Research Article

Soft Power Insurgency And The Baloch Militancy Nexus: State Responses To The Digital And Institutional Influence Of BRAS-Linked Activism

Nur Syazana Saharizan
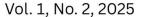Genovasi University, Malaysia

Abstract
The paper examines the emergence of digital and institutional propaganda by rebel organisations affiliated with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), as well as their combined platform, the Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS). It examines how such groups crucify stories of ethnic exploitation, disappearance of individuals and human rights abuse on Twitter (X), Telegram, and international human rights discourses. Specifically, it considers the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) and other public personalities, such as Dr. Mahrang Baloch, within a broader ideological framework associated with BRAS. The study employs qualitative secondary analysis of virtual content, media statements, and incidents to determine the security ramifications and social consequences of using this type of power insurgency. It also examines Pakistan's responses in digital knowledge, legislative changes, storytelling, youth participation, and global collaboration to protect national integrity.

Keywords: BRAS, Baloch Militancy Nexus, Soft Power Insurgency, propaganda, National Integrity.

1. Introduction

The Baloch rebellion in Pakistan has progressed through various stages, and it initially began as a land and resource-based grievance in the early years following independence. This whole thing has become intensified over the globe with years and years of supposed marginalisation and brutal force of the state. Militancy has its historical roots in the historical tensions between the Baloch nationalist movement and various central governments, particularly in matters regarding resource distribution, political independence, and the preservation of identity (Wani, 2021). In the early 2000s, some of the most notable armed movements, which comprise the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Republican Army (BRA) appeared and they, in turn, initiated the violent phase of insurgence against the security forces, the infrastructure, and the representatives of the state (Verma, 2025).

Nevertheless, over time, this insurgency has taken the shape of a hybrid phenomenon, i.e., it has transformed into something that is partly militant and at the same time a mixture of guerrilla warfare, digital propaganda, and involvement with international institutions.

This reached a new whirlpool when the Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS), a paramilitary alliance, was established and it united the BLA, the BRA and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF). BRAS has organised raids, increased its presence in the region of Balochistan, and helped an information campaign to shift various discourses (Ghani, 2024). Such a campaign involves many instruments of soft power, i.e. international discourse of human rights, the discourse of ethnic victimhood, avoiding enforced disappearance and placing it in the forefront to discredit the Pakistani state among international viewers.

Other fronts of the civilian side, such as the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) led by people such as Dr. Mahrang Baloch, have become influential in this war of words (Rahman, 2022). They do not set the situation where these people are the heroes, and, nevertheless, their positioning against BRAS-related messaging remains remarkable. In this study, the researcher seeks to examine the application of the digital platform and international system by the BRAS networked actors to further spread insurgent ideologies and assess the strategic, security, and diplomatic efforts adopted by Pakistan so as to contain this multi-dimensional insurgency.
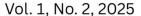
2. Literature Review
Key Definitions
There has been a shift in the current war scene, given that insurgent groups are increasingly using non-conventional weapons in addition to using conventional arms warfare. The most important aspect of this transition is the development of the so-called hybrid insurgency, the hybrid of guerilla, strategic communication, propaganda and mobilization of civilians (Stoddard, 2023). With this model, insurgency groups can work on the battlefield as well as in the cognitive plane. This effort is supplemented by applying so-called soft power, which comes in the form of digital persuasive power, i.e. the capacity of non-state agents to influence the opinion in the world, acquire some legitimacy and present their life stories by using social media, human rights rhetoric and politics of victimhood. Another applicable terminology is asymmetric warfare, which refers to conflict between a relatively weak insurgent outfit and a stronger state player, where the former uses non-standard methods to counter the advantage of the latter (Homiak, 2024). The propaganda war entails using the element of disinformation, emotional context, use of symbolic imagery to influence public opinion, and an impression on the international opinion. Finally, the narrative sovereignty can be defined as the authority on the manner to show, interpret, and perceive a conflict at the local and international levels. In the case of such groups as BRAS, narrative sovereignty must be a way of legitimizing their cause and of undermining the credibility of the state.

Comparative Frameworks
Experience on insurgencies world over offers good analytical bases, which can be used to evaluate the strategy of BRAS.The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are good evidence in this respect. ISIS had utilized social media in ways that had never been done before, whereby through sources such as Twitter, Telegram and YouTube, ISIS had been able to disseminate its ideologies by recruiting and radicalizing immigrants all around the globe

(Omar, 2024). They used Western resentment and Muslim politics of identity to build them a worldwide echo chamber of sympathizers. The LTTE, on the one hand, avoided official politics and turned to the diaspora networks and western NGOs to promote the politics of Tamil self-determination, building a moral discourse of victimhood on ethnic lines of victimization and historical trauma (Orjuela 2022). The two groups indicated how insurgents could work not only on the military level but also on the diplomatic one: posing as freedom fighters or violated minorities, they could find an echo in international politics and the human rights world. The approaches highlight the relevance of control of narratives and the use of digital communication with regard to contemporary insurgencies whereby BRAS provides a basis of comparisons to interpret how it uses comparable tools to internationalize its quest.

Online Radicalization and Targeting Screenagers

One of the inherent characteristics of digital insurgency is that it appeals to the youth in online echo chambers and algorithm-based platforms. BRAS-affiliated groups, which have received comparatively little publicity compared with ISIS or LTTE, seem to be following the same patterns and tactics: to use messages that are emotionally appealing among the Baloch youth, as well as in the diaspora. To create the grievance identities, disinformation, selective truths and visual materials of the state brutality or forced disappearances are spread. Such voices of the oppressed are frequently boosted by the social media algorithms and, as a result, create their ideologically narrow, homogenous bubbles (Rodilosso, 2024). In these rooms, there is no need to express your opinion since everything goes with the flow and psychological pressure leads to
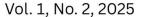
alienation and the need to act. Inclusion in this ecosystem of meanings is, in most cases, indirect, entailing recruitment into militancy (or activism) rather than direct action (Larrinaga et al., 2023). Members of the young generation, especially students and people of diaspora, are tempted into these computerized social circles where being a victim, resisting and becoming a martyr is idealized and, in a subliminal manner, propagates the ideology of BRAS without being militaristic.

Knowledge Gaps in the Literature

Although nowadays the phenomenon of BRAS and its environment is not so discreet, there is still a considerable lack in the scholarly literature on its soft power and online propaganda strategies. Although the aggression of militaries is commonly discussed in security and counterterrorism-related literature, the utilization of the digital space as a way of combat by BRAS and its civilian wing, Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) is rather understudied. The use of the international language of human rights in organizing the protests to secure the departure of the PM, framing the narratives of missing people, and mobilizing towards the construction of discourses by BYC has not been properly studied in peer-reviewed literature. Besides, how such stories influence children in urban learning institutions and members of the Baloch diaspora is a matter that needs to be studied. No analysis as well on the ways through which BYC, though posing as a peaceful rights group, promotes the ideologies of BRAS, albeit not directly, but by extension, just overlaps with the grey area of civil activism and insurgency propaganda.

Theoretical Framework

A number of theories lay a sound basis for the description of the digital and psychological aspects of the insurgency of
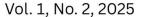
BRAS. Framing Theory is unique because it describes the process of the development and spread of a compelling story of armed rebellion by insurgent organizations the way they frame violence by the state against them, poverty, and ethnic repression coupled with the repression of counter-narratives (Thaler, 2022). Such frames are crafted in such a way that they trigger emotions as well as morals among the domestic and international audiences. Important insights are also available in the Social Movement Theory, especially in the arena of the political opportunity structures and resource mobilization. This theory can be used to define why collective groups like BRAS and BYC will use the opportunity of the crisis or media coverage on issues like protests or forced disappearance to pursue their agenda and to recruit more people on their side. This is supplemented by Narrative Theory, which looks into how group behavior and political mobilization develop through stories that are shared collectively, those of loss, resistance and identity (Ulug et al., 2022). Last but not least, the Cognitive Radicalization Theory plays a critical role in investigating the effects of repeated exposure to insurgent content on the Internet in terms of the transformation of beliefs and behavior among the youth, and, specifically, those at risk. A combination of these theoretical prisms works towards a more critical interpretation of the soft insurgency machine of BRAS.

3. Methodology

The study used a secondary analysis of a qualitative nature to study the role of BRAS-linked actors in using digital and institutionalized spaces to spread insurgencies and narratives. Due to the shape of the Baloch insurgency as a security-sensitive, politically fragile problem, the collection of primary data was considered non-viable. Consequently, the researcher had to depend on the secondary sources of information that can be found in the open, such as the statements of the government, independent media segments, OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) sites, and digital trails of BRAS, BLA, and BYC on different social media and protest reporting platforms. Moreover, footage of protests, documentation of civil discourses, and transcripts of international human rights inquiries on enforced disappearances in Balochistan were also studied to triangulate views and confirm the tendencies in the discourse.

To study the material organizedly, the thematic analysis approach was utilized. This was done by extracting and coding the information on the Twitter threads on BYC, the protest flyers, recorded speeches on leaders like Dr. Mahrang Baloch, and Telegram channels affiliated with BRAS or its supporters. The elements of State oppression, enforced disappearance, ethnic marginalization and self-identification were found out and grouped as recurring themes. Emphasis was put specifically on the use of emotive discourse, invocation of history and humanitarian justifications of legitimacy and gaining solidarity across the international front. It looked at hashtags, slogans and visual symbols included in the online media publications in order to investigate how the modes influence the processes of storytelling, identity definition and the shaping of the identity of supporters, particularly of the young viewers and diasporas.

The paper also used focused case studies in order to analyze the effect of the BRAS-supported activism on the formation of international perception. The selection of events that took place in Geneva, London and Washington, DC, organized or otherwise supported by the BRAS/BYC sympathizers was done on strategic considerations and visibility on the

international human rights fronts. Using these case studies, a detailed analysis of how symbolic acts of protesting, which may be held outside the UN or the embassies, may be framed at the international level was possible. The presence of slogans such as, Stop Baloch Genocide or Where are the Missing in such a high-profile location was discussed on how they impacted reporting in foreign media and on the international non-governmental organizations. The study also examined how such occurrences were geared up online via online media cross-publishing, naming of international institutions, and publication through online media that was often a feedback loop between online story proliferation and on-ground protest.

In spite of such richness of secondary data, some limitations significantly affected the research. Lack of main field research limited the possibilities of appealing to the grassroots views or confirming the first-hand experiences among the Baloch people. Besides, since the activists or the officials were so politically sensitive and under so much watch in Pakistan, direct interviews were dangerous and thus avoided. The other major shortcomings were based on the prejudices of self-published information by insurgent-implicated players. EM stories seized with the ideological and emotionally charged loaded narratives filled the digital content on BRAS and BYC, most of which could not be externally verified. Although thematic triangulation and cross-source validation were adopted to counter this, chances were that partial or biased representation could be realized. However, through the selected methodology, the digital and institutional characteristics of soft insurgency of BRAS have been investigated in a strong and ethically correct manner.
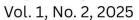
4. BRAS's Strategic Use of Digital and Institutional Platforms

Digital Content affiliated with militants

BRAS and their subdivisional bands (BLA and BRA) have turned respectively more often to digital spaces such as X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, and Instagram in conveying insurgent discursive arguments. These apps have legitimized militant activities and made it acceptable with campaigns of martyrdom messages and anti-state hashtags that allow the fighters killed to appear as heroes of a freedom operation (Piccini, 2018). There has often been circulated misinformation about the state military activities and this can be particularly about the controversial case of the missing persons. There are allegations of extrajudicial detention and disappearance that are given supra-factual magnitude without much questioning, whereas the proofs given by the security agencies regarding the militant fatalities are dismissed or rather discounted. Photographs are also often presented (women wounded, burning settlements, mass graves), as they may be used to cause an emotional reaction and to portray the state as a cruel colonist (Hight & Sampson, 2013). Such emotionally-grounded manipulative strategies are expected not only to attract the supporters but to discredit the Pakistani state at home and abroad.

Institutional Front Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC)

Institutional face of the BRAS narrative campaign. BYC Yakjehti Baloch Baloch Committee (BYC) has become an institutional voice of the Baloch narrative campaign. Under the pretext of civil activism, BYC reacts through staging public protests, press briefings, and campaigns of sensitisation in the key cities of Pakistan, e.g. Islamabad, Karachi, and Quetta (Khan et al., 2020). Educational institutions and

human rights conferences are important because in those forums, BYC has been re-packaging the BRAS agenda to sound in civilian/humanitarian terms. On the one hand, the BYC rhetoric does not evoke militancy directly; on the other hand, it repeats all the main accents of BRAS, that is, the accusations of state suppression, structural violence, and ethnic discrimination. Its rhetoric is cautiously worded to the extent that it becomes difficult to know whether the society is promoting peaceful views or propagating insurgency ideas, and therefore, authorities are faced with an uphill task when it comes to responding to the movement, lest they risk being described as curtailing on civil liberty (Lewis, 2022). Using a hybrid front, BRAS effectively combines the ideologically militant power and the legitimacy of the grassroots.
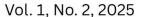
Overseas Reach

BRAS and BYC have been keen on internationalizing the Baloch cause as they reach out to Western platforms and NGOs (Ahmed & Khan, 2024). Protests in the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), presentations in the parliament of the UK and speeches at the Universities of the U.S were used to brand the conflict in Balochistan as a local freedom struggle but not as a separatist uprising. Such incidents tend to be supported by the diaspora groups along with other like-minded foreign NGOs, which have picked up the discourse of ethnic victims and human rights abuse. Insurgent-allied rhetoric stands a chance of reaching the international discourse through the strategic application of English-language slogans, optimized professional media provisions, as well as specific tagging of the international institutions. The fact that Balochistan is being presented as an occupied land in search of self-determination puts Pressure on the Pakistani

diplomatic avenues and also gives BRAS an assumed moral authority (Ghani, 2024).

Dr. Mahrang Baloch as a particular role player

Dr. Mahrang Baloch has turned out to be the main character of the story-war, who has become the figurative leader of the civilian side of the Baloch resistance. Her testament and especially that of her father, being murdered, Abdul Ghaffar Langove, who is allegedly involved in militancy activity, has been used to create an effective story of state oppression (Ahmad, 2024). Dr. Mahrang does nothing to be directly linked to militancy as he gives speeches in the street and performs in the media by using the themes of justice, dignity, and human rights. Nevertheless, her rhetoric helps to support the agenda of BRAS to extend its mission since she presents the conflict in the light of cruelty on the part of the state and ethnical discrimination. Such a strategic makeover will enable the ideology of BRAS to receive wider consent among people and even the international community, which might be opposed to the use of violent separatism, though it might still be in favor of humanitarian activism.

Psychological Framing

Psychological approach of BRAS-related forces implies describing the Baloch as the victims of systematic genocide and cultural extermination. This approach revolves around campaigns carried out based on the outstanding problem of missing persons. Although security agencies release data and official statements claiming that most of these disappearances are related to militant activity or stating that the missing people are returned, insurgent tendencies continue to depict the state as a criminal by breaking international law (Rahman, 2025). This victimhood policy can attract the interest of both the domestic audience, who want

justice to be executed, and foreign human rights activists, who are likely to support the suffering choir. This framing is emotionally and psychologically powerful, and it results in internal fragmentation: national identity is openly challenged, and anti-state manifestations become mainstream in particular communities (especially among the young people and diaspora groups).

5. National and Regional Security Risks

The tendency of BRAS and its affiliates to portray Pakistan as a rogue state, which is illegitimate and repressive to its citizens, is a very dangerous threat to national security and sovereignty (Shah, 2021). The loss of state legitimacy is made even more complicated by the rise of the anti-nation discourse in the schools and online communities of the young generation, where separatist stories are becoming more normalized. The second threat is diaspora radicalization, where messages shared by BRAS aligners aim to target Pakistani-origin students in other parts of the world, the UK, the US, and Canada specifically, especially the Baloch, Sindhi and even Punjabi youth who have lost interest in the policies of the state. Inwards, this mind game has made ideological gaps which undermine national unity (Rizvi, 2021). Outside the BRAS, cross-border magnification is being utilized; the anti-Pakistan material is magnified by like-minded media in Afghanistan and India, as well as some parts of the Western media. This is the organized war of information that is not only disenfranchising the state institutions but also interferes with the global perception, which makes diplomatic and security relations complicated.

6. Strategic Government Responses to Counter Digital Soft Insurgency
Cyber Intelligence and Monitoring

Following the increased danger of the digital rebellion, the Pakistani government has also introduced new AI-enabled surveillance systems to detect social networks, detect abnormal Telegram groups, and track keywords used in anti-government campaigns. Cyber intelligence has been directed towards finding out foreign-based financiers, operators and content contributors towards the digital operations of BRAS (Güntsch et al., 2025). Digital forensics helps to attribute links and also disrupt the BYC content by connecting it with the BRAS-aligned militant propaganda.

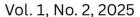### Content Regulation and Legal

Order- In the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the government has moved forward in blocking accounts, hashtags, and websites affiliated with BRAS (Haider et al., 2025). The laws are being created to criminalize the indirect support to the insurgency via the Internet, even through institutional fronts such as BYC. The state is also pursuing legal means on the diaspora level against the perpetrators who incite violence on digital platforms on foreign soil.

Youth Same Sex Counters and Narrative Building

To douse the disinformation being led by separatists, national influences and patriotic digital content creators are being enforced to create other narratives. The media literacy campaign and youth empowerment programs, such as media fellowships, digital storytelling contests, and Balochistan exchange, should establish critical skills and minimize the vulnerability to extremist information (Baloch et al., 2023). Pakistani student groups abroad are also receiving support in order to counteract the BRAS propaganda and propagate the stories of national integration and progress.

Trust Building/Community Development

The government has also initiated community development centers in terms of

health, education, and livelihood in insurgency-affected districts, as it has understood that counterinsurgency is not merely a job of the army (Abubakar & Amurtiya, 2023). The civil-military programmes rely on local elders, school teachers and even ex-militants in order to restore confidence through confidence-building measures to establish reconciliation. This is to solve those grievances at the core which causes the youth to be subject to insurgent doctrines.

International and Foreign Policies
At the international level, the government has been addressing the platforms, including Meta, X, and Telegram, which dominate the content moderation work and eliminate the anti-state propaganda (Avsec, 2023). Security bilateral dialogues have been set up with Iran and Afghanistan in order to overcome the application of the borders regions as safe havens and media relay points of BRAS. Additionally, the task of Pakistani representatives in the UN and international NGOs has been to present the facts of development and reports on the progress in the rights of Balochistan, thereby refuting the aggressors and winning the narrative of sovereignty.

7. Conclusion
The Baloch insurgency as it is currently, thus poses as a two-pronged aspect, which is a mixture of an armed militancy under BRAS and a soft institutional posture expressed through the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC). Whereas one (the former) engages in a physical struggle, the other will be targeting the mind and storytelling space, by making use of human rights talk and to make use of and use online spaces to de-legitimize the state. The hybrid model demands an equally hybrid response: a combination of intensive usage of cyber and legal intelligence, legal regulation,

dealing with youth, community development and diplomacy. The youth population, especially in universities and online worlds, is the most important avenue of this fight, as narratives that support insurgents gain more acceptance. The state should note that such a narrative war has to be addressed by providing believable narratives and economic platforms, as well as avenues of civic engagement. The kinetic and the non-kinetic aspects of the insurgency would have to be heartened to ensure that Pakistan would protect its national unity as well as reembrace narrative sovereignty in the fast-digitalising world.

References
A Omar, A. (2024). A Framing Analysis of the United States Government Counter-Terrorism Messaging Strategies During the Rise and Fall of ISIS (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester).
Abubakar, T. A., & Amurtiya, M. (2023). Boko-Haram Insurgency and Rural Livelihood Dilemma: Implication for Sustainable Development in North-East Nigeria. Problemy Ekorozwoju, 18(1).
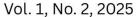Ahmed, Z. S., & Khan, S. (2024). Claiming Agency from a Distance: Baloch Diasporic Resistance to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Ethnopolitics, 1-21.
Avsec, K. (2023). "Pardon me if I don't weep for your victimhood": examining the aftermath of deplatformization through influential far-right activists' framing and alliance-building on Telegram.
Baloch, M. S., Bashir, S., Zarrar, H., & Aslam, A. (2023). Countering violent extremism in Balochistan: A case of strategic communication. Russian Law Journal, 11(8S), 343-354.
Ghani, A. (2024). From Khans to Rebels: A Historical Approach to Analysing the Balochistan Conflict.
Ghani, A. (2024). From Khans to Rebels: A Historical Approach to Analysing the

Balochistan Conflict.

Güntsch, A., Overmann, J., Ebert, B., Bonn, A., Le Bras, Y., Engel, T., ... & Luther, K. (2025). National biodiversity data infrastructures: ten essential functions for science, policy, and practice. BioScience, 75(2), 139-151.

Haider, W., Ali, A., & Zubair, M. (2023). Prevention of Electronic Crime Act, 2016: An Analysis of the Act's Effectiveness in Controlling Misuse of Social Media in Pakistan. Journal of Educational Research and Social Sciences Review (JERSSR), 3(2), 48-54.

Hight, E. M., & Sampson, G. D. (Eds.). (2013). Colonialist photography: imag (in) ing race and place (Vol. 9). Routledge.

Homiak, T. (2024). United States Military Thinking on War in the Age of Postmodern Conflict.

Khan, A., Khwaja, A., & Jawed, A. (2020). Navigating civic spaces during a pandemic: Pakistan report. Collective for Social Science Research.

Larrinaga, A., Odriozola, O., Amurrio, M., & Iraola, I. (2023). Exploring new citizenship practices: The meaning of young activists' political engagement in the Basque country. Made-to-Measure, 217.

Lewis, D. (2022). Contesting liberal peace: Russia's emerging model of conflict management. International Affairs, 98(2), 653-673.

Orjuela, C. (2022). Navigating labels, seeking recognition for victimhood: Diaspora activism after mass-atrocities. Global Networks, 22(1), 166-179.

Piccini, C. (2018). Using Media to Legitimize Terrorism-Dabiq and Islamic State.

Rahman, M. D. (2025). The Art of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT): Addressing Cybercrime, Opportunities, and Challenges.

The Art of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT): Addressing Cybercrime, Opportunities, and Challenges (May 01, 2025).

Rahman, T. (2022). PAKISTAN'S WARS.

Rizvi, S. (2021). Media Consumption and the Construction of Diasporic Identities of Youth of Pakistani Origin in Britain (Doctoral dissertation, University of Westminster).

Rodilosso, E. (2024). Filter bubbles and the unfeeling: How AI for social media can foster extremism and polarization. Philosophy & Technology, 37(2), 71.

Shah, S. (2021). Fear and External Military Security Vs. Internal Human Security: The Case of Pakistan (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bath).

Stoddard, E. (2023). Maoist hybridity? A comparative analysis of the links between insurgent strategic practice and tactical hybridity in contemporary non-state armed groups. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 46(6), 913-937.

Thaler, K. M. (2022). Rebel mobilization through pandering: Insincere leaders, framing, and exploitation of popular grievances. Security Studies, 31(3), 351-380.

Ulug, O., Chayinska, M., & Tropp, L. (2022). Conceptual, methodological, and contextual challenges in studying collective action: Recommendations for future research. TPM. TESTING, PSYCHOMETRICS, METHODOLOGY IN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY, 29(1), 9-22.

Verma, A. (2025). The Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan: Evolution, Tactics, and Regional Security Implications.

Wani, S. A. (2021). The new Baloch militancy: drivers and dynamics. India Quarterly, 77(3), 479-500.