South Asia

Apparently, Pakistan may be under some pressure, especially after the Biden Administration’s restrictions on certain industries putting export control that may help Pakistan develop part of the missile for security purposes. Pakistan has already lived under such pressures. Nevertheless, the strategic community in Pakistan may reflect

that Pakistan needs to stay upright and remain fully confident since its nuclear and missile programs are India-specific.

The newly, changed US MTCR policy imperatives, especially Jake Sullivan's statement regarding such policy in India, also provide an opportunity for Pakistan to express its security concerns to the US regarding its nuclear weapons development program, including the use of its missiles as part of credible delivery systems for deterrence purposes. Pakistan may assert that all its force posturing is India-specific.

Pakistani leadership may raise genuine security concerns at the diplomatic, military, bureaucratic, and political levels that restrictions on Pakistan's development of deterrent forces for deterrence purposes may undermine the broader strategic stability in South Asia. This, in turn, will never be in the supreme security interest of any stakeholder, including the US, in South Asia, even though the US has withdrawn its military forces from Afghanistan. The US continues to have a special interest in South Asia for a variety of geopolitical and geostrategic reasons. Pakistan must maintain strategic autonomy and strengthen ties with China and Russia while keeping diplomatic channels open with the U.S.

Pakistan may reinforce that its nuclear weapons program has been and will continue to be India-centric while deterring India. Its long-range missile delivery system is only 2750km reaching up to Andaman and Nicobar Islands where India has a military system that might be used to target Pakistan. The strategic community in Pakistan considers that unlike India which has been developing its long ranges with increasing payloads may not only threaten the entire Europe but may also threaten the US mainland security at some point in the future.

Realism depicts that international politics is never permanent for any of the strategic players in the system. Today's friend can be tomorrow's archrival as in the case of Russia and China for the US, once part of the alliance system to defeat Nazi Germany during WWII.

Conclusion

Pakistan may continue to develop its indigenous capability for developing and testing systems that can be used for deterrence purposes. Self-sufficiency is the best strategy to begin with. It may continue to hold strong relationships with China, Russia, and other regional players that are part of the MTCR system. Also, it may continue to hold a balanced relationship with the US which remains the leading player in the international system despite the withering of the unipolar moment. There is no harm in making friends to accomplish one's national security interests. All states practice a similar imperative, which is normal in this imperfect world. Whether be or out of the MTCR, Pakistan like other countries could continue to develop capabilities for its security and deterrence purposes despite all the pressures. If the security threat remains genuine, it eventually surpasses all regional and international pressures.

<https://stratheia.com/policy-changes-in-the-mtcr-implications-for-south-asia/>