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Terrorising the Belt and Road: A critical analysis of security threats to Chinese nationals and businesses in Pakistan

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**Terrorising the Belt and Road:
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Abstract

This paper offers an overview of security threats facing China's Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan. With a focus on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it offers a comprehensive account of attacks on Chinese nationals and businesses from 2001 to 2017. The study identifies Takfiri Islamists and Baloch separatists as two major groups posing threat to CPEC. The paper argues that the much-publicised socio-economic benefits of CPEC cannot be reaped unless both forms of militancy are comprehensively addressed.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), One Belt One Road, Takfiri Islamist extremism, Baloch nationalism and separatism

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) comprises multiple infrastructure projects that are presently being implemented in various parts of Pakistan. With a total value exceeding \$60 billion, CPEC is a leading component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that seeks to integrate countries and regions with China to enhance international trade, socio-economic connectivity and development (Siddiqui, 2017).

Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled the idea of "Silk Road Economic Belt" in a 2013 speech at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University. Designed to stimulate economic development by enhancing regional and global interconnectivity, the BRI aims to integrate the world's largest landmass—from Vladivostok to Lisbon, from Gwadar to Shanghai and from Moscow to Singapore — through a network of hard and soft infrastructure linked to China - from transportation, telecommunication and energy infrastructure to financial integration and socio-political coordination (Rolland, 2017).

CPEC is expected to strengthen Pakistan's economy by construction of road networks, implementation of energy projects, and creation of special economic zones. CPEC became partly operational on 13 November 2016 when Chinese cargo of 250 containers was transported overland from Xinjiang in China to Gwadar Port in Pakistan for onward maritime shipment to Middle East, West Asia and Africa (*The Tribune*, 2016).

According to a media report, about 71,000 Chinese nationals visited Pakistan in 2016. While more than 27,500 visa extensions were granted in the same year, a 41 percent increase on 2015, suggesting more Chinese are staying in Pakistan for longer (*VOA*, 2017). While thousands of Chinese nationals are currently working on Belt and Road projects in Pakistan, this second wave of Chinese arrivals, numbering in the thousands, comprises entrepreneurs, traders and tourists. Some of them are opening restaurants, shopping stores and language schools, while others are exploring what products they could sell in Pakistan (a market of 207 million people) or what products they could make in a cost-effective manner in Pakistan. In Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, Chinese visitors now outnumber other foreigners, and the country's first-ever Chinese-language newspaper, *Huashang*, has been launched. In hotels, shops and roadmaps, instructions in the Chinese language are increasingly common (Hashim, 2017).

Given that the CPEC runs from Kashgar in China to the ports of Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan, it is a cross-country initiative for Pakistan. In recent decades, Pakistan has seen violence and instability, and the country's security situation has particular relevance to China (Pantucci & Lain, 2016). Chinese national and projects face violence at the hands of militants who oppose CPEC due to a variety of reasons, including Takfiri Islamists and Baloch regional nationalists or separatists. *Takfir* means excommunication and a *Takfiri* is an extremist Muslim who denounces other Muslims as *kafir* (disbeliever or infidel) owing to political, ideological or sect-based differences, and condone acts of violence including suicide bombings against Muslims and non-Muslims as legitimate methods of enforcing a Takfiri supremacist agenda.¹ Moreover, CPEC also faces violence at the hands of extremist

¹ While Takfiri clerics and groups do not identify themselves as Takfiris or simply reject this label, it is their very ideology and acts of excommunication and violence which demonstrate their Takfiri characteristics. Takfiris are also known as Khawarij, the first radical group in the history of Islam that adopted an extremist approach to *takfir* and violence. Within South Asia, Takfiri ideology and violence is a hallmark of an extremist section within Deobandi branch of Sunni Islam, and is evident in the shape of militant outfits such as the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Jundallah and other similar groups which operate with different names and overlapping membership. The Deobandis represent an ultra-conservative movement within Sunni Islam in South Asia, which is partly influenced by the Salafi/Wahhabi ideology due to its hardline stance against Sufi Sunni practices of visiting Sufi shrines and celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Milad or Mawlid). The name derives from Deoband, India, where the madrasa Darul Uloom Deoband is situated. The Deobandis represent a

sections within Baloch ethnic or nationalist groups whose agenda is to separate Balochistan from Pakistan. Such violence is part of a larger cross-national guerrilla war waged by Baloch regional nationalists against the governments of Pakistan and Iran, mostly culminating in acts of violence in the Balochistan province in southwestern Pakistan and the Sistan-Baluchestan province in southeastern Iran. In Pakistan, these separatist militants are currently engaged in a low-intensity insurgency against the state, and have systematically attacked government and security institutions, energy installations, non-Baloch population as well as foreign nationals. Baloch militant outfits are opposed to CPEC and consider it as an exploitative project by the governments of Pakistan and China.

According to a 2016 estimate, militants trying to disrupt CPEC's projects in Pakistan have killed 44 workers and wounded more than 100 since 2014 (Hassan, 2016). This ongoing threat has increased Chinese worries about CPEC's security. **Appendix 'A'** offers pictures of some of the attacks on Chinese nationals.

Indeed, some of the roots of anti-Chinese violence in Pakistan may be sourced to Chinese Islamist militants, some of whom are present in Pakistan's tribal areas along with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and their local handlers such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jundallah. An anonymous Pakistani intelligence official told a Karachi-based publication: "We are now quite certain that foreign militants living in Pakistan and their Pakistani hosts, infuriated with Islamabad's cooperation with Beijing, are carrying out these attacks (Ansari, 2007; Smith, 2009).

Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan have faced fairly regular attacks since 9/11. Pakistanis working on other Chinese projects have also been targeted. Since the 2001 attack in Sibi that injured one Chinese engineer and the 2004 attack in Gwadar that killed three Chinese engineers, there has been a pattern of unrelenting violence against Chinese nationals and other personnel working on Chinese or CPEC related projects. This has resulted in official condemnation by the Chinese government demanding Pakistani government to ensure full security of Chinese citizens in Pakistan. For example, when three Chinese engineers were killed in February 2006 in Hub, Balochistan (PDO, 2006), Vice Governor of the Anhui Province, Wen Haiying, stated "that the death of the Chinese engineers in the terrorist attack in Pakistan had [stirred] a wave of deep shock and grief among 64 million people of the Province" (BT, 2006; Smith, 2009).

In 2006, a group of Chinese nationals were kidnapped by Takfiri Islamists of a Deobandi madrassa in Islamabad who accused them of prostitution. In February 2012, Hua Jing, a Chinese female travelling in Peshawar was shot and killed in the street in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban as revenge for the Chinese government killing Muslims in the Xinjiang province (*Reuters*, 2012; Small, 2015). In May 2014, an adventurous Chinese cyclist, Hong Xudong, was kidnapped by a Takfiri Islamist group which claimed to have targeted him for being Chinese. He was eventually released in August 2015 in what was described as 'an intelligence operation' (*BBC*, 2015). In March 2015, militants set five oil tankers on fire and abducted four local workers reportedly carrying fuel for a Chinese company working on the Saindak Copper Gold Project in Balochistan's Chaghi district. Police sources believed that the tankers were targeted specifically because they were supplying oil to a Chinese company (Pantucci & Lain, 2016). In a statement, the Baloch

numerical minority but increasingly influential and resourceful community within Sunni Muslims in Pakistan. However, they constitute a significant part of the population in the Pashtun areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as in certain Baloch tribes including a section of the Brahuis. On a global scale, groups such as the Islamic State (IS or ISIS), Boko Haram, Al Shabab and Al-Qaeda may be classified as the Takfiris and represent extremist sections within Salafi (or 'Wahhabi') branch of Sunni Islam. It may be noted that the majority of victims of Takfiri violence happen to be moderate or mainstream Sunni Muslims. This is in addition to Takfiri attacks on non-Muslims, Sufi Muslims and Shia Muslims.

militant group BLA criticised the CPEC, describing it as an exploitative project on Baloch soil (Singh, 2016).

Concerns have been voiced by the Chinese about the security, speed of completion and costs of BRI related projects. In August 2013, Lin Dajian, of the Department of International Cooperation in the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), highlighted at the China–Afghanistan–Pakistan Track Two Dialogue the security issues and other challenges that could impede the progress of the project (SOP, 2013). In 2016, a nationalist Chinese paper, the *Global Times*, remarked that the increasing cost of security may be a big problem in efficiently pushing forward the projects (Weijia, 2016, cited in Pantucci & Lain, 2016).

Chinese media notes that much of the security risks over the BRI are concentrated in CPEC, with Beijing aware of the threats Chinese workers face in Pakistan (*China Daily*, 2016). Chinese requirements for security call for a more complex set of solutions, requiring a set of integrated services in which armed personnel are just one of the many components. For example, there is an associated cost related to security and insurance. Chinese insurance sector is beginning to realise the importance of this business niche. Traditional security, counter terrorism, as well as kidnapping for ransom are going to be important considerations for Chinese businesses operating in Pakistan. Special insurance is a lesser-known niche market, but due to the expansion of Chinese FDI, it may prove to be a thriving sector. Leading Chinese insurance companies such as Ping An and China Taiping are already exploring these opportunities in consultation with British insurance experts (Arduino, 2017).

The issue of increased business cost due to increased security is also noted in Pakistan. For example, in August 2017, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), the power sector regulator in Pakistan, allowed power producers to charge (consumers through tariff) one per cent of capital cost of 19 power projects worth \$15.56 billion under CPEC for 20-30 years on account of security cost. NEPRA worked out the annual cost at about \$2.92 million. In its order, NEPRA referred to Article 10 of the CPEC Agreement which provides that “the Pakistani party shall take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of Chinese personnel and projects”, and noted that the country had established a special security force/division of the armed forces to ensure security of CPEC projects (Kiani, 2017).

There is also an issue of criticism and suspicion by India and the USA about CPEC and the increasing cooperation between Pakistan and China. While India alleges Pakistan of cross-border militancy in Kashmir, Pakistan alleges that Indian agencies are responsible for violence in Balochistan and intend to disrupt CPEC. There are also questions about the takfiri ideologies and fatwas emanating from the Darul Uloom Deoband, the madrasa based in India where the Deobandi Islamist movement began and whose ideology is adhered to by the likes of the Taliban and LeJ (Syed *et al.*, 2016).

This paper offers a critical overview and analysis of security threats to Chinese nationals and businesses in Pakistan. For this purpose, the paper compiles and analyses all such attacks carried out from 2001 until 15 November 2017. The analysis highlights the dominant Takfiri Islamist dimension of these attacks followed by the Baloch separatist dimension. The paper also offers some policy implications of this analysis.

The data

Based on an extensive review of media reports and research studies published in English and Urdu languages within and outside Pakistan, **Table 1** offers an overview of almost all notable attacks on Chinese nationals and China- or CPEC-related workers in

Pakistan from 2001 to 15 November 2017.² It shows that most of these attacks have been carried out by two distinct groups: Takfiri Islamists and Baloch separatists.

Table1. An overview of attacks on Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan (2001-2017)

Location	Date	Description
Kharan, Balochistan	12 August 2017	Armed militants hurled grenades at the buildings of National Highway Authority, residence of engineers working on CPEC projects. Baloch separatist group Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) accepted responsibility for the attack (<i>TBP</i> , 2017).
Karachi, Sindh	10 July 2017	A roadside improvised explosive device (IED) went off minutes after the motorcade of Chinese engineers passed through the Steel Town. The blast was aimed at Chinese engineers working on CPEC related projects in Thatta. Two injured. An obscure Sindhi separatist group Sindh Revolutionary Army (SRA) claimed responsibility for the attack (<i>Dawn</i> , 2017a).
Islamabad	6 June 2017	Two Chinese nationals assaulted in Islamabad after a business deal turned sour. Their cash and travel documents looted (<i>Nawaiwaqt</i> , 2017).
Quetta, Balochistan	24 May 2017	Two Chinese citizens (a man and a woman) kidnapped from Jinnah Town area of Quetta and later killed. Following the abduction, 11 Chinese nationals living in the vicinity were shifted to Karachi (Shah, 2017). The abductees were later killed by the Islamic State (Patranobis, 2017). A few days ago, Pakistan army's media arm (the ISPR) had claimed a major success against a Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Islamic State nexus of militancy in a remote warren of caves in Mastung district (<i>Dawn</i> , 2017b).
Turbat, Balochistan	19 May 2017	Militants gunned down three workers building a Chinese-funded highway, linking Gwadar to Quetta. They were making a trip to a marketplace in the small town of Hoshab to buy daily supplies. They had been working on road under the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) (<i>The Nation</i> , 2017b).
Gwadar, Balochistan	13 May 2017	Two gunmen riding on a motorbike killed ten construction workers in Peshukan Ganz who were working on CPEC related road projects. Another two workers sustained injuries. The Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack (<i>Anadolu Agency</i> , 2017; <i>Press TV</i> , 2017).
Rohri, Sindh	14 December 2016	A targeted attack (near Patni area) on a convoy of Chinese engineers working on CPEC projects. The blast occurred along a road leading to three campsites set up for Chinese staffers. The blast did not cause any damage except from shattering the wind shields of a nearby truck (<i>Zee News</i> , 2016). A student of Shah Abdul Latif University was later arrested for alleged involvement (Memon, 2017).
Pasni, Balochistan	26 November 2016	Two persons working on a CPEC project were killed on their way to work (RFE/RL, 2016).
Ormara, Balochistan	16 October 2016	Attack on a Chinese convoy through an IED. Four workers killed. Baloch militants claimed responsibility (Kumar, 2016).
Hub, Balochistan	28 September 2016	Two Chinese engineers were killed and another two injured in the Windar Kinraag area of Hub district. They were working on the Dudher Zinc Project, a part of CPEC. Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack (Singh, 2016).
Karachi, Sindh	30 May 2016	A Chinese engineer and his driver and private guard were injured when a roadside bomb exploded, as their vehicle passed through Steel Town, one of Karachi's industrial quarters. A Sindhi separatist group claimed responsibility for the attack (Boone, 2016; Krishnan, 2016; <i>The Economic Times</i> , 2017).

² These statistics do not include attacks where no Chinese national was targeted or where the attacked workers were not employed in a Chinese project.

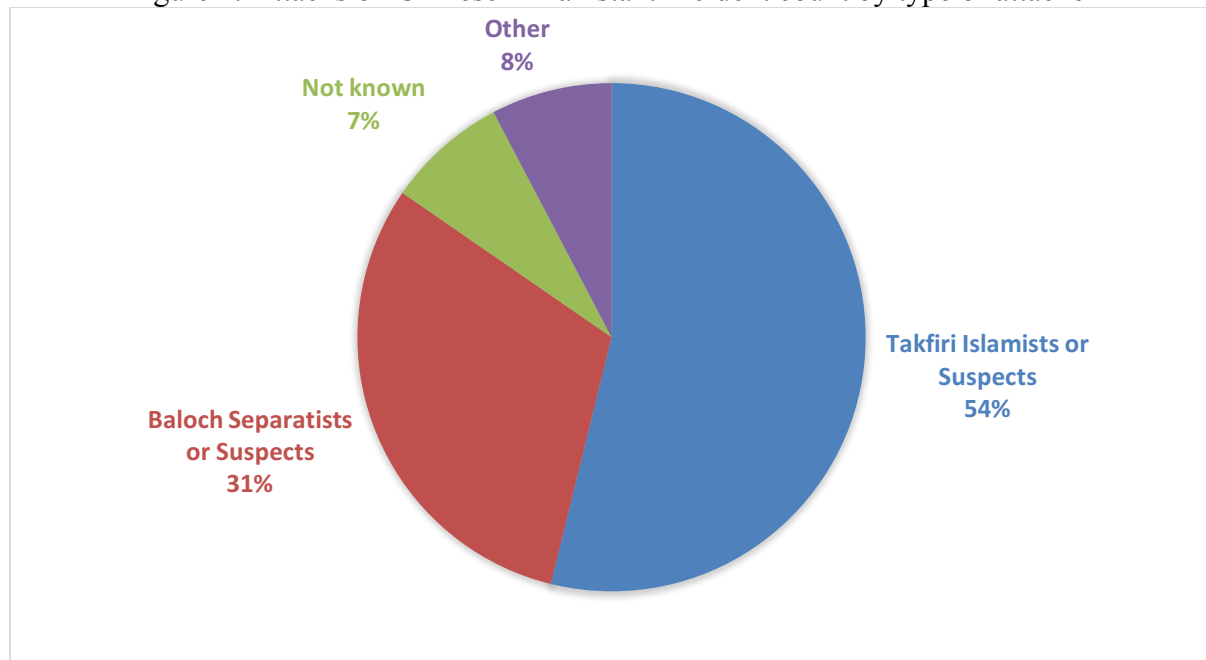
Mastung, Balochistan	23 March 2015	Five oil tanker set on fire and four drivers abducted, carrying fuel for a Chinese company working on the Saindak project (Baloch, 2015, Shah, 2015). Takfiri groups have attacked Shia Muslims and travellers to Iran in this area on several occasions.
Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	19 May 2014	Taliban militants kidnapped a tourist from China who was riding a bicycle. The man was kidnapped near Dera Ismail Khan. Pakistani Taliban (TTP) took credit for the abduction. "We want our detained militants to be released and we kidnapped him for this purpose" (Craig & Khan, 2014). He was later recovered in August 2015.
Chaghi, Balochistan	14 July 2013	Attack on a convoy of fuel tankers linked to Chinese operations in Chaghi district. Four trucks were destroyed (Baloch, 2015). On more than one previous occasions, Takfiri militant groups affiliated with Taliban have claimed responsibility for attacks on fuel tankers (<i>NBC</i> , 2011).
Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan	22 June 2013	11 tourists killed by Takfiri Islamist militants affiliated with Taliban and LeJ in Nanga Parbat mountainous area. Three Chinese were amongst the slain tourists (<i>AFP</i> , 2014; Malik, 2013). The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. The perpetrators were reportedly from Diamer, Mansehra and Chilas (Kohistan) (Burke, 2013).
Karachi, Sindh	21 May 2013	A targeted bomb blast in Clifton seafront in Karachi, aimed at a van full of 11 Chinese port workers and engineers, ahead of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Pakistan (<i>Reuters</i> , 2013). One engineer was injured during the attack (Malik, 2016).
Karachi, Sindh	23 July 2012	A bomb attack outside Chinese consulate in Karachi. Three people were injured. One car and three motorbikes were destroyed. Another bomb planted in a motorcycle near the Chinese consulate in Karachi was defused (Mirza, 2012). Similar attacks in Central Asia have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups.
Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	28 February 2012	A Chinese woman and her male companion were killed in Peshawar by the Taliban. She was a university student (Mehsud, 2012; <i>The Telegraph</i> , 2012). Takfiri Islamists such as Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) are known to operate in this area. Taliban claimed that she was killed in revenge for 'Chinese atrocities' on Muslims in Xinjinag.
Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	1 September 2008	Pakistani Taliban kidnapped two Chinese telecommunications engineers.
Hub, Balochistan	19 July 2007	A suicide car bomber, apparently targeting a convoy of Chinese mining technicians and engineers, killed at least 29 people, including seven policemen, and injuring 30 others in Hub. The bomber rammed into a police van that was escorting the Chinese. The dead were Pakistani nationals while the Chinese workers were unhurt (<i>BBC</i> , 2007; Shah, 2016). Suicide bombing in Pakistan is usually a characteristic of Takfiri Islamist groups.
Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	8 July 2007	Three Chinese workers were killed and another Chinese wounded. The attackers with face covered were shouting religious slogans when they opened fire on four Chinese nationals in a three-wheel auto-rickshaw factory at Khazana, near Peshawar (<i>Xinhua</i> , 2007a). While the police initially thought it was an incident of robbery, later police inquiry revealed that a large number of apparently Takfiri militants with long hair, beards and caps were involved in this pre-meditated murder. At least one madrassa student was also involved (<i>The News</i> , 2007).
Islamabad	22 June 2007	Seven Chinese citizen along with two Pakistanis kidnapped by armed Takfiri militants (Anthony, 2007). They were kidnapped from an acupuncture clinic cum massage centre in Islamabad by a radical Deobandi madrassa's female and male students belonging to Lal Masjid / Jamia Hafsa (<i>Xinhua</i> , 2007b; Hussain, 2011).
Hub, Balochistan	15 February 2006	Three Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were ambushed in their vehicle by gunmen on motorcycles. These engineers were involved in the construction of Attock cement factory. The attackers struck as the workers were leaving the factory. Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were killed (<i>BBC</i> , 2006; Shah, 2016; <i>Xinhua</i> , 2006). Unconfirmed reports say the Baloch Liberation Army claimed the attack.

South Waziristan, FATA	9 October 2004	Taliban militants kidnapped two Chinese engineers working on Gomal Zam dam in South Waziristan. One Chinese engineer was killed (<i>China Daily</i> , 2004; <i>Dawn</i> , 2007). Taliban from South Waziristan and their Uzbek affiliates were found to be involved in this attack.
Gwadar, Balochistan	3 May 2004	A car bomb in Gwadar killed three Chinese engineers and injured another ten. The engineers were developing a Beijing-funded deep-sea port in Gwadar (Shah, 2016). Police said the attack could be the work of Islamist extremists or local nationalists. The blast occurred at around 9am as 12 Chinese engineers were being taken to work in a van. Another six persons were injured. These engineers were working on Port facilities in Gwadar. 400 Chinese were engaged by China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC). Islamist militants had attacked foreigners in the past including the 2002 attack in Karachi when a suicide bomber killed 11 French naval engineers, and the attack on US consulate in the same year (<i>BBC</i> , 2004).
Sibi, Balochistan	7 May 2001	One person was killed and three others, including a Chinese engineer, injured seriously when the survey team of a Chinese company was attacked in the Sunny area of Sibi district (Raman, n.d.).

A deeper analysis of the data compiled in **Table 1** reveals that attacks by Takfiri Islamist militant groups or suspects are most grave not only in terms of number of attacks but also in terms of deaths, injuries and abductions.

Figure 1 shows that 54% of all attacks on Chinese or CPEC related projects have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups, 31% by Baloch separatists and 15% by others or not known. While a few of these attacks remain unclaimed by any group ('not known'), there is a known strategy and pattern of silence or denial on some occasions by Takfiri Islamist groups as a face saving exercise by simply disowning the bloodbath and creating confusion about the actual masterminds of their attacks (Mir, 2013).

Figure 1. Attacks on Chinese in Pakistan: Incident count by type of attacker



Figures 2 and 3 show that 67% of all fatalities may be attributed to Takfiri Islamists while Baloch separatists are responsible for 29%. Moreover, 76% of all injuries may be attributed to Takfiri Islamists and 14% to Baloch separatists. Moreover, the data (**Table 1**) shows that all abductions thus far (18 Chinese nationals kidnapped) have been carried out by

Takfiri Islamist groups who usually try to swap hostages in exchange for freedom of the arrested terrorists of Pakistani Taliban (TTP), LeJ, Al-Qaeda and other affiliated militant groups. It may be noted that TTP, an umbrella organisation of Islamist militant factions and an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, is battling the Pakistani government to enforce a hegemonic Islamist agenda. It has also attacked foreign individuals and organisations (Mehsud, 2012).

Figure 2. Fatalities by type of attacker

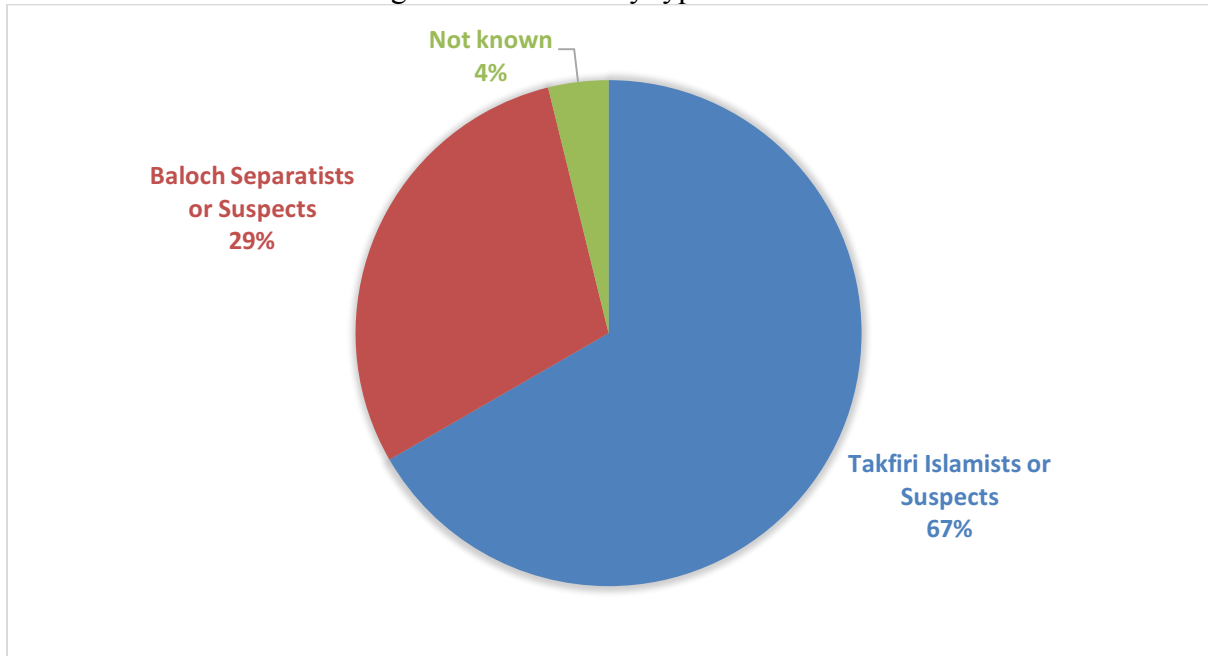
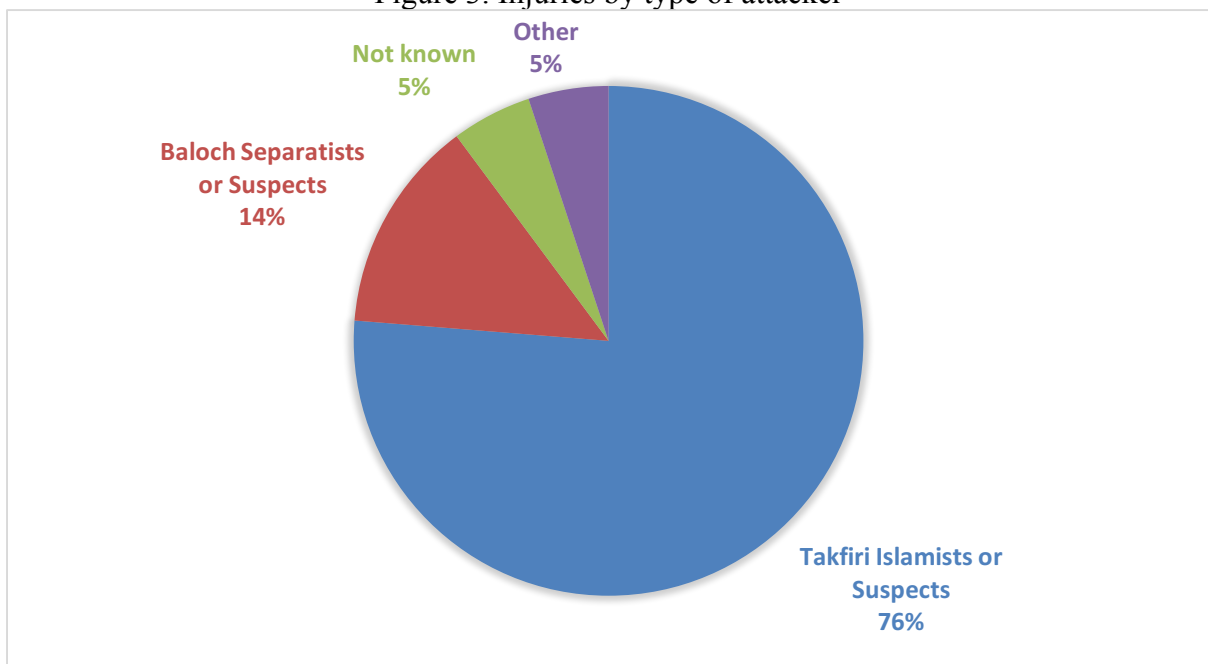


Figure 3. Injuries by type of attacker



Figures 4 and 5 indicate the scale of fatalities and injuries sustained by Chinese nationals in Pakistan, showing that 72% of all such killings are carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups while Baloch separatists are responsible for 28%. In terms of injuries of Chinese nationals, responsibility lies with the Takfiri Islamists (67%), Baloch separatists (17%) and Others (16%).

Figure 4. Chinese fatalities in Pakistan by type of attacker

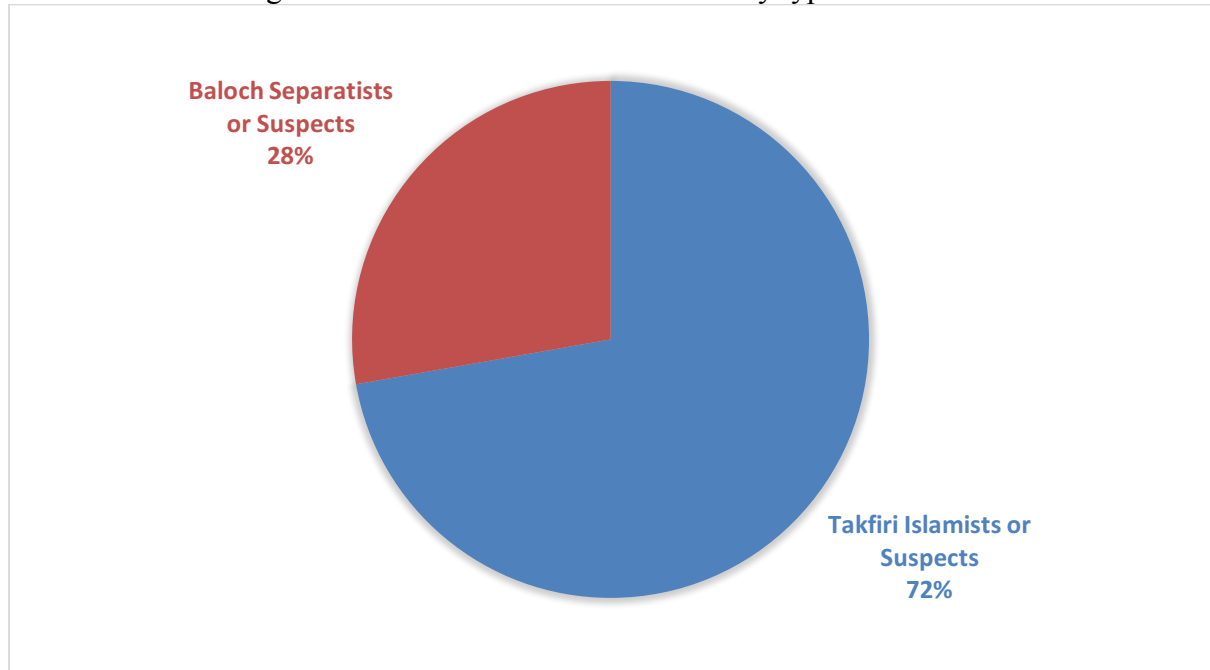
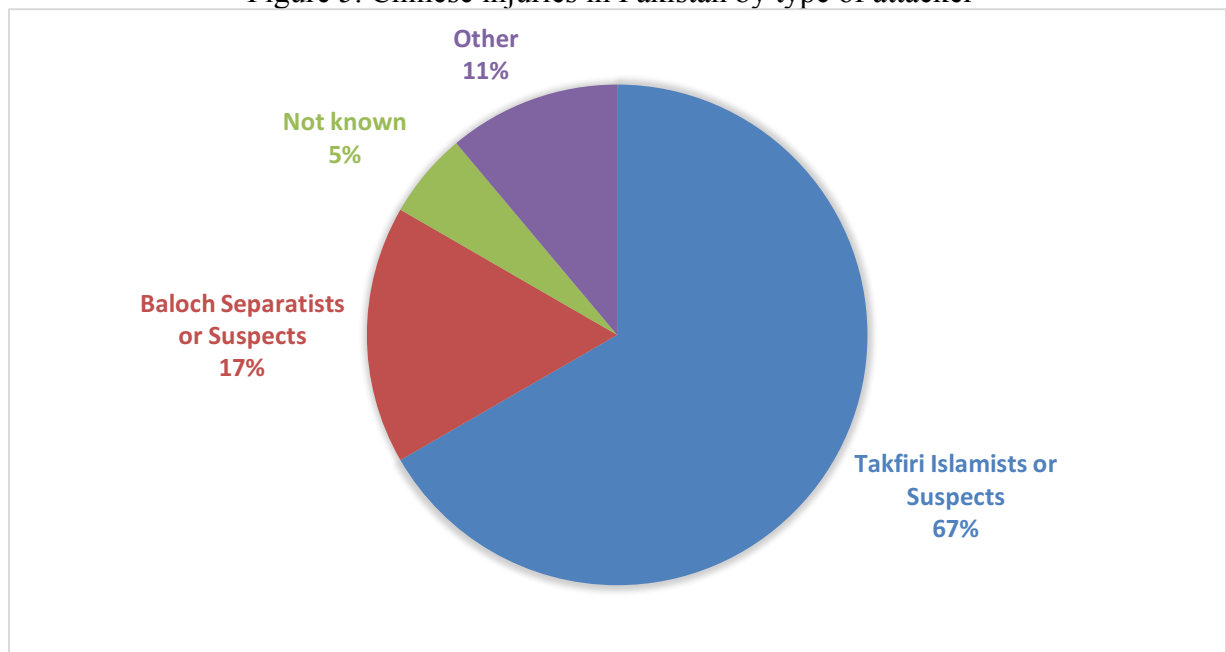


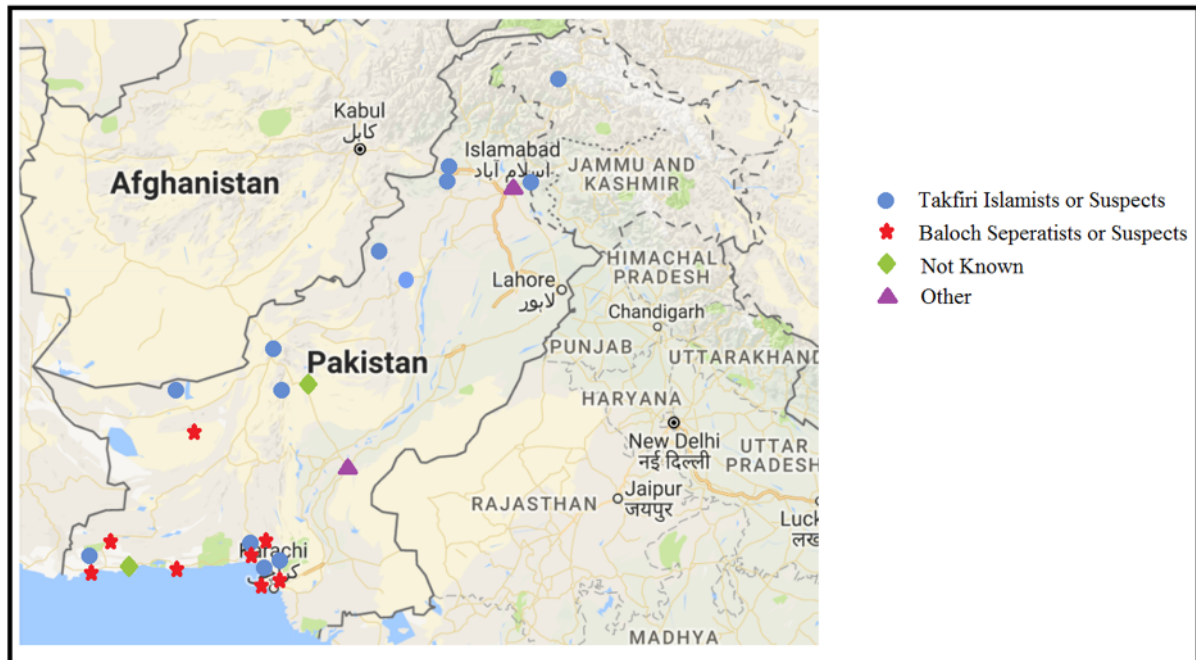
Figure 5. Chinese injuries in Pakistan by type of attacker



In terms of the geographical spread of these attacks, the data suggests that while the Baloch separatist attacks are limited to certain specific areas in Balochistan, the Takfiri Islamist attacks are more widespread throughout the country, from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northwestern Pakistan to various parts of the Sindh and Balochistan provinces in the south (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Geographical location of the attacks on Chinese nationals or projects in Pakistan



Intelligence reports in Pakistan have identified Takfiri militant groups including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) as key threats to CPEC projects in Pakistan. In particular, Al-Qaeda (Ilyas Kashmiri Group), TTP (Tariq Geedar Group) and LeJ have been identified as the main terrorist outfits which can launch attacks on those working on the CPEC project (Awan, 2016). According to a retired senior Pakistan army officer, General Saad Khattak, recent terrorist attacks by LeJ and the re-emergence of TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar are a clear signal that much needs to be done to eliminate threats to CPEC and Chinese nationals in Pakistan (Khattak, 2017).

These threats to CPEC are also noted in the Chinese state media. According to Wenwen (2017), it is “worth noting that Islamic militants have often carried out abductions of foreigners on Pakistani soil, either for ransom or to get publicity for their cause. Chinese people have also been targeted occasionally, despite the friendly relations between the two countries.” Wenwen notes that, “the restive region has seen frequent violence committed by Islamic terrorists and separatists and the Belt and Road program is often exposed to potential threats”. The Deobandi connection is also noted by Small (2015) in his analysis of Islamist terrorist threat to China. Referring to Pakistan’s Deobandi religio-political group (JUI), Small (2015: 67) notes that the “JUI is part of the Sunni fundamentalist Deobandi movement. It was in JUI madrassas that many of the Taliban leadership received their education, JUI intermediaries helped facilitate the Taliban’s military and financial relationships in the Gulf, and JUI-linked militant groups helped provide logistical support to Osama Bin Laden while he was in Pakistan.” In 2010, Chinese government invited JUI’s leader Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman to Beijing in an attempt to secure his cooperation on security issues. Small (2015) argues that the Chinese invitations to Deobandi clerics could only mean one thing: “Beijing had a problem, and didn’t believe its existing channels in Pakistan were doing enough to solve it” (p.68).

In 2014, an affiliate group of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar warned that it would hit Chinese interests in Pakistan. The 9th issue of the Ahrar’s official

magazine, 'Ihya-i-Khilafat' carried an article by Ehsanullah Ehsan, a key commander and official spokesperson, under the title of "Hidden Motives Behind the Chinese Investment in Pakistan". The militant group asked Beijing to stop persecuting Xinjiang Muslims or face action (*The Nation*, 2014).

Takfiri Islamist militancy in Pakistan

With a total population exceeding 207 million (PT, 2017), Pakistan faces significant challenges in terms of law and order and security. While law and order is an ongoing challenge in large cities such as Karachi and Lahore, there are specific security related challenges in the aftermath of 9/11 when Pakistan based Islamist militants (including jihadist and takfiri militants) aligned with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda started targeted Pakistani government and security institutions in reprisal of the US attack on Afghanistan. According to an estimate, the annual death toll from terrorist attacks rose from 164 in 2003 to 3318 in 2009, with a total of 35,000 Pakistanis killed between September 2001 and May 2011 (Hamid, 2011). While the situation has improved in recent years after the government launched military Operation Zarb-e-Azab in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region of the country in April 2014, Islamist militants are still responsible for the majority of violence and killings in Pakistan, and also pose threat to CPEC.

In 2014, in a social media video that was to have far reaching consequences for Takfiri Islamist militancy in Pakistan, the Lal Masjid-run Jamia Hafsa madrassa for girls extended its support to the IS. Jamia Hafsa is a Deobandi madrassa in Islamabad, affiliated with the Lal-Masjid (Red Mosque) which was raided by Pakistan's military forces in July 2007 to eliminate its terror-related activities. The Jamia Hafsa is known for instigating violence and propagating Takfiri ideology (*The News*, 2014). In one such incident, owners of a Chinese massage centre, two Chinese citizens, were kidnapped along with five female and two male employees. Two vehicles full of armed Lal-Masjid seminary students or vigilantes raided the massage centre and abducted the owners and their employees, as Jamia Hafsa management alleged that the owners were running a brothel under the garb of a massage centre (Hussain, 2011). Chinese Ambassador Luo Zhaohui demanded the Pakistan government to take all measures to secure urgent release of the hostages (*Xinhua*, 2007b).

In a similar Takfiri attack, two Chinese citizens were abducted in Quetta on 24 May 2017. Following this incident, Pakistan's military conducted an operation on June 1-3 in Mastung, a town north of Quetta, that has a large Deobandi madrassa and is a hub of numerous attacks against Shia Muslims as well as traders and pilgrims going to or returning from Iran (Reuters, 2014a). Dorsey (2017) argues that such attacks aim at disrupting the new Silk Road and may be attributed to some external forces that want to destabilise both Pakistan and Iran.

In fact, there is some evidence of foreign intelligence agencies trying to recruit and use Takfiri terrorist groups in Pakistan to promote cross-border terrorism. For example, quoting U.S. intelligence memos, Perry (2012) reports that Israeli Mossad agents posed as CIA officers to recruit members of Jundallah for attacks against the Iranian government. The covert Mossad operation was carried out in 2007-2008. The Mossad agents used U.S. passports and currency to pose as CIA spies to try to recruit members of Jundallah, a Pakistan-based Sunni [Takfiri] extremist organisation that has carried out a series of attacks in Iran and assassinations of government officials. "The report sparked White House concerns that Israel's program was putting Americans at risk," the intelligence officer told Perry. Perry (2012) notes that Israel's operation jeopardized the U.S. administration's fragile relationship with Pakistan, which was under immense pressure from Iran to crack down on Jundallah.

In June 2017, Amaq, the Islamic State's (IS or ISIS, the international Takfiri terrorist group) newsletter, announced the killing of the two Chinese citizens that had been kidnapped

from Quetta a few days ago. Previously ISIS had killed a Chinese hostage in Syria in 2015 after Beijing refused to pay ransom for his release (Stacey, 2017). The killings in Quetta were carried out by the Al Alami branch of the LeJ, which has developed links with ISIS in recent years (Gul, 2017). Banned in Pakistan and several other countries, LeJ is a Takfiri Islamist terror group (emanating from the Deobandi offshoot of Sunni Islam) that has carried out numerous terrorist activities targeting Sufi Sunnis, Shias, Bareilvi Sunnis, moderate Deobandis, Christians, Ahmadis, and other vulnerable communities as well as state institutions of Pakistan. In November 2016, LeJ carried out a terrorist attack on a police training centre in Quetta in which 61 police recruits were killed. LeJ is also involved in past attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan (*Al Jazeera*, 2016).

According to official sources, the June 2017 operation in Mastung to recover the abducted Chinese citizens killed 12 terrorists, including two suicide bombers belonging to LeJ, who were attempting to set up a foothold for ISIS in the Balochistan province (Gul, 2017; Xenakis, 2017). In the said operation, security forces destroyed an explosives facility and recovered a cache of arms and ammunition as well as the vehicle used in the kidnapping of the Chinese. The Chinese citizens themselves, however, were not found on site. Soon after the military operation, ISIS announced that the two Chinese hostages had been murdered (Rasmussen & Baloch, 2017).

A former senior government administrator of Pakistan's tribal regions, Mahmood Shah, notes that LeJ is the actual arm and operating wing for the Islamic State (IS) in Pakistan. He notes that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami has a history of attacks in Balochistan and its militants have been trained by al Qaeda for urban fighting. He urged the government to chalk out a comprehensive security plan for Balochistan as militants keep coming and attacking (Haider & Dilawar, 2016).

There are other similar incidents of attacks on Chinese workers by Takfiri groups. In October 2004, a group of kidnappers including two militants from South Waziristan's Mehsud tribe and three Uzbeks abducted and killed a Chinese engineer near Jandala in Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal area. The two kidnapped Chinese engineers, Wang Ende and Wang Peng, were working on a dam project in Pakistan for Chinese firm Sino Hydro Corp (*China Daily*, 2004).

In a similar attack, Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the February 2012 killing of a Chinese woman in a market in Peshawar, saying it was in revenge for China's killing of Muslims in its northwestern region of Xinjiang (Mehsud, 2012).

It may be noted that despite LeJ's primary target being the Shia, Bareilvi Sunni and Sufi Sunni communities, it has been responsible for attacks against multiple targets including Christians, Ahmadis, Pakistani military and government officials as well as foreign nationals. LeJ was also involved in the killing four US oil company workers in 1997, Daniel Pearl's abduction and beheading in 2002, the Marriott hotel bombing in Islamabad in 2008, the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore in 2009, and the attack on Pakistan Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in 2009 (Shahid, 2009). Shahid notes that LeJ works in tandem with the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other militant outfits for many of these attacks. In particular, its international or Al-Alami faction actively collaborates with ISIS and al-Qaeda, such as the attack that targeted a Shia procession in Kabul in 2011. In 2015, 43 Ismaili Shias were massacred in Karachi by Jundallah, an affiliate group of Pakistani Taliban and LeJ, that carried out this attack on behalf of ISIS. After this attack, Jundallah's [or Jundullah] spokesperson Marwat said in a media statement that "these people were Ismaili, and we consider them *kafir* [infidels]. In the coming days, we will attack Ismailis, Shias and Christians." He asserted that the ISIS is like a brother to Jundallah and that "whatever plan they [the Islamic State] have, we will support them" (*The Express Tribune*, 2014).

Similarly, members of the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (an affiliate of LeJ and TTP) acted as the foot-soldiers for ISIS in the Quetta hospital bombing in August 2016. Ideologically, the “Islamic purification” that ISIS seeks through Sufi Sunni killing and Shia killings brings it closer to the Pakistani Taliban, LeJ and other Deobandi militant groups. While TTP has more influence in certain Islamist sections of Pashtun population, LeJ is more useful for the ISIS owing to its deeper infiltration into the Punjab and other provinces, as well as into mainstream Pakistani politics through Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat (ASWJ, a banned Takfiri outfit which was previously known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, SSP). LeJ started operating in 1996 as an offshoot of SSP. When the government banned LeJ and SSP in 2002, SSP formed the ASWJ, which still continues to operate publicly despite being re-banned. With the Gwadar Port formally launching trade through CPEC, the entrance of the economic “lifeline” is in Balochistan. Evidently, Pakistan cannot afford any remnants or sleeper cells of Takfiri militant groups in any shape and form (Shahid, 2016).

On 13 November 2016, even as the CPEC convoys of trucks converged in Quetta en route to Gwadar port, a Sufi Sunni shrine in Balochistan’s Khuzdar district was targeted by a powerful bomb, killing at least 52 people and injuring more than hundred. The explosion at the Shah Noorani shrine is a known hallmark Takfiri militants (Ramachandran, 2016) who allege that Sufi Sunni practices are tantamount to polytheism and idol worship. While this attack did not target the CPEC project directly, and was a sectarian attack by Takfiris on Sufi Sunnis, it raised apprehensions about Balochistan’s vulnerability to terrorism and violence. In another similar attack, on 5 October 2017, a suicide bomber targeted the shrine of Pir Rakhel Shah situated in Fatehpur, situated in Jhal Magsi district of Balochistan. At least 22 people, including Sufi Sunni and Shia Muslims and two policemen were killed and more than 30 others injured in this attack (*The News*, 2017).

However, the Takfiri Islamist violence facing Chinese nationals in Pakistan may not be seen in isolation from Islamist militancy within China. The next section offers an overview of militancy facing Beijing in its restive Xinjiang region.

Islamist militancy in China

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), home to roughly nine million non-Han Uyghurs and other minorities, has been associated with rising political violence in China (Dreyer, 2005; Hopper & Webber, 2009; Small, 2015; Smith, 2009). Uyghurs (or Uighurs) in general are of Turkish ethnic origin and follow the Islamic faith.

Historically, China’s control over Xinjiang has been fragile. The region came under full Chinese control during the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century. The region was briefly autonomous as “East Turkistan Republic” during Chinese civil war. Han–Uyghur relations have been tense since the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949. Many Uyghurs viewed Chinese central government’s criticism and restrictions on religious practice during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), as major affronts to their religious and cultural identity (Millward, 2007; Tanner & Bellacqua, 2016). After Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, a wave of political reforms was initiated by his successor, Deng Xiaoping. These reforms included some easing of the religious suppression (Kindropp & Hamrin, 2014). Further reforms in 1980s included relaxing some past assimilation policies, undertaking repairs to damaged mosques and other religious facilities, and inclusion of minority representatives to key party and government positions in Xinjiang (Tanner & Bellacqua, 2016). The decade of the 1980s was particularly notable for a reopening of contacts between China’s Uyghur population and Muslims in Central Asia and the Middle East. However, this period of liberalization also provided an opportunity for a rising tide of social protest and violence in Xinjiang during the 1990s. Some Chinese analysts emphasize incitement and support from

foreign-based radical organizations and Islamist ideologies as a cause of Uyghur social violence (Millward, 2007). Xinjiang was also affected by major geopolitical events in the 1980s and early 1990s. These include the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the era of the Afghan jihad which culminated in the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan in 1988 and, later, the formation of five newly independent Muslim-majority Central Asian states on Xinjiang's western frontier. Some Chinese Uyghurs fought in the Islamist resistance against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and later returned to Xinjiang with a radicalised mind-set. Chinese scholars point to these as examples of destabilizing events in the region (Tanner & Bellacqua, 2016).

In Guantanamo, there were 22 Chinese Uyghur detainees caught fighting with Al Qaeda and Taliban, so China considers Xinjiang as its frontier against Islamist terrorism and violence (Wayne, 2007). In recent years (2012 to 2016), many Chinese Uyghurs travelled to Syria to wage jihad along with ISIS and Al-Qaeda militants against Assad regime (Lin, 2016). According to an estimate, there are about 2000 Chinese Uyghurs in ISIS and other jihadist groups in Syria. In December 2015, China expanded its anti-terrorism law to conduct operations abroad with the consent of host governments. In August 2016, China signed military agreement with Syria and also formed an anti-terror alliance with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Lin, 2016).

Beijing is concerned that Uyghurs are using the Pakistani territory to create unrest in western China. Beijing suspects the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) of carrying out attacks in Xinjiang (DW, 2015). The ETIM, which was formed over 30 years ago, is considered to be among the most dangerous "separatist" groups in China. The Chinese government as well as the UN have declared ETIM as a terrorist organisation.

The bulk of the Uyghur community in Pakistan, numbering a couple of thousands, is in Rawalpindi, and operates under the close watch of the Chinese government. Particularly since 9/11, the Chinese embassy in Islamabad has maintained a strong interest in Uyghurs in Pakistan, extending benefits such as funding for scholarships, collecting precise information about their numbers and locations (Wright & Page, 2011). Indeed, the dominant majority of them are peaceful and moderate. Chinese officials have talked about estimates of between forty and eighty Uyghur militants in Pakistan.

As ETIM is based in areas adjacent to Pakistan and Central Asia, their collaboration with Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and other Takfiri Islamist militants may not be ignored. When the Karakoram Highway between China and Pakistan was opened, thousands of young Uyghurs crossed the Chinese border to attend religious schools or madrassas in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Qatar, and this practice continued until late 1990s. Many of those who returned to Xinjiang were influenced by Salafi/Wahhabi and Deobandi ideologies. Some of these Uyghurs also opened Hizb-ut Tahrir cells in Xinjiang to cultivate and spread radical ideology, and became extremely critical of Beijing's policies.

Owing to this gradual radicalisation, nearly 200 people died in Urumqi riots in July 2009 (BBC, 2009; Escobar, 2011; Small, 2015). The first day's rioting which involved at least 1,000 Uyghurs, began as a protest but escalated into violent attacks that mainly targeted Han people. Two days later, hundreds of Han people clashed with both police and Uyghurs. Chinese officials said that most of those killed were Hans. The government's official line was that the violence was not only initiated by the protesters, but were also premeditated and coordinated by Uyghur separatists abroad. Eligen Imibakhi, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Xinjiang Regional People's Congress, blamed these riots on "extremism, separatism and terrorism" (*Xinhua*, 2009).

In March 2008, a flight from Urumqi to Beijing had to make an emergency landing in Lanzhou after a failed terrorist attempt. Reports citing Chinese sources claim that a 19-year-old Uyghur woman, along with a Central Asian and a Pakistani national (all three of them

carrying Pakistani passports) were involved in a “meticulously planned, tightly coordinated, terror attack activity”. Subsequent accounts suggest that the woman, Guazlinur Turdi, had “spent a significant amount of time in Pakistan” and that the third suspect, a Pakistani man who was detained a week later, had “masterminded” and “instigated” the attack (Small, 2015).

In July 2011, Islamist militants waged systematic attacks in Kashgar, stabbing random people and setting fire to a restaurant. In total, 23 people were killed including eight attackers. Subsequent investigation found involvement of ETIM. Chinese state media confirmed that all the suspected attackers were Uyghur, and an initial investigation by the Kashgar government concluded that the perpetrators were recruited in Pakistan and gained explosives and firearms training at training camps in Pakistan along with Taliban and al-Qaeda (Wivell, 2011). The Kashgar city government reported that one of the men involved had confessed to receiving explosives and firearms training in ETIM camps in Pakistan (CCTV, 2009).

Attacks in neighbouring countries

There is evidence of unrelenting violence facing Chinese nationals in neighbouring countries. One such example is the killing of 11 Chinese road workers near Kunduz, Afghanistan, in June 2004. Afghan government’s reports indicated Taliban’s involvement. The slain workers belonged to the China Railway Shisiju Group Corporation, based in Jinan, (Gall, 2004) and were among more than 100 Chinese workers and engineers who had arrived in Afghanistan to carry out a World Bank project of rebuilding the Kabul to Tajikistan Road. Liu Jianchao, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, condemned the attack and asserted that the construction projects would not be stopped.

In June 2010, Dubai’s State Security Court found two ethnic Uyghurs guilty of a terrorist plot to attack the Dragon Mart, a shopping mall on the outskirts of Dubai known as the largest Chinese trading hub outside mainland China (Small, 2015). According to the court documents, Shalmo, the main plotter, had been recruited by ETIM during a pilgrimage to Mecca in 2006. He travelled with the recruiter from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, where he spent a year in an ETIM camp in Waziristan receiving weapons and explosives training. After being assigned to attack the Dragon Mart, Shalmo flew from Islamabad to Dubai where he conducted scouting missions at the mall (Small, 2015).

In another incident in 2013, a bus carrying Chinese businessmen was attacked by armed militants on the way from Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) to China, killing 19 passengers (BBC, 2003). Before that, in June 2002, a Chinese diplomat, Wang Jianping, was gunned down in the Kyrgyz capital. Beijing has blamed the attacks outside of China on Islamist militants of ETIM (Smith, 2009).

More recently, on 30 August 2016, a car rammed through the gates of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek and exploded. The driver of the car, a suicide bomber, was killed while three embassy employees were injured. According to media reports, Uyghur Islamist militants working with Takfiri jihadists in Syria (Al Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda) were involved in this attack (Dzyubenko, 2006).

According to Chinese sources, ETIM sent scores of terrorists into China, establishing bases in Xinjiang and setting up training stations to produce weapons, ammunition and explosives (Reed & Raschke, 2010). ETIM itself claims to have trained its members in camps in Khost, Bagram, Herat, and Kabul (Garver, 2006). In 2003 ETIM’s leader, Hasan Mahsum, was killed by the Pakistani army during a raid in South Waziristan (Small, 2015).

China continued with its Strike Hard campaign against these militants and also pressed Governments in Central Asia to clamp down on the “three evils”: terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism (Haider, 2005). The founding in 1996 of the Shanghai

Five, which later evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, was in large part a product of Beijing's concerns about Uyghur militants and their foreign backers (Small, 2015).

While Takfiri Islamist militancy is the most potent threat to Chinese nationals and CPEC or BRI projects in South and Central Asia, there is also an aspect of regional nationalist or separatist militancy in Pakistan which needs to be considered. The Gwadar port, through which most of the western route of the CPEC runs, is located in the Balochistan province. Given Balochistan's vital role, instability and violence in the province brings concerns about safe operationalisation of CPEC (Ramachandran, 2016). The next section discusses this issue.

Baloch separatist militancy

In addition to Takfiri Islamist militancy which is a major threat to Pakistani and foreign interests including Chinese interests across all regions in Pakistan, another significant threat is posed by the Baloch ethnic separatist militancy in Balochistan. Relations between Baloch nationalists and Pakistan's federal government have seen ups and downs since the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, intermittently bursting out into violence.

The current wave of Baloch insurgency, which started in 2004, has various demands ranging from greater control of the province's natural resources and political autonomy to full freedom and separation from Pakistan. Extremist sections within Baloch nationalist and separatist groups are not only attacking Pakistan government officials, security institutions and non-Baloch ethnic groups, they are also targeting the CPEC projects, alleging that their resources are being exploited while the beneficiaries of CPEC and its consequent economic development are not the Baloch people but 'outsiders' (i.e., Punjabis, Chinese, etc) (TOI, 2016; Ramachandran, 2016).

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province in terms of area (347,190 sq km) and the smallest in terms of population (12.3 million, representing less than 6% of Pakistan's total population), is largely under-developed (PBS, 2017). In terms of ethnic composition, 55% of people in Balochistan speak Balochi as first language, while 30% speak Pashto and 5.6% speak Sindhi. 70% of the population of Balochistan lives below the poverty line (PBS, 2017). There is acute shortage of water in parts of the province. Living conditions and health indicators are worrisome. The maternal death rate in Balochistan is 785 out of every 100,000 which is astoundingly higher than the overall maternal death rate in Pakistan which stands at 278 out of 100,000 (Baloch, 2015).

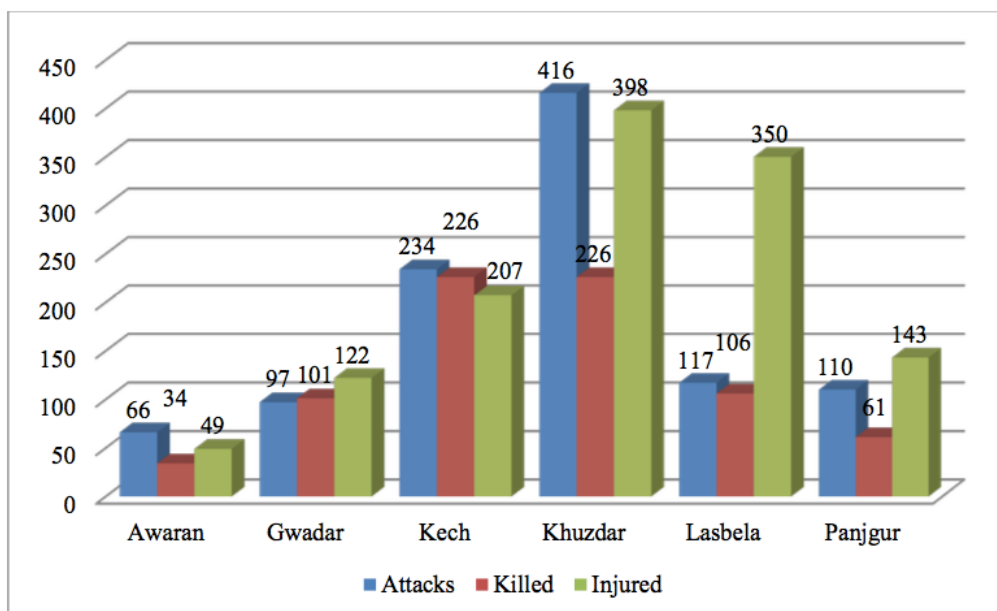
The beginning of CPEC projects via Gwadar has further inflamed the insurgency in Balochistan that has been present since 2004. The arrival of 'outsiders' in the Gwadar port area, the increased presence of the army, and the alleged dislocation of the locals have seemed to aggravate an already tense security environment (Jane, 2007). The alleged kidnapping and unlawful detention of dissidents has polarised Baloch moderates against the government. A report by the Pakistan Security Research Unit notes that Islamabad's militarized approach in Balochistan has led to violence, widespread human rights abuses, mass internal displacement and the deaths of hundreds of civilian and armed personnel (Baloch, 2007). The Baloch separatist groups have resorted to violence and terrorism, often attacking and killing non-Baloch settlers and workers, particularly Pashtuns, Saraikis and Punjabis. Between 2008 and 2010 alone, at least 22 Punjabi teachers were killed by Baloch militants, resulting in many teachers having fled or being moved outside the province and thus weakening the already fragile education system (Sheppard, 2010; Alam, 2015).

The Balochistan section of the CPEC originates from Gwadar, connecting it to Karachi and northern part of Pakistan through eastern and western routes. Security threats to CPEC in Balochistan also appear from neighbouring districts of Gwadar and Makran Coastal Belt, e.g., Kech, Awaran and Lasbela. However, the militant landscape of these districts is

largely linked to Panjgur and Khuzdar districts. A review of reported terrorist attacks between 1 January 2007 and 31 July 2014 suggests that Kech and Khuzdar are most volatile districts in this region (see **Figure 7**, Sial, 2014). It may be noted that most of these attacks are not targeted against CPEC projects or Chinese nationals. On the whole 1,040 terrorist attacks took place in these six districts (Gwadar, Kech, Awaran, Panjgur, Lasbela and Khuzdar) between 2007 and July 2014, representing 23 percent of total attacks reported from Balochistan during that period. Targets hit in most of these attacks included security forces, civilians, political leaders, non-Baloch settlers and workers, gas pipelines and power pylons, railways tracks, and government installations and property.

It may be noted that religious extremist and Takfiri sectarian groups such as ASWJ and LeJ have enhanced their presence and activities in Khuzdar district that is adjacent to Lasbela and Awaran districts. This means that in addition to Baloch separatists, there is now a further threat of Takfiri Islamists in areas adjoining Gwadar. Regionally speaking, much of the violence in terms of terrorist attacks in Gwadar, Makran Coastal Belt and neighbouring districts emanates from Baloch insurgent groups - mainly Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LB), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA). From 2011 to 2014, Baloch insurgents hit different targets in Gwadar at an average of nine attacks per year. These targets range from security forces including Gwadar coast guards, non-Baloch settlers, state installations, public and private property, and political leaders and workers. Also, the growing nexus of Baloch insurgents with the Takfiri militant groups (such as TTP, ASWJ, LeJ) and also criminals (drug peddlers, human traffickers) has complicated the overall security threat for Gwadar and its neighbourhood. Sial (2014) refers to the TTP's support structure in LeJ and Deobandi madrassas and argues that to curtail the security threat, it is necessary to counter the Taliban, and extremist sectarian groups from across Balochistan so that they are not able to expand their outreach to Gwadar region (Sial, 2014).

Figure 7. Terrorist attacks in Gwadar and neighbouring districts (January 2007-July 2014)



(Source: Adapted from Sial, 2014)

Cooperation between Baloch separatists and Takfiri Islamists

There is evidence of some collaboration between a certain section of Baloch separatists and Takfiri Islamist outfits. In June 2014, Pakistani media reported that the funeral prayer of secular Baloch nationalist leader Khair Bakhsh Marri was led by Ramzan Mengal, chief of banned Takfiri terror outfit, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) (*Dawn*, 2014). Senior Pakistani journalist, Rahimullah Yusufzai (2014) notes that:

“Ironically, Maulana Ramzan Mengal, the Balochistan head of the Jamaat Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat [ASWJ] which is a [banned] divisive Sunni [Deobandi] organisation, led his funeral prayers at the spacious Railway Hockey Stadium in Quetta. It is unlikely that the secular Khair Bakhsh Marri, who espoused leftist political views wrapped up in Baloch nationalism, would have approved this.”

Interestingly, while Ramzan Mengal led the prayer, “the emotionally charged members of the Baloch Students Organisation (Azad) raised slogans in support of Balochistan’s independence and some fired in the air to pay tributes to Khair Bakhsh Marri” (Yusufzai, 2014). Media reports did not indicate any protest or refusal by the separatists to participate in a funeral prayer led by a Takfiri cleric. Ramzan Mengal is known to enjoy official patronage of some sections within the security establishment despite his Takfiri views against Shia Muslims and other communities and despite the fact that LeJ, the militant offshoot of his party, is involved in numerous attacks on multiple targets including the Sufi or Bareilvi Sunnis, Shias, army, police, government officials and Chinese and other foreigners in Pakistan.

Ironically, some of these Islamists have been used by certain sections within Pakistani establishment for proxy-jihadist purposes in Afghanistan and elsewhere as well as to counter separatist militancy in Balochistan (Sellin, 2017). However, in certain Baloch sections, there seems to be a confluence of Deobandi and nationalist ideologies. Some secular Baloch leaders and parties have warned against the increasing influence of Takfiri ideology and blame the state and its security agencies for injecting Islamist (mostly Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi) ideologies and madrassas in Balochistan (Baloch, 2016). Such convergence between Takfiri ideology and Baloch separatism is particularly evident in terror attacks by Islamists within Iranian Balochistan where dozens of Iranian security personnel and ordinary civilians have been killed by the Baloch separatists while also using the Sunni-Shia sectarian discourse.

A similar convergence or cooperation between Baloch separatists and Takfiri Islamists has been reported by Reuters (2014b) which suggests that Islamists have joined hands with separatists in Balochistan in their joint fight against the government. Mir Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti, Home Minister of Balochistan, insists there are signs of coordination between the two groups due to their joint discord with the Pakistan government. It may be noted that the separatists focus on a political objective, i.e. independence from the state. However, religious militant groups like LeJ are considerably more hard-line as they specialise in attacks against Shia Muslims, Sufi Sunni or Bareilvi Muslims, Christians and other vulnerable communities. A senior security official in Balochistan told Reuters that the two groups have coordinated on a tactical level to carry out attacks. He further stated that the LeJ was recruiting ethnic Balochs as their fighters. The common territory of separatists and religious militants has helped create natural allies out of them. The separatists have learned and adopted from LeJ tactics. They also employ children in infiltration of tough targets for deployment of bombs. The attacks on 10th January 2014 can be considered as an example of this coordination when a bomb struck a security vehicle which acted as a diversion for a blast in the Shia enclave in Quetta which resulted in the death of more than 100 people. According

to security sources, even though the ideologies of the two groups may be divergent, their common goal of fighting against the security forces leads them into an informal, tactical cooperation which extends to logistical cooperation as well as coordinated attacks. They also feed on poverty and exploitation rampant in the province to further their agendas (Reuters, 2014b).

Ayesha Siddiqi points towards the increasing Deobandi influence in certain Baloch communities: “Another explanation pertains to Sunni Baloch killing the Shias. In a recent report from Quetta, journalist Wajahat S Khan, who has good military contacts, highlighted the fact that people in Quetta blame the Deobandi LeJ. However, he added that most of the LeJ members in Balochistan, known as the Jhangavis, are Baruhis [Brahuis], which is a sub-clan of the Baloch” (Siddiqi, 2013).

Further media reports illustrate how some sections of Baloch militant groups in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province and Pakistan’s Balochistan province are intertwined with Takfiri Islamist outfits based in Pakistan (IPD, 2014). This is not unlike the transnational Takfiri influence in China’s Xinjiang region. “Extremist groups who made headlines in the past months include Harkat ul-Ansar (HAI) and Jaish al-Adl. The latter merged with Abdolmalek Rigi’s Sunni Baloch group, Jundallah, in 2010, after their leader’s execution by the Iranian government. The group now operates under the name Jaish al-Adl...According to an announcement by Harkat ul-Ansar in December 2012, HAI also has ties with Sipah-e-Sahaba Iran (SSI), a Sunni [Deobandi] group with links to a Pakistani group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan” (IPD, 2014).

This increasing radicalisation of an otherwise secular Baloch population has adverse implications not only for Pakistan but also for China, Iran and wider South and Central Asia. Not unlike their attacks on security institutions and ordinary civilians in Pakistan, Takfiri militants have attacked security personnel and ordinary people in Iran. For example, on 21 October 2012, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near a mosque which resulted in the death of two people and injured another five. The terrorist, suspected to be a member of Jundallah (a Takfiri Islamist group allied with LeJ and some extremists in Baloch nationalist groups) attempted to enter the Imam Hossein mosque in the port city of Chabahar while people were gathering for the Friday congregational prayers. A similar attack was carried in 2010 by two Jundallah suicide bombers who targeted a religious ceremony at the same mosque which resulted in the death of 39 people. The casualties included women and children (*Fars News*, 2012).

According to Akbar (2012), the top most hierarchy of LeJ belongs to the lower-middle class in Balochistan. The historic stance of Balochs has been secular which makes the recent connections with religiously motivated violence a rare occurrence in their history. Akbar proposes that this recent surge of religiously motivated violence can be traced back to the surge in religious schools or madrassas throughout the province sponsored by the covert funding of Saudi Arabia and facilitated by certain sections within Pakistani establishment. This surge of madrassas is said to provide religious militancy with an intended aim to counter the separatist movement. The secular Baloch separatists claim that these madrassas are the key reason in the rise of religious or sectarian militants. However, there are no armed conflicts taking place between the two groups (separatists and Islamists) currently. The Baloch separatists claim that this is because they are engaged in a war against the Pakistani government so they cannot oppose the rise of extremist Islamic groups.

In June 2010, Abdolmalek Rigi, the now executed leader of Jundallah, was arrested in an anti-terrorism operation by the Iranian forces and subsequently faced a court trial and was hanged for his role in acts of terrorism. However, some of the Pakistan based Baloch nationalist and separatist groups protested, along with Jundallah and ASWJ, and condemned

Rigi's execution. They expressed solidarity with him, and called for a 3-days mourning (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Baloch nationalists mourn Abdolmalek Rigi's execution (Jang, 2010)

عبدالملک ریگی کی شہادت بی این ایف کی جانب سے سہ روزہ سوگ کا اعلان

عالمی برادری بلوچ نسل کشی کا نوٹس لے بیان؛ بلوچ بار آج عدالتوں کا بائیکاٹ کرے گی

کوئٹہ (ثناء نیوز) بلوچ نیشنل فرنٹ نے ایک بیان میں بلوچ مزاحمتی رہنماء عبدالملک ریگی کو تشدد کر کے شہید کرنے کی میں مذمت کرتے ہوئے کہا گیا ہے کہ بنیاد پرست ریاست بلوچ قوم کی نسل کشی پر عمل پیرا ہے گذشتہ دو سالوں کے دوران 700 سے زائد بے گناہ اور معصوم بلوچ دانشوروں ادیبوں، شاعروں، اساتذہ اور مذہبی رہنماؤں کو صرف اس لئے پھانسی دی گئی کہ وہ بلوچ قوم کے فرزند تھے اور مغربی بلوچستان پر قبضے کے خلاف آزادی کی جدوجہد کی حمایت کرتے تھے بیان شہید عبدالملک ریگی کو سرخ سلام پیش کرتے ہوئے کہا گیا کہ ان کی قربانی بلوچستان کی آزادی کے لئے بھی بلوچ قوم مغربی بلوچستان کے تحریک آزادی میں ان کی عظیم قربانی پر پوری دنیا کو یہ واضح کر دینا چاہتی ہے کہ وہ دونوں ریاستوں سے آزادی کے لئے جدوجہد کر رہے ہیں جس کی پاداش میں بلوچ قوم کی نسل کشی کی جارہی ہے مرکزی ترجمان نے بی این ایف کی جانب سے مالک ریگی کی

شہادت پر 22 جون 23 اور 24 کو تین روزہ سوگ کا اعلان کرتے ہوئے کہا ہے کہ آج 22 جون کو کراچی سمیت بلوچستان بھر میں یوم سیاہ، 23 جون کو پریس کلبوں کے باہر احتجاجی مظاہرے 24 جون کو ریفرنس منعقد کئے جائیں گے انہوں نے کہا کہ ہم اقوام متحدہ اور حقوق انسانی کی تنظیموں سے مطالبہ کرتے ہیں کہ وہ دہشت گردی اور انسانیت کے قتل عام جیسی سنگین کارروائیوں کا فوری نوٹس لیں۔ دریں اثناء بلوچ بار ایسوسی ایشن کے مرکزی ترجمان کے مطابق بلوچ بار عمران بابر، سید بابر اور دیگر بار ایسوسی ایشن کے متعلقہ فیصلے کے مطابق مغربی بلوچستان میں جند اللہ کے سربراہ عبدالملک ریگی کو پھانسی دینے، خضدار سے میر میمنگل ایڈووکیٹ کے انجواء اور بی ایس او (آزاد) کے دو کارکنوں کی خضدار میں شہادت کے خلاف آج کوئٹہ، مستونگ، دشت، قلات، سوراہ، خضدار، اوٹھل، حب، گوادر، تربت، مہنجوڑ، چاغی، خاران، نوشکی، سبی، نصیر آباد، ڈیرہ اللہ یار، اوستہ، محمد سمیت دیگر اضلاع میں عدالتوں کا بائیکاٹ کیا جائیگا ترجمان نے وکلاء برادری سے اپیل کی کہ وہ آج عدالتوں کا بائیکاٹ کریں۔

This news was also reported in Pakistan's English language newspapers. Dawn (2010) reports that: "Baloch National Front announced a three-day mourning on the death of Rigi and condemned his hanging in Iran. A statement issued by the front said a "black day" would be observed in Balochistan... [Moreover] Lawyers boycotted courts in several district headquarters of Balochistan in protest against the hanging of Jundullah leader Abdolmalek Rigi by Iranian government... The call for boycott was given by the Baloch Bar Association."

In a similar incident, in September 2012, a slain leader of a banned Baloch militant group, Baloch Republican Party (BRP), Sanaullah Siddiqi Baloch, was discovered to have also held an office bearing position in the banned Takfiri group ASWJ. While BRP is a party of secular nationalist agenda, ASWJ is a banned Takfiri outfit. Sanaullah Siddiqi Baloch's killing in Khuzdar was mourned as a BRP activist 'killed by Pakistani state'. ASWJ activists also mourned this person on social media as their leader (SK, 2012). Such instances indicate at least some kind of overlap between some sections of Baloch nationalist and Takfiri Islamist groups.

Concerns by India and US

CPEC passes through Pakistan-administered Kashmir and India has repeatedly raised concerns over it. India is most anxious about the construction of the CPEC through Gilgit-Baltistan and the opening and operation of the Gwadar port by China (Patranobis, 2017). Indian leadership is perturbed about the CPEC and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed it 'unacceptable' during his visit to China in May 2015 (*The Express Tribune*, 2015).

The US administration under President Trump has shown similar anxieties about CPEC. In October 2017, the Trump administration informed Congress that it believes CPEC passes through a disputed territory, referring to Pakistan's northern areas (Gilgit-Baltistan),

which India claims is part of the disputed Jammu and Kashmir territory. Secretary Mattis said the US opposed the One Belt One Road (OBOR) policy in principle because there were many belts and roads in a globalised world, and a singular nation should not take up a dictatorial position for a One Belt, One Road proposition. And it opposed the one going through Pakistan also because it passed through a disputed territory. US position on CPEC may further worsen the already tense relations between the US and Pakistan. Prior to the US announcing its discontentment over the CPEC route, Pakistan had opposed the greater role that the US has assigned to India in Afghanistan. Mattis said, “There are areas where, also, strategically, we need to confront China where we think it’s unproductive — the direction they’re going in” (Iqbal, 2017).

The Chinese foreign ministry dismissed Mattis’ statement, saying that the OBOR initiative was backed by the United Nations and that CPEC was an economic cooperation initiative. “We have repeatedly reiterated that CPEC ... is not directed against third parties and has nothing to do with territorial sovereignty disputes and does not affect China’s principled stance on the Kashmir issue,” the statement said. It said that a number of international organisations and nation states, which have attested and agreed to cooperation with China on OBOR have also incorporated it in their important resolutions. “Over 130 countries and more than 70 international organisations sent representatives to attend the international cooperation summit – ‘Belt and Road Forum’ – organised by China in May 2017 and spoke highly of the initiative,” it said. “This fully explains that the OBOR initiative is in line with the trend of the times and conforms to the rules of development and is in line with the interests of the people of all countries and has broad and bright prospects for development,” it added. (The Express Tribune, 2017).

This US and Indian hostility is discomfiting to Pakistan which places great emphasis on CPEC for its socio-economic development. Moreover, the willingness of the US to accommodate India’s narrative regarding Pakistan administered Kashmir (Azad Kashmir), while entirely disregarding the legal and human rights situation in Indian administered Kashmir is a matter of concern for Pakistan government. A leading Pakistani newspaper, The Nation (2017a), notes that the US seems to be opposing CPEC/Belt and Road as part of a grand strategic plan of power politics in the region even though the US has neither territory nor stake in the region.

China and India have long-standing border disputes over two territories. The first dispute is about Aksai Chin located between the Indian administered state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Chinese region of Xinjiang. The other disputed territory lies south of McMahon Line in the Arunachal Pradesh. The 1962 Sino-Indian War was fought in both of these areas. More recently a military standoff occurred between India and China in June 2017 in the disputed territory of Doklam. In contrast, China has a long history of economic and military cooperation with Pakistan. For example, Pakistan spent \$735 million on arms imports in 2015 out of which \$565 million were spend on arms imports from China. Indeed, the scale of economic activity between the two countries has grown tremendously due to CPEC. This also means China’s greater economic and political influence in Pakistan and the region in order to better monitor and control Uyghur separatists and extremists outside China. China can not only work closely with Pakistan and other regional countries to ensure the safety of western China, it can also use its regional alliances as a deterrent to India to reduce its security pressure from the southwest direction. While China is not a coastal state of the Indian Ocean, it can use its access to Indian Ocean through Pakistan to ensure the safety of the maritime Silk Route and energy security in the Gulf region (Haiquan, 2017).

Notwithstanding these misgivings, India may consider positive aspects of CPEC and more fully engage with BRI for reciprocal benefits. As suggested by Jeganaathan (2017), Pakistan and India may consider to open Kargil–Skardu road so that India could access

Pakistani, Central Asian and Russian energy resources and vice versa. Similarly, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which is a regional organisation comprising seven countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), may be expanded to include Pakistan and Afghanistan as it would enhance road connectivity from Kolkata to Lahore and Kabul.

Security measures

According to an estimate, there are close to 8,000 Chinese nationals working in Pakistan, and the country has raised a 15,000-strong armed force specifically to safeguard Chinese nationals working in the country (Neelakantan, 2017; Raza, 2017). These measures are in addition to close collaboration between China and Pakistan against terrorism. Joint China-Pakistan efforts target the activities of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and their affiliates and trainers are being suppressed through joint efforts. While terrorism continues to be a menace, leaders of both countries have expressed great commitment towards fighting against terrorists (Malik, 2016).

The mitigation of the threat of terrorist violence in Central Asia is one of the objectives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). SCO members attested the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism on the inaugural meeting in June 2001 in Shanghai. The six signatory nations are “firmly convinced that terrorism, separatism and extremism ... cannot be justified under any circumstances, and that the perpetrators of such acts should be prosecuted under the law.” according to the Convention (SECTSCO, 2008). The SCO's Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent, was strongly backed by Beijing as a new centre for counterterrorism operations (Smith, 2009).

In September 2017, leaders of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in their joint declaration expressed grave concern about the intensity of terrorist activity from Taliban and other groups in Afghanistan. BRICS leaders, who met in China's Xiamen city, said the activities of insurgent groups was unacceptable. In a strongly worded declaration, the BRICS nations named Pakistan-based Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi militant groups. "We strongly condemn terrorist attacks resulting in death to innocent Afghan nationals. We, in this regard, express concern on the security situation in the region and violence caused by the Taliban, ISIL/Daesh, al-Qaeda and its affiliates including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, TTP and Hizb ut-Tahrir," read the declaration issued by BRICS countries. The BRICS declaration further states, “We reaffirm that those responsible for committing, organising, or supporting terrorist acts must be held accountable” (Popalzai, 2017).

Despite these concerns, China remain committed to CPEC projects in Pakistan. China's deputy ambassador to Pakistan, Lijian Zhao, stated that, "The ultimate goal is to help Pakistan to develop the economy ... to help to accelerate the industrialisation process" (Hashim, 2017). The number of Chinese nationals residing in Pakistan have almost tripled to more than 30,000 due to the 43 projects directly under the CPEC banner. In addition to this, short-term visas to Pakistan were issued to more than 71,000 Chinese nationals in 2016 alone, as reported by Reuters (Hashim, 2017).

In 2007, the Government of Pakistan had created a Joint Task Force comprising the Chinese Embassy officials and the Ministry of Interior officials to ensure the security of Chinese citizens in Pakistan (Rahman, 2007). Today, there are 3044 Chinese nationals working on CPEC projects in Sindh. It has been reported that seven security headquarters have been established for each project with a total of 3044 well trained police force officers deployed for the security of Chinese nationals only. The eighth project is of NTDC

Transmission line which stretches from Matirai to Lahore, 15 Chinese are involved in this project who have been provided with 65 security force personnel. Moreover, 137 non-CPEC projects in the Sindh province have employed 1971 Chinese, and 1373 security personnel have been deployed for them. It was reported that the total sanctioned strength of Special Protection Unit was 2662 against which 1349 are currently deployed. A force of 563 personnel guards the coal-based power Plant at Port Qasim. Similar security arrangements have been made for Thar project, Block-I & II where a total of 46 and 413 security personnel respectively have been deployed. A force of 555 personnel is providing security to the four wind power projects in Thatta district. A force of 1197 personnel guards the 126-km long NDTC transmission line from Sukkur to Ghotki. Another force of 76 personnel guards the transmission line from Matirai to Lahore/Faisalabad. 75 personnel guard the Sindh section of the 548km railway line being laid from Karachi to Peshawar (SATP, 2017). Moreover, 8,000-strong Special Protection Unit was set up by Punjab province in 2014 to guard foreigners, mostly Chinese (VOA, 2017). According to an official report generated in July 2015, there were 2,954 Chinese working in 131 projects in Punjab, living in 31 residences. About 6,983 security personnel were deputed for their security (Elahi, 2015).

In terms of policy response to terrorism, the law in force in Pakistan is '1997 Anti-Terrorism Act' (subsequently amended to expand its scope). This Act created Special Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATC) as well as Anti-Terrorism Appellate (ATA) tribunal (Ahmad, 2006; Malhotra, 2001). This Act offers a comprehensive framework for dealing with terrorism at large. This includes preventive detention of terrorists, redefines the required evidence for conviction, lays down simplified trial procedures for the speedy disposal of terrorism-related cases, and provisions witness protection programmes (Shigri, 2016). From this law emanated all actions to confront terrorism in Pakistan, including the National Action Plan. However, despite such a comprehensive law, the conviction rate of terrorists continues to be very low and, upon acquittal, quite a few of them return to militancy. This legal deficiency is attributed to poor investigations and prosecutions as well as poor arrangements for protection of witnesses, lawyers and judges (Shigri, 2016).

In the aftermath of the Peshawar school massacre (2014) and subsequent domestic public pressure, Islamabad formulated the National Action Plan (NAP), drafted jointly by the government, parliament and army in 2015, a 20-points package of measures to combat terrorism in the country. In particular, Pakistan army chief General Raheel Sharif took a bold stance against terrorism and emphasized that the country had no other option than to eliminate all manifestations of extremism and terrorism at the grass roots level. He further iterated that Pakistan's security forces will not stop unless they achieve the end objective of a terror-free Pakistan. While the subsequent military operation (Zarb-e-Azb) was largely successful in reducing incidents of terrorism in Pakistan, the operation had a strict domestic focus, meaning that only anti-Pakistan militant groups were identified as targets (Wolf, 2016). Thus, those militant groups which are operating in Afghanistan or Indian-administered Kashmir were largely spared. Similar leniency was shown for certain Takfiri Islamist sections in Balochistan in order to use them to confront Baloch separatist groups. Heinkel and deVillafranca (2016) note that Islamabad sometimes links the Baloch to anti-Shia (anti-Hazara) massacres in Quetta, but Takfiri groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) and Lashkar e-Jhangvi (LeJ), some of them with known links with the elements of Pakistani establishment and led by local ethnic Baloch, likely conducted these attacks.

While Pakistani military undertook operations against groups that attacked government official and security forces within Pakistan such as TTP, it did not take action against other groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Similarly, Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network leadership allegedly enjoy safe haven in Balochistan and tribal areas. Although Pakistan military operations disrupted the actions of these groups, it did not directly

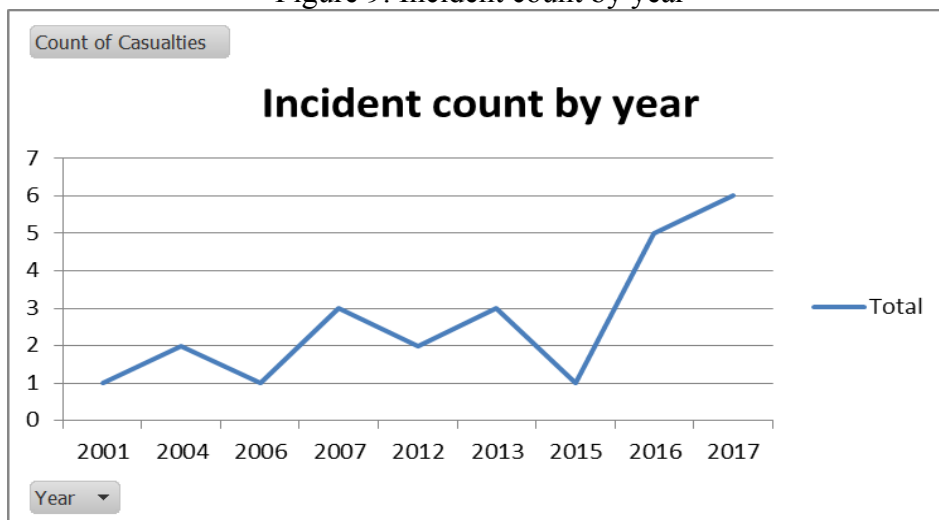
target them. Wolf (2016) suggests that Pakistan establishment has to realize that terrorist organizations are not reliable allies for states. While some of these militants for many years had an informal but deeply rooting alliance with some sections of security agencies, at the end they turned against the state and the society.

There are thus some contradictions in Pakistani state's response to terrorism. While the government through the use of its security agencies has made some gains in disrupting foreign networks, it needs to take a clear stance against home-grown Takfiri groups which serve as recruiting ground for the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. This is evident in the half-hearted manner in which the home grown Takfiri, jihadi and sectarian groups banned in January 2002 re-emerged under changed names. Banned again in November 2003, most operate as freely as they did in past, once again changed their names. Another related issue is the control of Takfiri extremist, sectarian and violent ideologies through religious schools (madrassas), mosques and social media. In particular, without effective state control over the functioning, funding, and curriculum of the madrassas, these violent ideologies will continue to threaten Pakistani and foreign citizens as much as they will continue to undermine regional and global stability.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the multipronged threats to CPEC. **Figure 9** indicates the increasing incident count per year showing the gravity of violence since 2001 and a significant increase in attacks on Chinese nationals or CPEC related projects since 2015.

Figure 9. Incident count by year



Given the increasing scale of work on CPEC and the increasing involvement of Chinese engineers and other employees in these projects in the future, governments of Pakistan, China and other regional countries need to develop a robust and integrated plan to eliminate all Takfiri Islamist groups, including those madrassas, clerics, literature and social media, which are propagate Takfiri ideology, as well as their foot-soldiers. Similarly, there is a need to address all legitimate concerns of the indigenous Baloch population, to ensure their socio-economic uplift, while taking tough stance, within the limits of law, against those who resort to violence to implement their ethnocentric or separatist agenda. Indeed, human security can be guaranteed by a rule of law that depends on and preserves legitimate institutions that have the trust of the population and have some enforcement capacity (Alam, 2015).

Most importantly, Pakistan government will need to review its unstated policy of using Islamist or jihadist groups to combat Baloch separatist militancy or conduct jihadist operations in other countries. Small (2015: 91) argues that “Pakistani military that grows ever more closely enmeshed with an Islamist and militant agenda undermines China’s basic strategic goals in South Asia. A Pakistani military that can no longer keep China off the terrorist target list, that has even become a target in its own right, undermines China’s security at home and the safety of its projects and personnel abroad.”

While in recent years, there has been military action against Takfiri Islamists or terrorist groups in other parts of the country, the state needs to adopt a clear anti-Takfiri strategy in Balochistan. Related to that, the state will need to take a tough and clear stance to break all sorts of cooperation between violent Baloch separatist groups and the ‘out-of-control’ Islamist groups who tactfully join hands to target security forces, non-Baloch population, vulnerable Sufi Sunni and Shia communities, and foreign nationals. While one of the parties (Baloch separatists) want to destabilise the CPEC projects, and the other has a Takfiri agenda (LeJ, TTP, ASWJ), they still, opportunistically, club together to carry out conjoined activities. The data in this paper shows that a Takfiri agenda can be achieved as a by-product of violence aiming for different causes, and thus Takfiri Islamist groups qualify as good foot-soldiers for different sorts of militancy and agendas. The Takfiri Islamist groups pose transnational threat to China because of their links with ETIM in Xinjiang and also due to their anti-China activities in Afghanistan and Central Asia. For example, in October 2017, the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad wrote a letter to Pakistan’s interior ministry, informing that a terrorist tasked to attack Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing had entered Pakistan. The Embassy requested the Pakistan government to take immediate action on the intelligence information, and enhance security of Ambassador Yao. The letter written by the focal person for CPEC, Ping Ying Fi, identifies the terrorist as Abdul Wali who belongs to ETIM (PTI, 2017).

In terms of its limitations, this study has focused on attacks against Chinese nationals or CPEC- or China-related projects only. However, it has not focused on attacks on Pakistani army and police, Sufi Sunni and Shia Muslims, non-Muslim communities, or the target killings of Pakistani businesspersons, lawyers, judges, activists and media persons. While such attacks may not be directly related to CPEC, but in the context of terrorizing the Belt and Road, such attacks may be seen as incidents that have indirect implications for overall situation of law and order and business environment. Indeed, as a method of terrorising, if large scale attacks have implications over group or social behaviours, then target killings, as a method, affect individual behaviours.

As a rising global power, China is discovering that its ascendancy to economic and political power is paved with great risks. This trend is reflected in recent attacks against Chinese citizens and commercial projects in South Asia and Central Asia. While some of these attacks have roots in the Islamist and separatist insurgency in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (Smith, 2009), others have roots in transnational Takfir Islamist ideology and regional nationalist or separatist ideologies. Beijing’s onward march for energy security, international trade and associated commercial ventures in Asia and Africa seem to suggest that terrorism risks might increase for China in the future.

In Pakistan, the attacks highlight several important aspects to the Sino–Pakistan relations. First is the employment of thousands of Chinese technicians, engineers and other workers by Chinese companies or state entities in Pakistan. Second are the threats to these workers by Takfiri Islamist and Baloch separatist militants. Third is the increased alarm with which these attacks are seen given the historically close Pakistan–China relationship (Smith, 2009).

With varying intensity and frequency, incidents of violence against Chinese as well as Pakistani workers on CPEC related projects continue to take place in Pakistan. Needless to say, CPEC's success will be determined by investors' confidence and their ability to successfully conduct their operations. If these attacks continue, the very scheme that is hoped to revolutionise Pakistan's industrial and socio-economic development may be at a great risk (*Daily Times*, 2017). Since India and USA are not too happy with the increasing cooperation between China and Pakistan, they are likely to use these incidents as an excuse to criticise the very idea of the Belt and Road and try to hurt CPEC.

For the CPEC to move forward, militant activities by the LeJ, BLA and other violent groups cannot continue unchecked (Hasan, 2016). Indeed, the much anticipated socio-economic and strategic advantages inherent therein for trade across China, Pakistan and Central Asia cannot be reaped unless both forms of militancy are comprehensively addressed and eliminated.

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Appendix 'A' - Pictures of attacks on Chinese nationals

Picture 1. *Chinese workers carry the coffin of one of the three Chinese engineers killed in Hub, Pakistan at Hefei Luogang Airport in Hefei, capital of east China's Anhui Province, 18 February 2006. (Xinhua, 2006)*



Picture 2. *Relatives of Zhao Bin, one of the three Chinese engineers killed in Hub, Pakistan, weep while waiting for the arrival of his body at Hefei Luogang Airport in Hefei, capital of East China's Anhui Province, 18 February 2006. (People, 2006)*



Picture 3. Pakistani police officers help move the body of a Chinese worker killed in Peshawar, 8 July 2007. Three Chinese nationals were killed and one was seriously injured (*Xinhua*, 2007a)



Picture 4. A Chinese worker, injured in the attack, receives treatment at a local hospital in Peshawar, 8 July 2007. Three Chinese nationals were killed and one was seriously injured in the attack (*Xinhua*, 2007a).



Picture 5. A Pakistani security official examines wreckage of a vehicle after a bomb explosion in Hub, 19 July 2007. Police said a bus carrying about 10 Chinese engineers and workers had just passed when the remote-controlled bomb exploded killing at least 26 people – Photo credits: AP (*China Daily*, 2007).



Picture 6. A Chinese national and two others, including his driver, were slightly injured in a roadside explosion in the outskirts of Karachi on 30 May 2016 (*The Nation*, 2016)



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