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Research Article

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

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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.

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Research Article

Beyond the Private Sphere: Intimate Partner Violence as a Transnational Security Crisis

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Abstract

This paper challenges the idea that intimate partner violence (IPV) is just a private crime. It argues that IPV is a transnational security crisis shaped by law, politics, and global structures. A key issue is the public-private divide, where the home is seen as outside the state's responsibility. This divide hides violence, protects perpetrators, and allows states to avoid accountability. Cases from London (Chkaifi), Lahore (Shaheen), and Oklahoma (Wilkens) show how these failures can have deadly results. States are not neutral in this process. Discriminatory laws, like Pakistan's Hudood Ordinances, reinforce women's subordination. Police often ignore abuse as a "family matter," and courts frequently silence survivors. The problem is also global—neoliberal economic reforms—policies that cut welfare and social support—trap women in dependence. Conflict zones like Uganda increase household violence, while strict migration laws expose women to dangers like deportation. Traditional security models focus only on borders and armies, ignoring violence inside homes and bodies. Using a conceptual approach, this paper develops a feminist view of security. It centers on bodily integrity, uses intersectional analysis, and calls for structural change. By framing IPV as a global security issue, the paper pushes scholarship and policy forward. It shows that true security means safety in everyday life.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, transnational security, public/private divide, state complicity, feminist security studies, bodily integrity

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) represents a devastating global epidemic, transcending national borders, cultural contexts, and socioeconomic strata. Defined as behaviour within a romantic or sexual relationship causing physical, psychological, or sexual harm. IPV encompasses acts of aggression, coercion, and control, rooted fundamentally in power imbalances and the desire to dominate (Bagwell-Gray, Messing, & Baldwin-White, 2015). Despite its pervasive nature and profound impact on individual lives, community stability, and societal health. Traditional paradigms within security studies and international relations have systematically marginalized IPV. They relegated it to the realm of "private" matters beyond the purview of state responsibility or international concern. This paper fundamentally challenges this exclusionary perspective. It argues that IPV constitutes a critical transnational security concern, deeply intertwined with global political-economic structures, patriarchal hegemonies, and the very fabric of state power. By illuminating the artificiality and detrimental consequences of the public/private divide, this analysis positions IPV not as an isolated criminal act. It is not a personal tragedy, but a manifestation of systemic gender-based violence. This violence is perpetuated and often facilitated by state institutions and international systems of power.

The failure of conventional, state-centric security models – preoccupied with military threats to territorial integrity and sovereignty (Tickner, 1995) – to recognize violence predominantly occurring within the home has profound implications. It renders invisible the daily insecurity faced by millions, predominantly women, obscuring how state structures themselves, through discriminatory legislation, institutional inaction, and the normalization of patriarchal norms, actively enable and exacerbate IPV (Murshid & Critelli, 2020; The Sentencing Project, 2025). Furthermore, this paper contends that the roots of IPV are inherently transnational. Global forces, including neoliberal economic restructuring, migration patterns, conflict, and post-conflict dynamics, interact with local patriarchal structures to shape vulnerability and create fertile ground for such violence to flourish (True, 2010; Mootz et al., 2018; Park et al., 2021). The devastating consequences extend far beyond individual suffering, impacting community cohesion, economic productivity, and the long-term stability of societies emerging from conflict, often neglected in formal peace processes (Mootz et al., 2018).

To support this argument, the paper employs a critical feminist methodology grounded in Feminist Security Studies (True, 2010) and Critical Feminist Theory (Kappler & Lemay-Hebert, 2020). This approach examines the power structures and systemic inequalities that generate and perpetuate IPV, using a methodology based on multi-layered analysis.

1. It critically deconstructs key theoretical frameworks, particularly the public/private divide (Radacic, 2007; Jain & Bhartiya, 2024) and the limitations of state-centric security models (Tickner, 1995), demonstrating their role in obscuring IPV as a security threat.
2. It engages in critical discourse analysis of legal frameworks, state policies, and institutional practices (e.g., policing, judiciary) across diverse contexts to expose patterns of complicity, neglect, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control.
3. Utilizing an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991, 2013; Innes, 2024), the paper examines how factors such as race, class, migration status, sexuality, and geographic location intersect with gender to compound vulnerabilities to

IPV and shape differential access to justice and security. Crucially, this theoretical and structural analysis is contextualized and illuminated through detailed qualitative case studies drawn from both the Global North (e.g., UK, USA) and Global South (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan, Uganda). These cases serve not merely as illustrations but as critical empirical evidence. They reveal the lived realities of IPV victims and the concrete mechanisms – societal pressure, victim-blaming, police dismissal, judicial bias, discriminatory laws. Through these mechanisms, states and societies perpetuate violence and fail to provide security. By weaving together theoretical critique, structural analysis, and grounded case studies, this methodology provides a comprehensive and politically engaged examination of IPV as a transnational security crisis demanding fundamental reconceptualization and transformative global action. The paper ultimately advocates for a feminist redefinition of security centred on bodily integrity, human dignity, and the dismantling of the intersecting systems of oppression that fuel intimate partner violence worldwide.

The methodology of this paper is conceptual.

2. Defining IPV

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behaviour within a romantic or sexual relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to one partner. It includes acts of aggression, coercion, and control, whether physical or non-physical. While the nature and severity of IPV vary, it consistently violates the autonomy and safety of the targeted partner (Bagwell-Gray, Messing, & Baldwin-White, 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Security Studies

Feminist security studies fundamentally challenge traditional International Relations (IR) paradigms that prioritize state-centric military threats, arguing instead for a comprehensive understanding of security that encompasses the pervasive violence women experience across the private and public spheres, including intimate partner violence (IPV) (True, 2010). It critiques the artificial separation between war and peace, highlighting a "continuum of violence" where women's experiences of violence, whether in the home during peacetime or as systematic sexual violence during conflict, are interconnected and rooted in systemic gender inequalities (True, 2010; Davies & True, 2015). Traditional security approaches, including UN frameworks like the Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), often separate conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) from other forms of gender-based violence (GBV). They portray women mainly as victims needing protection by masculine actors such as peacekeepers. This framing reinforces gender essentialism and obscures the political-economic structures that reproduce vulnerability (True, 2010).

Central to feminist security studies is the concept of the gendered political economy. This perspective insists that women's physical security and freedom from violence are inextricably linked to the material basis of relationships governing resource distribution, entitlements, and authority within households, communities, and the transnational realm (True, 2010). It analyses how global processes like neoliberal economic restructuring, trade liberalization, and post-conflict reconstruction exacerbate existing gender inequalities and create new forms of marginalization and violence (True, 2010). For instance, men's loss of secure employment due to economic globalization can trigger violence to reassert masculine identity and control within the household,

demonstrating the interplay between economic disempowerment and intimate violence (True, 2010). Similarly, the creation of export processing zones reliant on young female migrant labour often coincides with environments where violence against women workers, including sexual harassment and femicide, thrives due to deregulation and lack of state protection (True, 2010).

Feminist security studies thus demand a reconceptualization of security that transcends the public/private divide. It asserts that violence against women, including IPV, is not merely a private or criminal issue but a profound security concern with transnational dimensions, fuelled by global political-economic forces and systemic gender discrimination. Ignoring the structural roots of this violence in normalized gender inequalities and discriminatory institutions, as mainstream security analyses often do, obscures its true causes and undermines effective prevention (True, 2010; Davies & True, 2015).

3.2 Critical Feminist Theory

The Critical Feminist Theory provides an analysis rubric to understand that intimate partner violence (IPV) is more than a domestic issue and needs to be viewed as a transnational and political security concern. The approach also challenges established dichotomies of public/private, peace/war, and domestic/international, by accentuating how gendered violence transcends these false divisions. IPV, traditionally a subject of the so-called private realm, becomes internationally significant upon being re-addressed through the eye of critical feminism, according to which the personal is also political (Kappler & Lemay-Hebert, 2020).

The breaking of these binaries shows the nature of cooperation between global orders of militarism, patriarchy, and state power and their ability to re-enact violence upon the female population. The given framework shows that the security of the nation is always put higher than the interests of individual lives, especially women who face violence that is either marginalized or apolitical. As a result, IPV becomes invisible within the mainstream security-related debates and discourses, which invoke masculinist concepts of war and peace and thereby obscure the prevalence of IPV.

Critical Feminist Theory, in turn, emphasizes the interrelation of gender, power, and violence. Underlining that the positions of women vary in accordance with race, class, nationality, and other indices of identity, it stresses the layers and complexity of the experiences of women (Crenshaw, 1991). This intersectional awareness shifts the focus from isolated acts of abuse to the structural and systemic nature of IPV, drawing attention to how global hierarchies shape vulnerability. In this context, IPV cannot be reduced to a purely personal or cultural issue. Rather, it reflects unequal gendered power relations embedded within both domestic and international structures.

4. The Public/Private Divide

The public/private divide, a cornerstone of liberal political thought and international human rights law, has functioned as a primary mechanism for the systemic marginalization of women's rights and the normalization of intimate partner violence (IPV). Historically, the public/private dichotomy has placed the public domain of state, market economy, and formal political institutions as the legitimate site of legal regulation and the enforcement of rights, while relegating the private sphere, including the family life, home, and other personal associations, to a space shielded from state intervention and public scrutiny (Radacic, 2007). Such a division is inherently gendered: the public sphere becomes linked with masculinity, rationality, citizenship, and authority, while the domestic sphere is tied to

femininity, depicted as apolitical, natural, and outside the domain of law (Jain & Bhartiya, 2024; Radacic, 2007).

Feminist scholarship has relentlessly exposed how this divide operated as the "main obstacle for the protection of women's rights" (Radacic, 2007). By defining violations predominantly occurring within the private sphere, such as domestic violence, marital rape, and reproductive control, as "private issues" or matters of "morality," international human rights law and domestic legal systems historically rendered them invisible and outside the scope of state responsibility (Radacic, 2007). The doctrine of state responsibility initially focused solely on direct actions by state agents in the public sphere, neglecting systemic failures to prevent or remedy violations by private actors (like intimate partners) within the "private" domain (Radacic, 2007). This conceptualization meant that widespread IPV was not recognized as a violation of human rights or a matter of public concern, but rather as an unfortunate, yet inevitable, aspect of private life. Archival practices reinforced this invisibility, often categorizing materials documenting women's lives, even of prominent politicians like Kerstin Hesselgren, within "private" ephemera or familial contexts, marginalizing their public contributions and the violence they might face (Pierce, 2024).

The consequences of this divide for IPV are profound and enduring. By framing the home as a "haven" beyond state reach, the dichotomy provided ideological cover for impunity, allowing patriarchal control and violence within families to flourish unchecked (Jain & Bhartiya, 2024). Despite legal reforms ostensibly extending justice into the private sphere (e.g., domestic violence laws), the legacy of the divide persists. Data reveals high rates of unreported IPV due to societal pressure, victim-blaming, and the enduring perception of such violence as private family matter rather than a public crime (Jain & Bhartiya, 2024; Radacic, 2007). Furthermore, women entering the public sphere often face new forms of subordination and violence (like workplace harassment), while still bearing the primary responsibility for the private sphere, creating a "double burden" that exacerbates vulnerability (Jain & Bhartiya, 2024). The public/private divide thus constructed a legal and social architecture that systematically obscured IPV, minimized state accountability, and normalized violence against women within the very space designated as their domain.

5. IPV, State Structures and Power

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is structurally intertwined with the workings of the state through law and its apparatus of enforcement, as well as through institutionalized gender inequities. Patriarchal control was explicitly intertwined with the judicial system in Pakistan, where discriminatory laws, especially the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, existed, which required rape prosecutions to be conducted with four male witnesses. Consequently, many victims of rape were instead charged with fornication under Hudood Ordinances, and the victim was punished (Murshid & Critelli, 2020). The Domestic Violence Bill of 2010 was a reform, but poor implementation persists. Systems equate IPV with so-called domestic issues, where police regularly dismiss reports as a matter of the private sphere and treat it as normal (this reflects state-sanctioned indifference that normalizes abuse) (Murshid & Critelli, 2020). Comparable patterns are observed across 28 EU countries, whereby structural stigma involving gender-related disparities in health, income, and political influence is found to correlate with the increased rates of IPV. Women in high-stigma countries faced 18% greater risk of recent IPV and heightened fear of violence, highlighting

how state-level gender inequities perpetuate risk (Scheer et al., 2022).

IPV functions as a tool for patriarchal power by enforcing control and subordination. In Pakistan, 41.6% of women reported husbands using coercive behaviours (e.g., restricting movement, isolating them from social networks), directly linking control to violence (Murshid & Critelli, 2020). Adherence to patriarchal norms, such as justifying wife-beating for trivial infractions (e.g., burning food), increased IPV risk by 39%, revealing how cultural ideologies weaponize violence to maintain dominance (Murshid & Critelli, 2020). Similarly, in the EU, minority women, sexual minorities, immigrants, and those in poverty face disproportionate IPV risks (e.g., sexual minority women had 8× higher risk of abuse). This highlights how intersecting power hierarchies (e.g., heteronormativity, xenophobia) exploit IPV to marginalize vulnerable groups (Scheer et al., 2022). Thus, state structures legitimize and exacerbate IPV, while violence itself reinforces gendered power imbalances transnationally.

6. IPV as a Transnational Security Concern

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive issue and is transnational; it is a security issue rooted in established patriarchal institutions that systematically marginalize women and make IPV a norm in most cultures. Cross-cultural research reveals striking commonalities where patriarchal norms systematically subordinate women, creating environments where IPV is normalized and legal protections remain inadequate or unenforced (Mootz et al., 2018; Purohit et al., 2014). To illustrate, in Northeastern Uganda, the inflexibility of gender roles tends to lead to men controlling resources and decision-making regarding female healthcare, which only aggravates relational-level violence and leads to the development of serious mental health problems, namely depression and suicidality, in women exposed to both IPV and armed violence simultaneously (Mootz et al., 2018). A examination of social media discourse in India, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, and the United States demonstrates an even more fertile soil for implicit gender-based violence (GBV): the abundance of humour and metaphors, common in Philippine tweets which use more slang phrasing like “baka ma rape” (you might get raped) or sports-related rape analogies (unnecessary rape penalties in football), thus tending to downplay the atrocity of the act (Purohit et al., 2014). Accordingly, a unified international environment is created where both cultural approval and inadequate implementation of the law serve as conducive conditions of IPV, regardless of the development level and geographical location.

In Uganda, empirical research conducted shows that conflict areas aggravate intimate partner violence, shifting it from individual suffering to a broader societal danger. Women living in Teso experienced violence from both armed groups and their partners, which was worsened by men’s traumatic experiences, broken community ties, and economic collapse (Mootz et al., 2018). The jointly exerted violence forms led to significantly elevated depression and suicidal ideation compared to women experiencing only one form of violence. This burden was exacerbated by displacement: Women who were displaced in Northern Uganda also subjected themselves to dangerous trips to collect firewood to feed their families, consequently exposing themselves to soldiers and rebels (Mootz et al., 2018). Crucially, peace processes consistently fail to address this nexus. Despite the profound impact of IPV on women's security and community stability during and after conflict, it remains conspicuously absent from formal peace agreements and

disarmament programs, as seen in Uganda's post-2006 disarmament efforts, which ignored ongoing IPV within "protectorate villages" (Mootz et al., 2018). This omission leaves a critical security vacuum, allowing patterns of violence established during war to persist and undermine post-conflict recovery.

The crossings between borders are deeply entangled with intimate partner violence (IPV), resulting in transnational dangers marked by a lack of clarity in the law and an increase in risk. Immigrating women, especially those who do not have a safe residential situation, such as visitors or temporary workers in Canada, are disproportionately affected: they are 1.65 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence compared to citizens (Park et al., 2021). The threat of being deported, being unaware of the laws that protect them, the reliance on the abusive sponsors, and worry about immigration policies do not encourage these women to reach out to formal institutions; instead, they refer to NGOs with limited resources like Changing Together (Park et al., 2021; Mootz et al., 2018). Such a climate of uncertainty blinds IPV to the protective mechanisms of the states. More so, mistreatment situations often trigger migration, which then subjects victims to new risks upon their arrival. Online analyses, too, indicate the existence of this phenomenon: in Nigeria, as elsewhere, the threat of retaliation (especially by Boko Haram) has generated much less retweeting and general discussion of violence against women (Purohit et al., 2014). Women moving abroad for marriage often find themselves isolated, facing language hurdles, unfamiliar laws, and potentially trapped in abuse far from home, leaving them uniquely vulnerable and legally invisible across nations.

Given its transnational nature, IPV must be acknowledged as a core human rights abuse demanding unified global action through existing agreements. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5.2 on ending violence against women and Goal 16 on peace and justice, set a universal framework requiring commitment beyond any single country (Park et al., 2021; Mootz et al., 2018). International treaties like CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention explicitly demand states prevent, protect against, and punish IPV, defining it as a state duty needing legal change, not a private affair (Park et al., 2021; Mootz et al., 2018). Meeting SDG targets and treaty responsibilities means creating consistent laws worldwide, guaranteeing migrant and refugee women can access justice regardless of immigration standing (Park et al., 2021.), embedding IPV prevention within peace talks and rebuilding efforts (Mootz et al., 2018), and promoting worldwide cooperation to challenge the patriarchal beliefs enabling global violence, visible even in widespread online talk (Purohit et al., 2014). Achieving this requires persistent, joint international work.

7. Case Studies- Global North

7.1 Case Study: Yasmi Chkaifi

This case study details the fatal Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against Yasmin Chkaifi (43, also known as Wafah or Yaz), occurring in Maida Vale, London, illustrating the breach of the private/public divide. Chkaifi suffered years of severe physical and coercive abuse at the hands of her estranged partner, Leon McCaskre (41). Despite residing in soundproofed flats, a neighbour reported frequently hearing "clumps and thumps," Chkaifi screaming, and McCaskre shouting during violent assaults. The neighbour's interventions (knocking on their door) would temporarily halt the violence, indicating McCaskre's awareness of external perception, yet the abuse persisted "at all times of the day and night." Police were called on multiple occasions following these incidents (Weaver, 2022).

The abuse extended beyond physical violence into profound control; McCaskre bullied Chkaifi, preventing her from speaking to others and dominating her life, making her visibly unhappy. Her well-being notably improved only during periods when McCaskre was absent, allowing neighbourly interaction. This chronic private terror culminated in a highly public act of lethal violence: McCaskre attacked Chkaifi on the street near St Peter's primary school just before 9 am, witnessed by children whose screams awoke residents. McCaskre died after being struck by a car during the incident. Chkaifi, described as kind, beautiful, and community-minded (child-minding, tending plants), leaves behind two teenage sons and a devastated family, originally from Morocco, with her mother hospitalized from shock. The case tragically demonstrates how sustained private IPV escalates into fatal public security threats, shattering lives and communities (Weaver, 2022).

7.2 Case Study: State Complicity in IPV - The Case of April Wilkens (Oklahoma, USA)

This case study examines how state structures actively perpetuate Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) through institutional failure and bias, using the case of April Wilkens in Oklahoma. Wilkens endured extreme, well-documented abuse from her former partner, including rape, beatings, kidnapping, stalking, and blackmail, detailed in over 14 police reports witnessed by multiple observers. Despite this extensive documentation and her repeated pleas, law enforcement consistently refused to intervene or protect her. This inaction is critically linked to the perpetrator's social privilege as the son of a prominent local businessman, demonstrating how state power (via police) selectively enforces protection based on social hierarchies, leaving victims vulnerable (The Sentencing Project, 2025).

The state's role in perpetuating violence extended beyond police inaction into the judicial system. After Wilkens killed her abuser during an hours-long sexual assault and beating, acting in immediate self-defense, she was charged with first-degree murder. During her trial, the court system failed her: the novel "Battered Woman Syndrome" defense was met with skepticism, her own attorney failed to present crucial expert testimony, and key evidence was suppressed. This resulted in her life sentence. The state apparatus, through its police and courts, thus transitioned from failing to protect her from private violence to publicly punishing her survival response. Wilkens remains incarcerated, advocating for legal reform (DVSJA-type bills) to challenge the systemic state structures that enabled her abuse and subsequent imprisonment (The Sentencing Project, 2025).

7.3 Global South- Case Study: Institutional and Social Complicity in IPV - The Case of Rumana Manzur (Bangladesh)

This case study examines Rumana Manzur's experience in Bangladesh to illustrate how state and societal structures perpetuate Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the Global South, reinforcing the private/public divide. Manzur, a Dhaka University professor and University of British Columbia postgraduate student, suffered years of abuse from her husband, Hasan Sayeed Sumon. The violence culminated on June 5th when Sumon gouged her eyes in their Dhaka residence, permanently blinding her left eye and severely damaging her right eye, witnessed by their five-year-old daughter. Despite seeking treatment in Bangladesh and India, her sight could not be restored (Staff Correspondent, 2011).

The case reveals multiple layers of systemic failure. Firstly, the abuse persisted privately for years. Secondly, post-assault, Manzur faced public victim-

blaming, including fabricated allegations of infidelity spread by media and social media, actively attempting to justify the attack, a form of societal complicity condemned by academics, lawyers, and activists. Thirdly, concerns arose regarding potential state institutional bias, with Manzur's lawyer fearing influence from Sumon's lawyer uncle on the judicial process, despite his arrest and remand. While the education minister assured justice, the demand to shift the case to a Speedy Trial Tribunal reflects underlying distrust in the regular system. Manzur's public plea, "Please, press for his punishment," underscores the victim's struggle against structures that transition private violence into public injustice without adequate accountability (Staff Correspondent, 2011).

7.4 Case Study: State and Societal Perpetuation of IPV - The Case of Musarrat Sultana Shaheen (Pakistan)

This case study examines the brutal attack on Musarrat Sultana Shaheen in Pakistan, demonstrating systemic complicity in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and the collapse of the private/public divide. On February 7th, Musarrat's mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law's husband amputated her legs below the knees, falsely accusing her of adultery. This extreme act of violence occurred within the "private" family sphere, reflecting entrenched patriarchal norms where women are controlled through accusations of infidelity, used to justify crimes, and gain social acceptance (Rizvi, 2004).

The case underscores critical institutional failures. Pakistan lacks specific domestic violence legislation; existing laws offer lenient penalties and fail to address violence by non-spousal family members, as highlighted by Musarrat's ordeal. The state's failure to enact proposed laws signifies neglect. Furthermore, societal structures actively perpetuate violence and impede justice: Musarrat and her family faced immense pressure from their clan ("biradari") to withdraw charges and compromise, reflecting the social stigma against challenging familial authority. Cultural attitudes prioritise keeping marriages intact at all costs, discouraging reporting and support for victims, with divorced women seen as burdens. While the perpetrators are jailed, Musarrat's plight reveals how state inaction and societal collusion transform private abuse into a severe public security and human rights crisis, demanding transnational feminist intervention (Rizvi, 2004). In this case, the in-laws act as proxies for the husband and perpetuate IPV.

7.5 Case Study: State Response to Extreme IPV - Islamabad Axe Attack

This case study examines the attempted murder of an Islamabad woman by her husband using an axe, demonstrating the state's reactive role in addressing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) after private violence becomes publicly visible. The attack occurred within the marital home (private sphere), but intervention only commenced when the victim's father filed a formal complaint with Phulgran Police (transition to public sphere). Police responded by registering a case, deploying modern technology and forensic evidence to arrest the suspect, and publicly committing to "strict action" through prosecution (APP, 2025).

Two critical dimensions emerge:

1. Third-Party Reporting Necessity: The victim required her father's intervention to trigger state action, highlighting institutional passivity toward IPV until external actors' demand accountability.

2. Selective Institutional Efficacy: While police efficiently apprehended the suspect post-complaint, this juxtaposes this with pervasive gender-based violence across Pakistan (per Human Rights Commission data), including an honour killing days prior in Quetta. This highlights systemic

inconsistency in protecting women (APP, 2025).

The case reveals how states in the Global South often treat IPV as a private issue until extreme physical harm forces public institutional engagement, failing to dismantle the root structures enabling such violence.

8. Feminist Reconceptualization of Security

8.1 Deconstructing the State-Centric Model of Security

Traditional security paradigms, heavily influenced by realist thought, prioritize the state as the primary actor and referent object, defining security almost exclusively in terms of military threats to territorial integrity and sovereignty achieved through power balancing and deterrence (Tickner, 1995). This state-centric model, dominant during the Cold War, constructs sharp boundaries between the "ordered" domestic sphere and "anarchic" international realm, viewing security as zero-sum and achievable only through state military capabilities (Tickner, 1995). Feminist Security Studies fundamentally challenges this model, arguing it is analytically inadequate and normatively flawed for contemporary security challenges, particularly concerning violence against women like Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (True, 2010). The state-centric model's core flaw lies in its artificial separation of the public (state, military) from the private (family, home), rendering pervasive violence within the "private" sphere, such as IPV, invisible to security analysis and state responsibility (Radacic, 2007; Jain & Bhartiya, 2024,).

By privileging state security and interstate conflict, this model systematically neglects the security of individuals, especially women, within state borders. It obscures how state structures themselves, through discriminatory laws (e.g., Pakistan's Hudood Ordinances), police inaction (e.g., April Wilkens case), judicial bias, and the perpetuation of patriarchal norms, actively facilitate and normalize IPV, transforming the state from a presumed security provider into a complicit actor in insecurity (Murshid & Critelli, 2020; The Sentencing Project, 2025; Staff Correspondent, 2011). As Tickner notes, critics argue that state-centric analysis, focusing solely on political/military dimensions, is insufficient in a highly interdependent world facing multiple, non-military threats that defy border protection (Tickner, 1995). IPV exemplifies such a threat: it is transnational in scope, fuelled by global political-economic forces and patriarchal structures, and devastates individual lives and community stability, yet remains marginalized within state-centric security frameworks that cannot conceptualize violence crossing the public/private divide (True, 2010; Mootz et al., 2018). Deconstructing this model is therefore essential to recognizing IPV as a profound security concern demanding a reconceptualization centred on human, rather than exclusively state, security.

8.2 Centring Bodily Integrity in Security Discourse

Feminist security studies fundamentally challenge state-centric security paradigms that prioritize territorial sovereignty over individuals' physical safety, demanding a reconceptualization centred on bodily integrity as a core security referent (True, 2010). Bodily integrity, the inviolability of the physical self, is systematically violated by intimate partner violence (IPV), which remains obscured within traditional security frameworks that relegate violence occurring in the "private" sphere to the margins of political concern (Radacic, 2007; True, 2010). This exclusion ignores how IPV is intrinsically linked to transnational political-economic structures. Global processes like neoliberal restructuring exacerbate women's economic precarity, trapping them in

violent relationships by limiting access to resources, safe housing, or independent migration status, thereby directly undermining bodily autonomy (True, 2010; Park et al., 2021). Furthermore, state institutions often perpetuate this violence through discriminatory laws, police inaction treating IPV as a "private matter," and judicial systems biased against survivors (Murshid & Critelli, 2020; The Sentencing Project, 2025; Staff Correspondent, 2011). Centring bodily integrity necessitates dismantling the public/private divide in security discourse. It requires recognizing that the pervasive threat of IPV, enabled by global inequalities and state complicity, constitutes a profound human security crisis demanding transnational responses focused on ensuring women's fundamental right to physical safety and autonomy within and beyond national borders (True, 2010; Davies & True, 2015).

8.3 IPV as Structural, Not Individualized Violence

IPV is more than the isolated instances of violence; it must be viewed as a manifestation of structural inequalities and structural weaknesses. Feminist scholarship has clearly challenged these explanations and instead, depicts the inseparability of IPV and the greater power structures in society and across national boundaries (True, 2010, Tolmie et al., 2018). The government also contributes to IPV by promoting discriminatory laws like the Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan and that permit the perpetrator with impunity (Murshid & Critelli, 2020) and as well as the institutional neglect, as seen in the dismissal of IPV by the police as a “private matter” in key cases like April Wilkens being denied justice by the courts (The Sentencing Project, 2025). This acts of state complicity turns the supposed security providers into actors that perpetuate insecurity.

IPV is also a patriarchal tool of control that enforces gender hierarchies on a transnational basis. Adherence with patriarchal norms already increases the risk of IPV to a higher degree (Murshid & Critelli, 2020), whereas combined oppressions of race, class, migration status, and sexuality increase their vulnerability (Scheer et al., 2022; Crenshaw, 1991). Entrapment model explains this dynamic and shows how the victims’ and survivors are trapped not only by the coercion of the partner but by a system that fails to provide adequate safety responses, and perpetuate structural racism, economic precarity, that restrict autonomy and access to justice (Tolmie et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). Consequently, IPV is inextricably linked to global political economies, colonial legacies, and state-sanctioned gender inequities, demanding analysis and intervention beyond the individual level (True, 2010; Davies & True, 2015).

8.4 Intersectional Security: Race, Class, and Gender

An intersectional security framework fundamentally challenges monolithic state security by revealing how insecurities are co-constituted by race, class, and gender within global power structures (Crenshaw, 2013; Innes, 2024). Securitization processes, such as restrictive immigration controls or health surveillance, rarely operate neutrally; instead, they calcify existing hierarchies, disproportionately targeting racialized, low-income, and migrant women (Innes, 2024). For instance, migrant women experience heightened vulnerability to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), 1.65 times more likely than citizens in Canada, due to intersecting barriers like deportation threats, economic dependence on abusive sponsors, and lack of culturally safe services, creating a state of "entrapment" that transcends borders (Park et al., 2021; Tolmie et al., 2024). Health securitization, exemplified by pandemic border closures

and healthcare charging (e.g., the UK's 150% fees for migrant maternity care), exacerbates these vulnerabilities by limiting access to crucial support systems for IPV survivors, particularly women of colour and those in poverty (Innes, 2024). Consequently, the state's security practices often reproduce the very patriarchal, racist, and class-based violence they purport to mitigate, rendering women with marginalized identities perpetually insecure (True, 2010; Innes, 2024). True security demands dismantling these interlocking systems of oppression to centre the bodily integrity and lived experiences of the most marginalized.

8.5 From Protective to Transformative Security

Traditional security paradigms prioritize protective measures, such as UNSCR 1325's focus on conflict-related sexual violence, which often isolates interventions from broader socio-economic contexts and reinforces women's victimhood (True & Tanyag, 2017; True, 2010). This protective approach fails to address the root causes of intimate partner violence (IPV), such as gendered economic precarity, discriminatory laws, and patriarchal power structures that persist across peace and conflict (True, 2012; Murshid & Critelli, 2020). For instance, post-conflict peace operations frequently prioritize military stability over livelihood restoration, neglecting women's material needs and trapping survivors in cycles of abuse (True & Tanyag, 2017).

Transformative security, by contrast, demands dismantling structural inequalities through integrated political-economic justice. It shifts from merely shielding women to empowering their agency by ensuring access to resources, legal autonomy, and participation in decision-making (True & Tanyag, 2017; Davies & True, 2015). This requires embedding IPV prevention within macroeconomic policies, such as valuing unpaid care work, guaranteeing migrant women's healthcare access, and challenging neoliberal austerity that exacerbates household tensions (True, 2012; Innes, 2024). Transformative frameworks also reject siloed interventions, instead linking physical security to sexual/reproductive rights and economic justice to disrupt the continuum of violence (True & Tanyag, 2017). Without such structural change, protective measures risk perpetuating the very insecurities they aim to resolve.

9. Conclusion

This analysis has unflinchingly demonstrated that intimate partner violence (IPV) is not a private misfortune confined within the walls of a home, nor merely a criminal justice issue. It is, fundamentally and undeniably, a profound transnational security crisis. The pervasive myth of the public/private divide, deeply embedded in liberal political thought and international law, has served for centuries as the primary ideological shield, rendering IPV invisible to the state's security gaze and absolving institutions of accountability (Radacic, 2007; Jain & Bhartiya, 2024). We have seen, tragically and repeatedly, how this artificial separation operates: the neighbour's knocks temporarily silencing the screams in Maida Vale, but not stopping Yasmin Chkaifi's terror until it exploded onto the street; the police reports piling up uselessly for April Wilkens while state power protected her abuser; the societal whispers blaming Rumana Manzur even as she lost her sight; the clan pressure silencing Musarrat Shaheen after her limbs were severed; the desperate need for a father's intervention in Islamabad to trigger any state response. These are not isolated tragedies; they are the predictable, systemic outcomes of a world order that systematically devalues women's security within the so-called private sphere.

The evidence presented here shatters the illusion that states are neutral security providers. State structures are deeply complicit actors in the perpetuation of IPV. Discriminatory laws like Pakistan's Hudood Ordinances codify patriarchal control into the justice system itself (Murshid & Critelli, 2020). Police inaction, dismissing abuse as a "private matter," is not negligence but a form of state-sanctioned indifference, as Wilkens' case so starkly illustrates (The Sentencing Project, 2025). Judicial systems frequently fail survivors, replicating societal biases and punishing resistance, as seen in Wilkens' wrongful conviction and the fears surrounding Manzur's case in Bangladesh (Staff Correspondent, 2011). Furthermore, the data is unequivocal: state-level gender inequities, measured through structural stigma in health, income, and power, directly correlate with higher IPV prevalence, demonstrating how institutionalized discrimination fuels intimate terror (Scheer et al., 2022). The state, therefore, is often not a bulwark against violence but a key pillar enabling it.

Critically, the roots of this crisis extend far beyond any single nation. IPV is intrinsically transnational, fuelled by global political-economic forces. Neoliberal restructuring creates the economic precarity that traps women in violent relationships (True, 2010). Conflict zones like Northeastern Uganda expose the deadly synergy between armed violence and IPV, where broken communities and male trauma dramatically escalate abuse and mental health devastation, yet peace processes consistently ignore this nexus, leaving a critical security vacuum (Mootz et al., 2018). Migration, rather than offering escape, often compounds vulnerability; the heightened risk faced by migrant women in Canada, isolated and threatened by deportation, lays bare how immigration regimes intersect with patriarchal control to create transnational "entrapment" (Park et al., 2021; Tolmie et al., 2018). Online spaces, reflecting global patriarchal attitudes, normalize and trivialize gender-based violence across cultures, as seen in the disturbing social media discourses analyzed from India to the Philippines (Purohit et al., 2014). IPV thrives in this interconnected web of global inequality and normalized misogyny.

Consequently, the traditional, state-centric model of security – obsessed with borders, military might, and interstate conflict (Tickner, 1995) – is not merely inadequate; it is analytically bankrupt and morally indefensible when confronting the daily, global insecurity inflicted by IPV. It fails utterly to conceptualize violence that crosses the threshold from the public to the private, or to see the state itself as a source of insecurity for half its population. A feminist reconceptualization of security is not an optional theoretical exercise; it is an urgent necessity. Security must be centred on the fundamental, inviolable principle of bodily integrity. It demands dismantling the corrosive public/private divide in security discourse and practice. It requires embracing an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991, 2013; Innes, 2024) that recognizes how race, class, migration status, sexuality, and location compound vulnerabilities to IPV and shape vastly different experiences of (in)security. It necessitates moving beyond merely protective measures, which often isolate interventions and reinforce victimhood, towards genuinely transformative security (True & Tanyag, 2017). This means tackling the root causes: embedding IPV prevention within macroeconomic policies that value care work and ensure economic justice. It also means guaranteeing migrant women's unconditional access to healthcare and safety. It requires overhauling legal systems to ensure real accountability and survivor-centred justice. It involves challenging the patriarchal norms glorified in cultures worldwide. And crucially, it calls for integrating IPV

prevention and survivor support as core, non-negotiable components of conflict resolution and post-conflict rebuilding.

The case studies from the UK to Pakistan, the US to Bangladesh, are not just stories; they are indictments. They reveal a global system where violence against intimate partners is systematically enabled, ignored, or punished only when it becomes too publicly grotesque to ignore. Recognizing IPV as the transnational security crisis it truly is constitutes the essential first step. The next, and far more demanding step, is the relentless pursuit of the transformative change outlined here – a world where security is measured not by the strength of borders, but by the safety of every individual within their own home and body, everywhere. This is the only security worth striving for. Anything less perpetuates the cycle.

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Research Article

The Subaltern Silence: An Eco-Feminist Analysis of the Global South's Fractured Voice in Climate Negotiations

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Abstract

This paper addresses the persistent fragmentation of the Global South's collective voice within international climate negotiations. Transcending conventional state-centric analyses of competing national interests, this study employs a postcolonial eco-feminist framework to address the central research question: To what extent do internal patriarchal state structures in the Global South undermine the formation of a unified negotiating voice on climate change, and how does this manifest in the national climate policies of Pakistan and Nigeria? The central thesis advanced is that this disunity is a direct manifestation of entrenched patriarchal structures within states in the Global South. These structures grant preeminence to masculinist-coded objectives, such as industrial economic growth and national security, thereby systematically marginalizing the lived experiences and knowledge of the most climate-vulnerable populations, particularly women. Existing scholarship has largely examined the fragmentation of the Global South through the lenses of divergent material interests, North–South power asymmetries, or institutional weaknesses; however, it has rarely interrogated the gendered and patriarchal logics underpinning these divisions. By foregrounding this overlooked dimension, the paper addresses a critical gap in both climate diplomacy and feminist IR literature. Through a comparative analysis of Pakistan and Nigeria, this paper demonstrates that the silencing of these "subaltern" voices precludes the formation of an authentic, unified external position grounded in climate justice.

Keywords: Global South, Climate Diplomacy, Eco-feminism, Postcolonialism, Gender, G77, UNFCCC, Climate Justice, Pakistan, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The international climate regime, institutionalized under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), rests on a geopolitical narrative that divides the world into two camps: the historically polluting Global North and the disproportionately affected Global South (GCE Europe, 2023). This binary, rooted in the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" (CBDR-RC), implies a shared interest and a common position among the nations of the South, born from a collective history of colonial subjugation and a shared present of acute vulnerability to the escalating climate crisis (Jahan, 2012). The Group of 77 and China (G77+China), the principal negotiating bloc for developing countries, was founded on this very premise of solidarity to amplify the influence of the "powerless and vulnerable" on the world stage (Adler & Tanner, 2013). Yet, a central and debilitating paradox persists within the halls of climate diplomacy. Despite the rhetorical power of Southern solidarity, the Global South frequently fails to speak with a single, coherent voice. Its negotiating positions often appear fragmented, contradictory, and undermined by internal divisions (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2024), resulting in outcomes consistently described as "too little and too late". The broad banner of the "Global South" or the "Third World" often conceals profound structural and political fissures that prevent the formation of a cohesive and effective negotiating bloc (Roberts & Parks, 2007).

Conventional international relations theories, particularly from a realist perspective, explain this disunity through the lens of divergent national interests (Williams, 2018). This framework posits that states, as rational actors in an anarchic system, prioritize their own survival, security, and power. From this viewpoint, it is unsurprising that the interests of a major emerging economy and emitter like China would diverge from those of an existentially threatened small island state like the Maldives, or that an oil-exporting nation like Saudi Arabia would actively obstruct mitigation progress (Chan & Dagnet, 2012). While valid, such state-centric analyses are insufficient. They treat the "national interest" as a pre-formed, objective reality, failing to interrogate its construction and overlooking the deeper, structural forces that shape state behavior and produce these very cleavages (Sultana, 2022).

This paper posits a more fundamental explanation for the fragmentation of the Global South's voice, guided by the research question: To what extent do internal patriarchal state structures in the Global South undermine the formation of a unified negotiating voice on climate change, and how does this manifest in the national climate policies of Pakistan and Nigeria? Drawing on a postcolonial eco-feminist framework, this analysis contends that the concept of "national interest" in many powerful Global South nations is constructed around masculinist-coded priorities such as industrial growth, resource extraction for export, and geopolitical standing that mirror the very developmentalist models imposed during the colonial era (Mudgway, 2023). This paradigm systematically devalues, marginalizes, and renders invisible the knowledge, labor, and security of women and other subaltern communities who bear the disproportionate burden of climate change (Alston, 2014). The internal silencing of these voices, whose security is predicated on ecological health and community resilience, makes an authentic, unified external voice rooted in holistic climate justice impossible (Tuana, 2013). The fracture we observe at the UNFCCC is a projection of the gendered power imbalances operating at the national and local levels.

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, critical analysis grounded in a postcolonial eco-feminist framework. This framework is not only presented in the theoretical section but is applied throughout the subsequent analysis: it guides the deconstruction of Global South negotiating blocs, shapes the reading of state climate policies, and informs the comparative interpretation of Pakistan and Nigeria. In other words, eco-feminist and postcolonial concepts are consistently mobilized to interrogate how patriarchal logics structure both domestic climate governance and international bargaining behavior.

The scope is intentionally focused, centering on a comparative case study of two highly climate-vulnerable nations from distinct regions: Pakistan from South Asia and Nigeria from West Africa. These nations were selected through purposive sampling, as they each combine (i) acute exposure to climate risks, (ii) deeply entrenched patriarchal social hierarchies, and (iii) complex development trajectories that juxtapose vulnerability with competing economic priorities. Together, these cases illuminate how gendered power relations are reproduced in national climate policy and projected into international negotiations.

- **Pakistan**, while a low-emissions country, faces existential threats from hydro-meteorological hazards such as floods and droughts (WWF, n.d.). Its state policies reveal a persistent tension between urgent adaptation imperatives and a developmental paradigm that neglects the gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability (Bradshaw, 2022).
- **Nigeria**, as a major oil and gas producer, exemplifies a patriarchal-developmentalist logic intrinsically tied to resource extraction (International Crisis Group, 2023). This model entrenches a conflict between the state's economic reliance on fossil fuels and the environmental security of its citizens, with disproportionate harms borne by women in the Niger Delta (Fisher, 2021).

This comparative design is qualitative and critical, not mixed-method. It does not combine qualitative and quantitative methods; rather, it relies on a systematic comparison of policy documents (e.g., NDCs, climate action plans), NGO and international reports, and secondary scholarly sources.

This comparative methodology thus facilitates a nuanced, context-sensitive analysis: although patriarchal logics manifest differently in Pakistan and Nigeria, the framework enables a demonstration of their shared role in undermining Global South solidarity.

The paper is structured in four sequential parts. First, it elaborates the theoretical framework of postcolonial eco-feminism. Second, it deconstructs the G77+China bloc, analyzing the internal power dynamics that generate fractures. Third, it presents the detailed comparative case studies of Pakistan and Nigeria, guided by the framework's analytical questions. Finally, it concludes by positing that a truly unified Global South voice can only emerge from a "subaltern climate solidarity" that challenges entrenched patriarchal state power from below.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Postcolonial Eco-feminism: Core Tenets

Postcolonial eco-feminism is a critical theory and political movement that emerged from the confluence of ecology, feminism, and postcolonial studies in the late 20th century (Nagdee, 2021). Its foundational thesis is that all forms of oppression are interconnected; specifically, the patriarchal domination of women and

the colonial-capitalist domination of nature are not parallel but mutually constitutive.

phenomena rooted in the same logic of exploitation and control (Sultana, 2022). Thinkers like Vandana Shiva argue that Western models of "development" and scientific progress are built on a masculinist and colonial worldview that severs the holistic relationship between humans and nature. This paradigm reduces nature to a passive resource for extraction and simultaneously objectifies the people of the Global South—particularly women —as targets for development interventions rather than as agents with their own knowledge systems (Bhatnagar & Sharma, 2022). This framework offers a feminist critique of environmentalism, for often ignoring gendered power dynamics, and an environmental critique of feminism, for sometimes overlooking the ecological basis of social justice.

A central target of this critique is the dominant paradigm of "development" itself. From an eco-feminist perspective, many climate "solutions" proposed for the Global South—such as large-scale renewable energy projects, carbon offsetting schemes, or industrial agriculture are often a continuation of colonial-era dynamics under a green guise (Sultana, 2022). This phenomenon, termed "green grabbing," involves the appropriation of land and resources from local communities for ostensibly environmental ends (Asiyanbi, 2015). These projects, typically driven by state and corporate actors, displace local populations and disproportionately harm women, who are often responsible for household food security, water collection, and managing communal lands (Yadav & Lal, 2018). These technocentric approaches ignore the gendered ecological knowledge preserved by women in marginalized communities and perpetuate a model of progress that is fundamentally at war with nature. Postcolonial eco-feminism thus calls for a rejection of this androcentric worldview and a reclamation of woman-centered, subsistence-based visions of life that prioritize ecological harmony and community well-being (Nagdee, 2021). It argues that true climate justice cannot be achieved through solutions that replicate the extractive and patriarchal logics that caused the crisis (Imam, 2023).

3.2 Intersectionality and Compounded Vulnerability

Postcolonial eco-feminism is inherently intersectional, a concept first articulated by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how overlapping social identities create unique and compounded experiences of discrimination. The framework recognizes that "woman" is not a monolithic category of analysis; the vulnerability of women in the Global South to climate change is compounded by the interlocking systems of oppression based on race, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and legal status (Kabeer, 2015). The lived reality of a landless, low-caste woman in rural Pakistan, an indigenous woman in a conflict-affected forest region of Nigeria, or a migrant domestic worker is shaped by the interaction of these identities, creating unique and intensified forms of marginalization that are often invisible to mainstream policy analysis (Siar, 2023).

State-centric climate policies, which rely on aggregate national data and focus on broad economic sectors, systematically obscure these intersectional realities. The UNFCCC notes that women and girls bear the brunt of climate impacts, with estimates suggesting they constitute 80 percent of those displaced by climate change (UN Women, 2023). Yet, national climate plans often fail to move beyond acknowledging this vulnerability to implementing policies that address its root causes (Oane, 2020).

3.3 Deconstructing the Language of Climate Diplomacy

A central tenet of this analytical framework is the critical deconstruction of the purportedly neutral language of international relations. Core concepts that dominate climate negotiations, such as "national security," "sovereignty," and "economic growth," are revealed not as objective realities, but as patriarchal constructs (FES, 2021). Historically, their definitions have been forged in relation to the state, the military, and the industrial economy: realms governed by masculine-coded values of control, competition, and production (Mudgway, 2023). This logic systematically devalues and marginalizes the so-called "private" sphere of social reproduction, community care, and ecological stewardship, wherein women's labor is foundational yet systemically unrecognized and uncompensated (Kabeer, 2015).

In its pursuit of legitimacy and power on the global stage, the postcolonial state frequently internalizes this patriarchal-developmentalist model (Sultana, 2022). The "national interest" becomes synonymous with GDP growth, energy production, and geopolitical influence, often at the direct expense of ecological sustainability and human well-being. Realizing such interests necessitates the externalization of environmental and social costs—including pollution, resource depletion, and displacement—onto marginalized lands and bodies, which are disproportionately those of women, indigenous peoples, and the rural poor (Thompson-Hall et al., 2016).

In this capacity, the state functions not as a neutral arbiter but as an active agent of silencing, suppressing the subaltern voices that challenge its developmentalist trajectory (Tuana, 2013). This internal contradiction, between the state's proclaimed interests and the security needs of its most vulnerable populations, is subsequently projected onto the international stage. Consequently, what is often misdiagnosed as a mere failure of diplomatic coordination is, in fact, a structural outcome of patriarchy. The disunity of the Global South is not a diplomatic shortcoming; it is the intended result of a patriarchal system that successfully fractures solidarity from within (MacGregor, 2010).

3.4 Research Gap

While the existing scholarship on international climate negotiations has generated valuable insights, it remains limited in scope in several critical ways. Much of the dominant literature explains the persistent fragmentation of the Global South's negotiating blocs—such as the G77+China—through conventional state-centric paradigms. These accounts tend to emphasize divergent material interests, asymmetrical power relations with the Global North, institutional inefficiencies, or the structural imperatives of global capitalism. Although these explanations are important, they generally neglect how domestic socio-political hierarchies, particularly gendered and patriarchal structures, shape how "national interest" is defined and projected onto the international stage.

Feminist and eco-feminist scholarship has, in turn, illuminated how climate change disproportionately affects women and marginalized communities, and has underscored the epistemic violence embedded in masculinist development logics. Yet, this body of work often concentrates on local and community-level struggles, adaptation practices, and environmental justice campaigns, while paying less attention to how these dynamics scale upward into the realm of formal state policy and global negotiations. The critical linkage between subaltern silencing at the national level and the fragmentation of Global South solidarity at the multilateral level therefore remains

underexplored. Furthermore, postcolonial analyses of climate diplomacy have rightly highlighted the enduring legacies of colonialism and neo-imperialism, but they frequently treat the Global South as a relatively cohesive counter-hegemonic bloc, overlooking the fact that intra-South fractures are themselves structured by patriarchal power relations. This creates a conceptual blind spot: while colonial-capitalist domination is problematized, the patriarchal underpinnings of Global South state behavior often remain analytically invisible.

Finally, there is a striking lack of comparative empirical research that systematically demonstrates how these patriarchal logics manifest in the climate policies of specific Global South states and how they, in turn, distort collective bargaining positions. Case studies such as Pakistan and Nigeria—both highly climate-vulnerable yet embedded in different political economies (agrarian-fragile versus petro-dependent)—are rarely juxtaposed to reveal the gendered contradictions that undercut the pursuit of climate justice in negotiations.

This paper directly addresses these gaps by integrating postcolonial eco-feminist theory with a comparative analysis of Pakistan and Nigeria, thereby linking the micro-politics of subaltern silencing to the macro-politics of Global South fragmentation. In doing so, it contributes both a theoretical reframing and an empirical grounding for understanding why a truly unified Global South voice remains elusive in climate negotiations.

4. Findings: Negotiating Blocs and Competing Patriarchies

The G77+China negotiating bloc is the primary vehicle through which the Global South articulates its demands in the UNFCCC process (Vieira, 2012). However, an eco-feminist analysis reveals that this coalition, rather than being a unified front of the oppressed, is a contested space where internal hierarchies and competing patriarchal logics replicate the very dynamics of domination they seek to challenge. The group's fragmentation is not an anomaly but a structural feature rooted in the divergent ways its member states define their interests (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2024).

4.1 The G77+China: A Postcolonial Alliance of Convenience

The Group of 77 was established in 1964 with the explicit goal of leveraging collective bargaining power to advance the economic interests of developing countries within the United Nations system (Obasi, 2021). Its identity is grounded in a shared history of colonialism and a collective demand for the "right to develop," climate justice, and financial and technological support from the historically responsible Global North (Jha, 2022). In climate negotiations, this manifests as a unified stance on foundational principles like Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) and the need for new and additional climate finance (Jahan, 2012; Nhamo & Mjimba, 2020).

However, this unity is largely a strategic performance that masks a deeply heterogeneous reality. The bloc is a "huge, heterogeneous conglomerate" of over 130 nations, encompassing emerging industrial powerhouses, oil-exporting states, middle-income countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Adler & Tanner, 2013). This diversity translates into starkly different vulnerabilities, emission profiles, and, consequently, fundamentally divergent material interests in the outcome of climate negotiations (Farand, 2023). While the language of Southern solidarity persists, the group is fractured into numerous sub-coalitions, each pursuing its own distinct agenda. These internal fissures are often exploited by external powers, further complicating

the potential for a unified stance (American Progress, 2024).

4.2 The Rise of the Developmentalist Patriarchs: The BASIC Coalition

Among the most powerful of these sub-groups is the BASIC coalition, comprising Brazil, South Africa, India, and China. Formed in 2009, this bloc represents a new center of gravity in global politics, characterized by large populations, significant economic clout, and substantial and rapidly growing greenhouse gas emissions (SEI, 2011). Together, they account for roughly 40% of the world's population and, as of 2005, nearly 29% of total global GHG emissions (Chan & Dagnet, 2012). Their diplomatic posture is driven by a desire to protect their national development pathways, which they see as their sovereign right.

From an eco-feminist perspective, the "national interest" articulated by the BASIC countries is a clear expression of a patriarchal-developmentalist logic. This worldview prioritizes industrial production and economic expansion as the primary measures of national strength (Sultana, 2022). While acknowledging their emissions as a "burden," they are also framed as a necessary byproduct of their "greatest achievement"—economic growth (Chan & Dagnet, 2012). Consequently, they have historically resisted internationally binding mitigation commitments that could constrain this growth, even as their collective emissions have soared. This position effectively prioritizes the accumulation of industrial and geopolitical power—a masculinist-coded goal—over the immediate, existential security of the planet and the most vulnerable nations.

4.3 The Voices of the Vulnerable: AOSIS and the LDCs

In stark contrast to the BASIC bloc, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the LDC Group operate from a position of profound vulnerability, which shapes their entire negotiating strategy. AOSIS, a coalition of 44 low-lying coastal and small island nations, faces an existential threat from sea-level rise (IPCC, 2022). This extreme vulnerability grants them a unique "moral leverage" in negotiations. Their strategy is one of "reverse leadership," where, despite their lack of material power, they seek to influence outcomes by championing ambitious mitigation targets (such as the "1.5 to stay alive" campaign) and pioneering legal and ethical arguments for a dedicated "loss and damage" mechanism to compensate for irreversible climate impacts (Harvey & Ayeb-Karlsson, 2022). Their core interest is not development space but planetary survival, a principle that aligns directly with eco-feminist ethics of care and ecological responsibility.

The LDC Group, comprising 45 of the world's poorest nations, shares this vulnerability but focuses its limited negotiating capital on securing "adequate, predictable, and accessible finance" (Oxfam International, 2023). For LDCs, climate finance is not an abstract bargaining chip but a matter of survival, essential for funding adaptation measures and addressing loss and damage in countries that have contributed negligibly to the crisis but suffer its worst effects (UNEP, 2021). Their position is grounded in a demand for justice and a recognition of their structural powerlessness within the global economic and political system.

4.4 An Eco-Feminist Reading of the Fracture

The primary fracture within the G77+China occurs at the intersection of these competing logics. It is a fundamental clash between the developmentalist patriarchy of the powerful emerging economies and the survival-and-justice-based ethics of the most vulnerable (Okereke & Coventry, 2016). This is most evident in two key areas. First is the

conflict over mitigation versus finance. The most vulnerable countries have increasingly argued that their future depends on immediate, deep emissions cuts from all major emitters, including the BASIC countries. The BASIC bloc, however, has often conditioned its own actions on receiving finance from the North, while simultaneously pursuing high-emissions development paths, creating a deep rift with those whose very existence are threatened by those emissions (Roberts & Parks, 2007).

Second, this conflict is exacerbated by the inequitable distribution of climate "solutions." Mechanisms designed to support the South, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), have overwhelmingly benefited the more powerful emerging economies. Over 81% of all CDM projects were hosted in the four BASIC countries, which also received the lion's share of clean-energy technology transfers due to their more developed infrastructure and markets (Roberts & Parks, 2007). This dynamic reveals how, even within a framework of "South-South cooperation," patriarchal power structures —where material strength and industrial capacity determine outcomes—are replicated. The powerful benefit at the expense of the marginalized, leaving LDCs and SIDS further behind (Nagarajan, 2019). This internal hierarchy, where the "male-coded" actors wielding material power dominate the discourse and resources, while the "female-coded" actors must rely on moral suasion, prevents the formation of a truly unified front based on the needs of the most vulnerable. Geopolitical competition between major powers like the US and China further exploits these fissures, using climate finance as a tool of influence and compelling developing nations to navigate these rivalries, detracting from a cohesive, justice-based agenda (Belhaj, 2024).

5. Discussion: A Gendered Analysis of Climate Policy in Pakistan and Nigeria

To move from the abstract architecture of negotiating blocs to the concrete realities of state policy, this section provides a parochial, empirically grounded analysis of Pakistan and Nigeria. By examining their national climate policies through an eco-feminist lens, it is possible to see how the internal silencing of women and other subaltern groups directly contributes to the fractured external voice of the Global South.

5.1 Pakistan – The Vulnerable State and the Invisible Woman

Pakistan is a quintessential example of a climate-vulnerable nation. Consistently ranking among the top countries on the Global Climate Risk Index, it faces a barrage of climate-induced threats despite contributing less than 1% to global emissions (The World Bank, 2022). The country is plagued by catastrophic floods, such as the devastating 2022 super-floods that submerged one-third of the nation (Alam, 2022), as well as severe droughts, glacial melt, and extreme heatwaves that threaten its agriculture-dependent economy and the livelihoods of millions. In its 2021 updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Pakistan committed to an ambitious 50% reduction in projected emissions by 2030, but this target is overwhelmingly conditional (35% of the 50%) on receiving international support of over USD 100 billion (Government of Pakistan, 2021). This position reflects the classic Global South demand for climate justice and finance, framing its action as contingent on the historical responsibility of the North (Khan & Khan, 2023).

However, an eco-feminist analysis reveals a deep chasm between this external posture and the internal reality for Pakistani women. Climate impacts are not gender-neutral; they disproportionately harm women due to pre-existing, deeply entrenched patriarchal structures (UN

Women, n.d.). Women constitute a staggering 70% of the rural agricultural workforce (Shakoor, 2023), yet own a mere 3% of agricultural land (Ali, 2023), a disparity that severely limits their economic independence and capacity to adapt to climate shocks. This lack of ownership means they have little to no say in decisions about crop selection, irrigation, or the adoption of climate-resilient techniques, even though they perform the bulk of the labor (Ali & Ahmad, 2024).

The catastrophic floods of 2022 served as a stark illustration of these compounded gendered vulnerabilities. An estimated 8.2 million women of reproductive age were impacted, with hundreds of thousands requiring urgent antenatal and obstetric care (Anwar & Shaukat, 2023). The widespread destruction of health facilities and transport infrastructure rendered maternal and reproductive healthcare virtually inaccessible for these populations. Within displacement camps, the absence of secure, gender-segregated sanitation facilities and adequate lighting exacerbated the risks of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, and harassment (Bradshaw, 2022). Prevailing cultural norms restricting female mobility further compounded these dangers, frequently preventing women from evacuating without male relatives and thus confining them to hazardous environments (Aur, 2022). Critically, humanitarian relief efforts were often gender-blind, failing to address specific physiological needs such as menstrual hygiene, thereby compromising both the health and dignity of affected women and girls (Anwar & Shaukat, 2023).

Despite nominal recognition of gender considerations within its policy framework, Pakistan has failed to translate these acknowledgements into transformative action. Initiatives such as the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) and the inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting theme in the updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) exist, yet they largely lack substantive implementation. Consequently, the voices of women—particularly those from rural, landless, and other marginalized communities—remain conspicuously absent from policy formulation and implementation processes. This gap ensures that post-disaster relief and rehabilitation programs consistently neglect the unique challenges faced by women, thus perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability (Bradshaw, 2022). This systemic oversight extends to other marginalized populations, notably the transgender community, who are often omitted entirely from disaster management protocols and social protection schemes, rendering them invisible and compounding their suffering. The state's climate response, therefore, perpetuates a patriarchal logic that frames women as passive victims requiring management, rather than as active agents possessing critical knowledge for building genuine resilience. Ultimately, the predominant focus on securing international climate finance, while necessary, serves to obscure the more pressing imperative of dismantling the internal patriarchal structures that create and exacerbate vulnerability in the first place.

5.2 Nigeria – Patriarchy, Resource Extraction, and Silenced Resistance

Nigeria serves as a critical comparative case, exhibiting a similar profile of high climate vulnerability to Pakistan, yet possessing a national interest shaped by a distinct economic driver. The nation is highly susceptible to climate change, contending with desertification in its northern regions and severe coastal flooding and erosion in the south (The World Bank, 2022). Its updated 2021 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) mirrors Pakistan's posture, committing to a 20% unconditional emissions reduction and a 47% conditional

reduction by 2030, contingent on international support (FGN, 2021). However, Nigeria's status as one of Africa's largest hydrocarbon producers introduces a more acute manifestation of the patriarchal-developmentalist logic (Onuoha, 2008). Here, the national interest is predicated upon fossil fuel extraction—a quintessentially masculinist-coded sector associated with state power, capital accumulation, and geopolitical influence. This prioritization has historically precipitated severe environmental degradation and social conflict, particularly in the Niger Delta (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The gendered impacts of climate change in Nigeria are pronounced and directly attributable to entrenched patriarchal norms that govern social roles and resource access (ResearchGate, n.d.). Women, who constitute the majority of the agricultural labor force, face severely curtailed land ownership rights and are often confined to climate-sensitive livelihoods such as rain-fed subsistence farming (Akinyoade, n.d.). This constrained vocational and geographic mobility, a direct consequence of patriarchal structures that bind them to the domestic sphere, structurally limits their adaptive capacity relative to men, who typically possess greater freedom to migrate or pursue alternative employment following climate-related shocks (Odutola et al., 2016).

In the oil-producing Niger Delta, the nexus of patriarchal power and extractive capitalism manifests with particular violence. For decades, women have constituted the vanguard of environmental activism, protesting the contamination of their farmlands and fishing waters by multinational oil corporations (Fisher, 2021). These grassroots movements articulate a potent, alternative eco-feminist vision of development centered on ecological integrity and community well-being (Rahman, 2023). Despite this, they are systematically precluded from formal decision-making processes. Research indicates that women exert negligible influence over environmental management and remediation projects, such as the Ogoniland clean-up, with their concerns and participation consistently disregarded by state and corporate actors (Rahman, 2023). Their resistance is ultimately subordinated to the state's overriding interest in maintaining oil revenues, offering a clear demonstration of a patriarchal state apparatus suppressing subaltern dissent to preserve its core economic model.

Nigeria's policy response mirrors the contradictions seen in Pakistan. The government has adopted a National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020-2025), which aims to mainstream gender into climate policies across key sectors like agriculture, energy, and water (Nigeria, Federal Government of, 2020). The updated NDC also acknowledges the need for a "whole-of-society approach" and gender mainstreaming (Nigeria, Federal Government of, 2021). Yet, the implementation of these gender-responsive policies has been inconsistent, with significant gaps in funding, coordination, and monitoring. The state's fundamental commitment to expanding the oil and gas sector creates an irreconcilable conflict with a just, gender-transformative climate agenda (Atela et al., 2021). The patriarchal state logic, whether driven by general development goals (as in Pakistan) or by resource extraction (as in Nigeria), consistently prioritizes masculinist economic paradigms over the security and agency of its most vulnerable women.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Gender Integration in the Climate Policies of Pakistan and Nigeria

Feature	Pakistan	Nigeria
Key NDC Mitigation Pledge	15% unconditional & 35% conditional reduction of projected emissions by 2030.	20% unconditional & 47% conditional reduction below BAU by 2030.
Explicit Mention of Gender/Women in NDC	NDC mentions cross-cutting themes of gender and youth but lacks specific, actionable policies.	Updated NDC aims to mainstream gender across all sectors; acknowledges disproportionate impacts and commits to a "whole-of-society approach".
Primary Source Evidence of Gender Integration	Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) developed. However, policies are criticized for being gender-insensitive in practice, with women's voices ignored in decision-making and disaster response.	National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020-2025) was adopted. Implementation is inconsistent, with gaps in funding and coordination, and undermined by the state's focus on oil and gas.
Alignment with Eco-Feminist Principles	**Low:** Policy prioritizes securing international finance while internal patriarchal structures (e.g., lack of land rights for women) that create vulnerability remain unaddressed. Women are framed as victims, not agents.	**Low:** Policy prioritizes patriarchal-developmentalist goals (oil/gas extraction) and silences subaltern women's environmental movements (e.g., in Niger Delta). Gender plans exist but are undermined by core economic Strategy (Sam and Zibima, 2023).

This comparative analysis demonstrates a clear and disturbing pattern. Both Pakistan and Nigeria, despite their different geopolitical and economic contexts, exhibit a profound disconnect between their international climate rhetoric and their domestic gender realities. Both have adopted national gender action plans, but these often remain at the level of policy rhetoric, failing to challenge the underlying patriarchal structures that systematically produce and reproduce women's vulnerability. This internal silencing of subaltern voices is a root cause of the Global South's inability to forge a unified, justice-oriented front in global climate negotiations.

6. Conclusion

In line with the study's aims, this paper set out to (1) explicate the persistent fragmentation of the Global South's voice

in international climate negotiations; (2) advance and operationalize a postcolonial eco-feminist framework that locates this fragmentation in entrenched patriarchal-developmentalist state structures; (3) empirically validate these claims through a comparative analysis of Pakistan and Nigeria—tracing how domestic gendered power relations shape national climate policy and negotiating behaviour; and (4) propose a normative and practicable pathway, termed "subaltern climate solidarity," to reorient national interest toward climate justice and the material wellbeing of the most vulnerable.

This study has sought to explain the persistent fragmentation of the Global South's voice in international climate negotiations. Moving beyond conventional state-centric analyses, it has advanced a postcolonial eco-feminist critique, positing that this disunity is not a simple failure of diplomatic coordination but a manifestation of a profound structural pathology. The analysis demonstrates that the prevalence of a patriarchal-developmentalist logic within Global South states fosters a conception of "national interest" that is fundamentally irreconcilable with the principles of climate justice and ecological survival. This masculinist-coded focus on industrial growth, resource extraction, and geopolitical standing systematically marginalizes the knowledge and silences the voices of the most climate-vulnerable populations, particularly women and subaltern communities.

The comparative analysis of Pakistan and Nigeria offers robust empirical validation for this thesis. In Pakistan, the state's external appeals for climate finance are fundamentally subverted by its domestic failure to dismantle patriarchal norms—such as inequitable land tenure for women —that amplify acute vulnerability to climate shocks. Consequently, its gender action plans are rendered merely rhetorical, with the lived experiences of women in disasters disregarded in favor of top-down, gender-blind responses. In Nigeria, the state's allegiance to a fossil fuel-centric development model necessitates the active suppression of eco-feminist resistance in the Niger Delta, where the very industry fueling the national economy destroys local lives and livelihoods.

In both contexts, national climate policies that are nominally gender-responsive are revealed to be superficial, failing to challenge the entrenched power structures that perpetuate gendered injustice. The fractures evident within the G77+China—pitting the developmentalist ambitions of the BASIC countries against the survival imperatives of AOSIS and the LDCs—are thus understood not as incidental diplomatic disputes but as a macro-level projection of these internal, gendered contradictions onto the global stage. From this analysis, a critical conclusion emerges: a truly unified and powerful Global South voice cannot be forged through traditional, state-centric diplomacy alone. The state itself, often acting as a vehicle for patriarchal and postcolonial power, is frequently a site of oppression and silencing. Therefore, looking to state leaders to spontaneously generate a cohesive front based on the needs of the most vulnerable is a flawed strategy that ignores the internal power dynamics at play.

The path toward an authentic and unified voice lies instead in fostering a "subaltern climate solidarity." This is a political project that must be built from the ground up. It requires intentionally amplifying and centering the knowledge, experiences, and leadership of the most marginalized groups who are already on the front lines of the climate crisis: the rural women managing water scarcity in Pakistan, the indigenous communities defending forests from extraction, and the women activists resisting oil pollution in Nigeria. Such a solidarity would challenge the patriarchal

foundations of the state from within and below. It would work to redefine "national interest" away from abstract economic indicators and toward the concrete, material well-being of people and the planet. This is the only foundation upon which an authentic, powerful, and unified Global South voice can emerge—one that speaks not with the compromised language of state interest, but with the unassailable moral authority of lived experience and the radical vision of genuine climate justice.

In this way, the conclusion directly aligns with the study's objectives: it advances a postcolonial eco-feminist framework to interrogate how patriarchal state structures undermine collective climate diplomacy; it grounds the analysis in comparative cases of Pakistan and Nigeria to empirically substantiate the argument; and it proposes "subaltern climate solidarity" as a normative and practical pathway toward an authentic, unified Global South voice.

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Research Article

Ethnic Conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Study of Abaseen Movement in Hazara Division

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Abstract

Ethnonationalism, a political ideology rooted in shared ethnicity, culture, and historical experience, has been a driving force in shaping the socio-political landscape of many regions. In Pakistan, the Hazara region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has seen a growing wave of ethnonationalist sentiment, which has expedited the ethnic conflict and disturbed the regional peace, particularly in the context of the Abaseen Movement for separate division. This research examines the origins, development, and implications of ethnic conflict in this region, analyzing how socio-political marginalization, economic disparities, and state policies have fueled the demand for a separate Hazara Province and its counter-demand for Abaseen Division. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study examines local narratives, state responses, and historical antecedents that contribute to the Abaseen movement.

K**eywords:** Ethnic Conflict, Hazarawal, Abaseen Division, Regional Peace, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Political Identity, Separatism, Abaseen Movement.

1. Introduction

Ethnonationalism in the Hazara region, particularly in the Abaseen region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has emerged as a significant political discourse in Pakistan's federal structure. Rooted in distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical identities, the Hazarawal have long felt politically marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged in comparison to the dominant Pashtun ethnic group of the province. The demand for a separate Hazara Province has gained momentum over the decades, reflecting the increasing desire for recognition, autonomy, and equitable resource distribution. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

The Abaseen Movement is primarily a demand for the creation of a separate administrative division carved out of the existing Hazara Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The movement originates from the sense of marginalization felt by the people living in the upper parts of Hazara, commonly referred to as the Abaseen region. The population of this area is largely non-Hindko and non-Pashtun, consisting mainly of Kohistani and other indigenous communities who believe that their socio-economic needs and cultural identity have been overlooked by the divisional administration centered in Abbottabad. The Hazara Division currently comprises nine districts, including Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Battagram, Allai, Torghar, Kolai-Palas, Upper Kohistan, and Lower Kohistan. Among these, the Abaseen Movement is particularly active in the districts of Battagram, Kolai-Palas, Allai, and the Kohistan region, where the people share a distinct cultural, linguistic, and geographical identity. They argue that a new Abaseen Division would ensure more equitable distribution of resources, effective governance, and greater administrative accessibility for remote mountainous areas. However, this demand has also triggered ethnic tensions within the broader Hazara Division, as various groups hold differing views regarding regional identity, representation, and the future administrative structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The objective of the present study is to investigate and elaborate on the Abaseen Movement and the factors of this ethnic conflict in the Hazara region between Hindko and non-Hindko speakers. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Administratively, there are seven administrative units of Pakistan, including Baluchistan, Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and Gilgit Baltistan. Pakistan is a diverse state in the regard of religious sects, tradition, ethnicity and linguistic composition. While the administrative construction of Pakistan is divided into union councils, tehsils, districts, provinces, and the capital. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic country based on language, sects, caste, customs, traditions, and creed. All the major and minor provinces have their own tradition and cultures, as Sindh have Sindhi, Punjab have Punjabi, Balochistan have Balochi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have Pashtun and Hindko. In addition to major provincial identities Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashtun, and Balochi etc., there are numerous sub provincial identities in provinces such as, Saraiki in the Multan Division of Punjab, Hazarawal in the Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Mohajir in the Karachi. These regions' identities alleged marginalization during budget allocations, and in respect of development works and employment opportunities. (Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

With the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, which gave autonomy to provinces, the demand for the creation of new provinces has also increased. The politics of new provinces has been a historical issue, especially in Abbottabad, Karachi, and in South Punjab. In the South Punjab and Hazara Division, the major stakeholders and political elites politicized the ethnic

movements. Nevertheless, these ethnic movements are converted into violent conflict between political leaders and the government after the elections in 2013 or 2018. This study highlights that people are demanding more divisions and provinces due to economic and political marginalization. (Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

The budget allocation in the 7th National Finance Award is based on population and geography. In 2010, with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, the ethnopolitical conflict has been started as the issue emerged on unequal distribution of resources between cities and provinces. Henceforth, their political, ethnic, and cultural rights are being demanded by the regional and provincial minorities for their development. Likewise, the movement for a separate province has been launched by the Hazarawal. The demand is comprised of nine districts, including Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Torghar, Battagaram, Lower Kohistan, Upper Kohistan, Allai, and Kolai Palas in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, the people of the Seraiki region also founded a movement for a separate province in South Punjab includes Vehari, Multan, Bakhar, Khanewal, and Mianwali. Mohajir Province is another demand started by the Mohajir community living in Karachi. They demand for the province based on Karachi, i.e., East, South, Central, Korangi, and Malir. Ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and administrative factors are responsible for the new province. The isolation feeling depends on language, ethnic identity, and unequal distribution of resources and budget allocation. Unequal distribution of resources, administrative issues, and further consideration of geographic and population factors. Similarly, the inadequate budget allocation and unequal distribution of resources lead to language and economic factors, and ethnicity emerges as a cultural factor. Moreover, political rhetoric and bad governance are the political reasons behind such demands. (Ahmed and Sarbi, 2021).

After the renaming of the former NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the people of the Hazara Division have started a series of protests and are demanding for creation a new Hazara Province. Some political analysts believe the movement for Seraiki Province is similar to the Hazara Province Movement. Furthermore, the people from the Pashtun ethnic group living in the Hazara Division are demanding for separate Abaseen Division. The renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expedited the ethnic conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

2. Historical Background of the Hazara Region

The Hazara region has a rich and complex history dating back to pre-colonial times, with a unique cultural and linguistic identity predominantly represented by Hindko speakers. Under British rule, Hazara was administratively distinct from other regions of what later became the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Post-independence, the incorporation of Hazara into a Pashtun-majority province set the stage for long-term grievances regarding political underrepresentation, economic neglect, and cultural marginalization.

The Hazara Province Movement was initially started in 1957 by the regional lawyers Mufti Mahmood and Abdul Khaliq. After two decades, the voice for the Hazara Province again restarted in 1987 by advocate Asif Malik by initiating Hazara Qaumi Mahaz. Later on, Hazara Qaumi Mahaz was converted into a registered political party as Hazara Qaumi Mahaz Pakistan and contested both national and provincial elections. After the renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 by the Eighteenth Amendment, the Hazarawal started a protest and demanded the creation of a new province in the Hazara region. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).
The mainstream political parties present

resolutions in National and Provincial Assemblies for the creation of various provinces in Pakistan. Muttahida Qaumi Movement tabled a resolution in the national assembly for a constitutional amendment to facilitate the creation of new provinces, which received a mixed response in the Hazara Division. The leader of the Tehreek-e-Suba Hazara Pakistan, Sardar Baba Haider Zaman, said except for MQM, all the mainstream political parties have been playing politics and not supporting the aspirations and wishes of Hazarawal by bringing that resolution in the parliament. On the other hand, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly called MQM's support a conspiracy for the Hazara Province and condemned the resolution. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Mian Iftikhar Hussain, "the provincial information minister of Awami National Party (ANP), waited for 63 years to change the name of the province", but followed proper procedure. The MQM has violated Article 239 Clause 4 of the Constitution by bringing a resolution in to National Assembly. (Hussain, 2025).

Qalander Lodhi of PML-N, Javed Abbasi of PML-N, Mufti Kifayatullah of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam- Fazl (JUI-F), and "all elected members of the provincial Assembly from Hazara Division also condemned the MQM move and termed it against the law. Additionally, the MQM wants to create a new province consisting of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sindh. The political leader of PML-N and lawmakers also said, the MQM wants to divide the Sindh Province but could not say it openly, fearing strong public resentment in Sindh, and also wanted to get political support from the people who want new provinces in Punjab and Sindh. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

Eventually, along with all these developments, the ethnic conflict based on language and culture became more obvious between Hindko and non-Hindko speakers in the Hazara region. The increasing political awareness and demand for equitable representation further intensified the linguistic and cultural divide. Hindko-speaking communities, who have long considered themselves the dominant cultural group of Hazara, began to feel that their linguistic identity and administrative influence were being challenged. On the other hand, the non-Hindko-speaking populations, including Pashto and Kohistani speakers, expressed their concerns about being marginalized within the existing administrative setup of the Hazara Division. This growing sense of alienation gave rise to new identity-based movements aimed at achieving recognition and autonomy.

The Abaseen Movement for a separate division emerged as a prominent example of this ethnic and linguistic division within the Hazara. The supporters of the Abaseen Division, mainly from Pashtun and Kohistani communities, argued that their cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic interests were not being adequately addressed under the current system. They demanded a separate administrative unit that could ensure fair development and political participation. Consequently, this movement not only reflected the diversity of the Hazara region but also highlighted the deep-seated ethnic and linguistic complexities that shape its modern political landscape. (Hussain, 2025).

2.1 The Emergence of Ethnonationalist Sentiment in Hazara Division

Ethnonationalism in the Hazara region is not a sudden or isolated phenomenon; rather, it has gradually evolved over several decades as a result of deep-rooted political, economic, and cultural grievances. The people of Hazara have long felt marginalized within the broader structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, both in terms of resource allocation and political representation. This persistent neglect in developmental planning has created a sense of deprivation and alienation among the local population. Despite contributing significantly to the province's economy and education, the Hazara region has often been overlooked when it comes to infrastructural projects, healthcare facilities, and higher education

institutions. Such uneven development has fueled a collective perception of injustice, which later transformed into a more organized form of ethnonationalism.

Another key dimension of Hazara's ethnonational identity revolves around issues of governance and representation. Historically, decision-making processes within the provincial setup have been dominated by groups belonging to other ethnic backgrounds, particularly Pashtuns. Consequently, the Hindko-speaking Hazarawal have often found themselves underrepresented in provincial institutions, bureaucracy, and policymaking circles. This imbalance in power distribution reinforced the belief that the region's political voice was being systematically silenced. Over time, the absence of adequate representation and the dominance of a particular ethnic narrative in provincial politics led the Hazarawal to question the legitimacy of their inclusion within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The cultural dimension of this struggle is equally significant. Hazara possesses a distinct linguistic and cultural identity, primarily shaped by its Hindko-speaking population, which differs considerably from the Pashto-speaking majority of the province. The imposition of a dominant cultural narrative that prioritizes Pashtun identity, language, and traditions has been perceived by the Hazarawal as an attempt to assimilate their unique cultural heritage. This perceived cultural suppression intensified feelings of exclusion and gave birth to a desire for recognition and preservation of the region's own identity. Cultural institutions, writers, and political activists from Hazara increasingly began to articulate the need for autonomy as a means of safeguarding their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. (Khan, 2022).

The turning point in this ethnonational awakening came in 2010, when the name of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) was officially changed to "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." While this change was meant to reflect the Pashtun majority's cultural and historical identity, it was met with strong opposition in Hazara. Many locals perceived the new name as an act of erasure, an attempt to redefine the province in purely ethnic terms that excluded them. The renaming sparked massive protests across the region, with demonstrators demanding either the restoration of the old name or the creation of a separate administrative unit for Hazara. These protests marked a watershed moment in the region's political history.

The 2010 movement, often referred to as the Hazara Province Movement, became the rallying point for the articulation of Hazara's ethnonationalist ideology. It transcended the issue of nomenclature and evolved into a broader demand for political and administrative autonomy. The movement's leaders emphasized that only a separate province could ensure fair representation, equitable development, and the preservation of Hazara's cultural identity. Thus, ethnonationalism in Hazara emerged as a response to prolonged marginalization and became a powerful expression of the region's struggle for recognition, equality, and self-determination. (Hussain, 2025).

3. A Movement for Abaseen Division: An Emerging Sub-Regional Identity

The Abaseen Division, encompassing districts like Battagram, Kohistan, and Torghar, has emerged as a focal point within the Hazara ethnonationalist discourse. Historically isolated and underdeveloped, the Abaseen area suffers from poor infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and minimal political representation. These socio-economic challenges have deepened the sense of exclusion and strengthened the call for inclusion within a separate Hazara Province. (Khan, 2022). A young scholar, Asad Khan, resident of Battagram, talking about the current Hazara Province Movement, said, the Hazarawal who are living in the Hazara region showed an act of discrimination

against non-Hindko speakers. He further said, most of the people from Torgahr, Kolai Palas, Battagram, and Allai Districts are not in favor of Hazara as a separate province and are demanding that the Abaseen as a separate division from Hazara, consisting of Battagram, Torghar, Kolai Palas, and Allai. He further argued that the people who are in favor of Hazara as a separate province are living only in three districts, Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra, and the rest of the districts were demanding Abaseen Division. He also said that all the main leaders from the Hazara region remained in power in all formats in the Senate, National Assembly, and Provincial Assembly and failed to create a full-fledged province in Hazara. (Khan, 2022).

3.1 Key Drivers of Ethnonationalism in the Abaseen Region

Abaseen or Abasin Division is a proposed division in the Hazara region, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The initial proposal for the establishment of Abaseen Division comprises some districts from the Hazara and Malakand Divisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The proposed Abaseen division comprises seven districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Battagram, Allai, Kolai-Palas, Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Shangla, and Torgahr. The geographical landscape is located on both sides of the Indus River. Pashto is a major language spoken in the area along with Hindko, Kohistani, and Abaseen. It is declared that either Battagram or a town at the eastern end of Shangla District will become the headquarters of Abaseen Division. (Zia U Rehman, 2021). There are many factors responsible for the Abaseen movement of the new division, some of them are,

1. Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

The Hazara Division is home to multiple ethnic and linguistic groups, including Hindko, Pashto, and Kohistani speakers. The increasing assertion of Hindko-speaking identity and the perceived dominance of Hindko culture and language in administrative affairs created tensions among non-Hindko groups, particularly Pashtun and Kohistani populations. These groups began advocating for a separate Abaseen Division as a means to achieve equal representation and preserve their distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Moreover, the cultural and linguistic identity of the people of Abaseen Division is a major reason. The Hindko language, central to Hazara's identity, is underrepresented in the provincial media and educational institutions. The cultural policies of the province are often viewed as promoting Pashtun heritage at the expense of others, reinforcing the ethnonationalist narrative. The repressive state policies and the centralization of power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial capital, Peshawar, are seen as a form of ethnic domination. State responses to protests and movements in Hazara have often been dismissive, if not repressive, which has further alienated the local population. (Ahmed and Sabri, 2021).

2. Perceived Administrative Neglect

The eastern and northern parts of Hazara Division, including Battagram, Kohistan, Kolai-Palas, and Torghar districts, have long suffered from poor infrastructure, weak governance, and limited access to education and healthcare. Locals believe that the Abbottabad-centric administration has failed to ensure balanced development across all districts. The demand for Abaseen Division thus emerged as a movement for administrative efficiency and regional equity.

3. Unequal Resource Distribution

The concentration of resources, government offices, and developmental projects in southern Hazara districts such as Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra created resentment among people in the upper areas. Residents of Kohistan and Battagram districts argue that they have been historically deprived of their fair share in

provincial and federal development budgets. The Abaseen Division demand reflects a call for more localized control over resource allocation. The lack of development projects, insufficient infrastructure, and minimal government investment in the Abaseen Division have created stark economic disparities. The perception that resources are disproportionately allocated to other regions fuels resentment. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

4. Political Representation and Identity Politics

Political representation is a key factor behind the movement. Non-Hindko-speaking communities often feel underrepresented in provincial and divisional institutions, where Hindko-speaking elites dominate leadership positions. The Abaseen Division idea gained traction as a political strategy to enhance representation for Pashtun and Kohistani groups in local governance structures and legislative assemblies. First, the political marginalization is the leading cause behind the Abaseen Division. The people of Abaseen Division feel sidelined in provincial decision-making processes. Political offices are predominantly held by individuals from the more dominant Pashtun belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, leaving Abaseen residents with little voice in legislative matters. (Zia U Rehman, 2021).

5. Geographic and Administrative Challenges

The Hazara Division covers a vast and mountainous region with complex geography, making governance and coordination difficult. Many residents of remote areas face challenges in accessing administrative services centered in Abbottabad. The creation of the Abaseen Division is viewed as a practical administrative solution to improve governance by bringing government institutions closer to people.

6. Reaction to the Hazara Province Movement

The Hazara Province Movement, which seeks a separate province for the entire Hazara Division, indirectly triggered counter-narratives. While Hindko-speaking groups led the Hazara Province demand, non-Hindko communities saw the Abaseen Division as an alternative path that recognizes intra-regional diversity rather than merging all ethnicities under one identity. Thus, Abaseen Division became both a response and a counterbalance to Hazara Province activism.

7. Local Leadership and Grassroots Mobilization

Local leaders, tribal elders, and political activists from the upper Hazara districts have played a major role in mobilizing public opinion in favor of Abaseen Division. These leaders argue that decentralization will empower local communities, reduce ethnic polarization, and ensure inclusive development. Their campaigns have helped institutionalize the idea at both social and political levels.

8. Provincial and National Political Dynamics

At the provincial level, political parties have sometimes used the Abaseen Division demand as a bargaining tool to gain support from the upper Hazara electorate. Similarly, at the national level, decentralization and the creation of new administrative units have become popular political agendas. The provincial government's consideration of new divisions has encouraged local actors to formally press their demand for the Abaseen Division. (Ahmed and Sabri, 2021).

3.2 The Voice for the Abaseen Division

Moreover, Sajjadullah Khan, an elected parliamentarian from Kohistan, stated that the intention is not to oppose the formation of Hazara Province, but to establish a

separate division comprising three backward and underprivileged districts. Nationalist activists and residents of the Abaseen region also express support for creating a separate division in the Pashtun-dominated areas, referred to as the Abaseen Division. MPAs from Battagram and Kohistan have already submitted resolutions for a separate division. They claimed that the Kohistan, Battagram, and newly established Torghar districts have been ignored in development, and the people of these areas find it difficult to travel to the divisional headquarters in Abbottabad to resolve their problems. The provincial government has completed all the spadework for the proposed new division, administrative departments, and arrangement of revenue. (Khan, 2025). The population of Hazara Division is divided over the issue of renaming the province to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "The Hindko-speaking population feels that the province has been given an ethnocentric name that excludes them". (Shah, 2024).

The creation of the Abaseen Division may help ease the sense of alienation among local communities. The linguistic differences between the Hindko-speaking population of Abbottabad and the Pashtun communities of Hazara's upper districts have been a significant barrier to communication. During the tenures of political leaders from Abbottabad and Haripur, local activists expressed concerns that the Pashtun areas of Hazara were often neglected. But some analysts and activists believe the creation of the new division would hurt the movement for the Hazara Province. The PML-N has a stronghold in the Hazara Division, and after this, it will also make the ANP more popular in the areas. MPAs from Battagram, Kohistan, and Torghar either won on ANP tickets or joined the party after winning the elections. (Rehman, 2022).

The former opposition leader of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly and the leader of the Hazara Province Movement, Shehzada Gastasap Khan, said we are not opposing the creation of Abaseen Division. We are strong supporters of the creation of more districts, tehsils, divisions, and provinces in the country and decentralizing power. He concluded that the creation of the Abaseen Division is aimed at dividing the people of Hazara. He argued that, if the Hazara region can be divided into two separate divisions, why not Khyber Pakhtunkhwa be divided into two separate provinces? (Rehman, 2022).

Haider Khan Hoti, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, announced the formation of Abaseen Division during a speech on June 18, 2011, but it was not approved because of a lack of consensus. Similarly, Chief Minister Mehmood Khan also made a similar kind of speech on December 2, 2021. "A grand Jirga of the elders of Kolai Palas, Upper Kohistan, and Lower Kohistan in December 2021 opposed the move and warned the government against the split of the current Hazara Division and alternatively proposed a separate Kohistan Division comprising the three districts". (Amanat, 2021).

The Hazara Province Movement, which reignited after the province's renaming in 2010, has gained increasing support among the residents of Abaseen. Local leaders from Battagram, Torghar, and Kohistan have echoed demands for a new province, emphasizing administrative efficiency, cultural preservation, and equitable resource distribution as key motivations. Support for the movement has been mobilized through demonstrations, rallies, and political lobbying (Rehman, 2022). However, the federal and provincial governments have largely maintained a status quo stance on the issue. Although the concerns of Hazara residents have been acknowledged, substantive actions remain limited. Tokenistic measures such as promises of development and greater representation have failed to address the growing demand for autonomy (Khan, 2022).

3.3 Challenges and Policy Implications

Conducting field research in the Abaseen region presented a series of methodological and contextual challenges. Many respondents exhibited reluctance to provide candid responses due to concerns about political repercussions. In districts such as Kohistan and Battagram, prevailing patriarchal norms further restricted access to female participants, thereby limiting the representativeness of the data. Notwithstanding these constraints, the study was able to obtain a diverse array of perspectives through sustained engagement, trust-building, and active community involvement. The ongoing conflict over ethnonationalism between the Hazara and Abaseen regions reflects deep-rooted structural disparities that contribute to social alienation and potential instability. Policymakers must consider provincial restructuring, constitutional reforms, and inclusive development strategies while ensuring cultural representation in public institutions to foster harmony and equitable governance.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on the concept of consociational democracy, which encompasses four core features: grand coalition, segmental autonomy, proportionality, and mutual veto (Adeney, 2003; Noor, 2005). These principles allow diverse groups to participate equitably in governance, exercise autonomy in cultural matters, and safeguard their vital interests through veto rights.

In explaining the dynamics of ethnonationalism, Horowitz (2000) views ethnicity as a political instrument employed by elites to pursue specific goals, suggesting that ethnic identity serves as a means to achieve material or political ends. Ernest Gellner (1983), adopting a modernist perspective, argues that nationalism is a product of modern industrial society. As societies industrialize, the need for cultural homogeneity intensifies, leading to the alignment of political and cultural boundaries to sustain mass education, communication, and economic efficiency. In this view, nationalism constructs nations to fulfill the requirements of modernization and bureaucratic centralization. Fredrik Barth (1998) emphasizes the persistence of ethnic groups through social boundaries and cultural distinctiveness. He argues that ethnic identity is maintained through both social organization and geographical separation, which reinforce cultural diversity.

The theory of ethnonationalism, advanced by scholars such as Anthony D. Smith and Walker Connor, further elucidates that political movements emerge when ethnic groups seek recognition, autonomy, or independence grounded in shared cultural, linguistic, or historical identities. Ethnonationalism evolves when collective identity transforms into political consciousness, driving groups to mobilize for rights, representation, or territorial autonomy within or beyond existing state structures.

4. Conclusion

A recent voice has re-emerged for the new Abaseen Division from the Abaseen area of Hazara Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is also an important combination of socio-political exclusion, historical resentment, and identity formation. The demand for provincial autonomy is not just a matter of administrative reforms but a desire for self-respect, fair representation, and visibility in the state machinery. These issues need to be addressed through communication, policy adjustments and representation in the national unity and democratic development are to be achieved in Pakistan.

The Abaseen movement in the Hazara Division is multifaceted and an important aspect of provincial politics in Pakistan. It is based on cultural identity, historical grievances, and administrative marginalization. The movement has developed into an insistent demand for rights, including political recognition, autonomy, and eventually the formation of a

distinct Abaseen Division. This demand emerged after the demand of Hazarawal for the new province in Hazara Division after the renaming of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010. This movement underlined the long-standing linguistic and ethnic distinctions that continue to exist among Pakistan's multicultural population.

The central motives of the movement are the sense of cultural and political marginalization. The Pashtun community is ethnically separated from the Hazarawal in the Hazara Division, which is predominantly Hindko-speaking. They are traditionally felt to be underrepresented in the provincial affairs. The renaming was done without serious consultation with the Hazara community, which further spreads the feelings of alienation and found expression in mass protests. Unfortunately, the violent repression, like the infamous Abbottabad riots were occurred where 10 people were killed and more than 200 were injured. These protests and strikes energized the Hazarawal, which further urgency to their calls for administrative acknowledgment and increased political autonomy.

Despite resistance from provincial governments and major political parties, the movement has kept up momentum through civil society, local leadership, and diaspora activism. The demand for the Abaseen Division is usually argued based on cultural protection, administrative effectiveness and resource allocation. This demand is also a response to the demand of Hazarawal for Hazara on the basis of administration and opposed the ethnic considerations which may enhance governance and render services more accessible to the people. Some opponents of the movement took it as a danger to the national unity and additional calls for ethnic based administration or provinces which already delicate the federal setup. At the same time, the Hazara Province Movement, through largely non-violent also highlights some larger issues of multicultural and nation-building. Lack of open, accountable mechanisms and political discourse of governance aggravates such identity-based movements. The provincial and federal governments need to interact constructively with Hazara and Pashtun leadership and meet their demands through democratic means. This may involve more provincial institutions, more representation, fair distribution, protection of cultural heritage, and severe national debate regarding provincial reorganization.

The state is also responsible for such movement. Suppressing and denying such movements has the potential to lead to instability and greater alienation. Thus, the state must adopt an inclusive and progressive strategy that regards the aspirations of all ethnic groups. The national unity can be achieved through accommodating and admiring states' policies and respecting the rich fabrics of ethnic and regional identities.

Likewise, the voice for Abaseen Division was suggested new administrative division in Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which reflects an emerging local desire for more equitable distribution of resources, increased administrative autonomy, and acknowledgment of cultural identity. The Abaseen is the name of Indus River which runs for Indus River, which runs through this area. "Abaseen" is a name for the Indus River, which runs through this area, signifying the geographic and oneness significance. The main supporters and leaders of the movement would assist the enhancing the infrastructure, health care, and education in remote and hilly areas. The proponents of the movement claim that these areas remained underdeveloped than the major cities of Haripur and Abbottabad. The new administrative structure may help for equitable distribute the provincial resources. The inhabitants of the Abaseen region have different cultural and tribal identities and believe they are a marginalized ethnic group. The nationalists and activists of the Hazara Province Movement fear that the subdivision of the Hazara Division could dilute the

overall movement for Hazara Province. The infrastructural and financial issues in setting up a new division, such as personnel and infrastructure, can slow down the process. Similarly, there is also intra-district competition for the prospect of divisional headquarters with Besham, Battagram, and Dasu being among the likely candidates. The idea was deliberated at provincial levels as the local protest and resolution calling for the formation of Abaseen Division no concrete administrative steps have been initiated up to mid-2025.

To address ethnic conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly the Abaseen Movement in Hazara Division, policymakers should promote inclusive governance, ensuring fair representation of all ethnic groups in provincial institutions. Development projects must be equitably distributed across districts to reduce regional disparities. Establishing inter-ethnic dialogue forums can foster mutual understanding and cultural respect. The government should recognize linguistic and **c**ultural diversity through educational and media inclusion. Decentralizing administrative structures and creating locally empowered divisions like Abaseen may improve governance and reduce tensions. Transparent resource allocation, participatory planning, and conflict-sensitive policymaking can build long-term stability and social cohesion in the region.

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Research Article

Evolution of China's Nuclear Strategy: Lessons for Pakistan

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Abstract
Asia is undergoing rapid transformation due to asymmetric doctrines and modernisation efforts. China has historically maintained a minimum deterrence and a strict No-First-Use policy, focusing on survivability and assured retaliation rather than numerical parity. Under Xi's leadership, China's nuclear modernisation efforts have sparked debate over whether this modernisation represents a deviation from minimum deterrence or a reinforcement of assured retaliation. This study addresses this question by using Deterrence theory to conduct a comparative analysis of China and Pakistan's nuclear doctrines under three distinct paradigms: minimum deterrence, assured retaliation, and escalation control. The analysis finds that while China's modernisation remains primarily oriented toward survival, Pakistan's reliance on tactical nuclear weapons risks instability. The study suggests that China's survivability-focused model offers conditional lessons in restraint, credibility, and sustainable modernization.

K**eywords:** *China, Pakistan, Nuclear Strategy, Deterrence, Modernization, Full-Spectrum Deterrence, Assured Retaliation*

1. Introduction

Asymmetric doctrines and accelerating modernisation are rapidly transforming Asia's nuclear landscape. China's nuclear doctrine states that Beijing maintains a no-first-use and minimum deterrence posture. However, China is modernising its forces at a notable pace, with estimates suggesting acquisition of approximately 600 warheads in 2025 alone (Kristensen et al., 2024; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2025). India, on its part, has also been focused on upgrading its nuclear capabilities while claiming to maintain credible minimum deterrence (CMD) under a No-first Use policy (NFU). According to Indian analysts, the country's NFU policy is weakened over time; however, they argued that it is because of Pakistan's First Use posture (Narang, 2014). In response to India's pacing moves, Pakistan was compelled to evolve its posture from CMD to Full-Spectrum Deterrence (FSD). However, this shift is not quantitative but qualitative (Tasleem, 2016; Noor, 2023). The regional stability was further strained when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) codified expanded first-use conditions in its 2022 Law (Cheong, 2023). Collectively, these developments have resulted in asymmetric doctrines and the introduction of modernised new tech, such as MIRVs, hypersonic, and missile defence, eroding deterrence stability across Asia.

China's policy of minimum deterrence has historically been intended to ensure retaliation, survivability, and a long-standing NFU pledge (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Chinese officials argue that consistent modernisation efforts are not for numerical parity but credibility (Xinhua, 2019). Despite framing its modernisation as minimal, China is expanding and diversifying its forces through new silo construction, road-mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), and sea-based leg (Kristensen et al., 2024). This trajectory has generated debate among scholars. Some scholars argue that China's current modernisation blurs the line between minimum deterrence and force expansion, while others interpret these developments as consistent with an assured retaliation model adapted to changing strategic conditions (Brown, 2021; Hiim, 2024).

This paper seeks to answer the following research question: Does China's nuclear modernization represent a deviation from minimum deterrence or a reinforcement of assured retaliation, and what conditional lessons can Pakistan draw from this trajectory for its own doctrine? The first step toward answering this question is to determine whether the Chinese are moving away from their assured retaliatory posture. The next step would be to determine if there are any lessons, conditional or otherwise, that Pakistan can learn from China's experiences, especially given Pakistan's own resource constraints, and priority to have a survivable second-strike capability.

This study is comparative, policy-oriented, and survivability-focused. It examines how China has developed as a minimum deterrent and evaluates if China's modernization is still aligned with assured retaliation. The study will also analyse the potential conditional lessons that Pakistan can take away from China's experiences, especially about managing resource limitations, and prioritizing survivable second-strike capabilities. Using an updated and comparative analysis of the current doctrines of China and Pakistan, this study identifies policy-relevant implications for Pakistan's

survivability and the direction of its modernization.

2. Literature Review

During the Mao-Deng era, China's nuclear doctrine focused on assured retaliation, a no-first-use policy, and a survivable force prioritizing city-busting rather than warfighting (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). This very initial posture is labelled as the era of minimum deterrence. Even after the Cold War, China never shifted to a first-use policy and relied on an assured retaliation capability against the US counterforce (Xinhua, 2019). China ramped up its modernisation efforts in 2010 through force diversification and growth (Kristensen et al., 2024). Modernisation produced mobile ICBMs, MIRVed warheads, SSBNs, and improved command-and-control systems while officially framing its policy as defensive (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, a significant rise in expansion was noticed—500 warheads in 2024 alone—which raised concerns about whether the expansion remains within an assured retaliation logic (Kristensen et al., 2024; SIPRI, 2025). This illustrates China's force structure and modernization trajectory. Empirical stockpile data confirm both the rapid numerical increase and delivery-system buildup (Defence Intelligence Agency, 2024). In terms of escalation control and signalling, regionally, Chinese counterspace and ASAT capabilities also complicate nuclear security by threatening early-warning systems (Kan, 2007).

Countries maintaining Minimum Deterrence do so along with economic and strategic sustainability constraints, holding a sufficient arsenal to impose unacceptable damage in retaliation without extending resources. The purpose is not to fight or prevail in a nuclear war but to deter the opponent using the fear of reprisals. In the canonical case of China, there is a credibility problem as rivals field precision strike, ISR, BMD, and conventional counterforce; therefore, the minimum deterrence should become credible using survivability, redundancy, and signalling, not parity (Brown, 2021). According to Narang's (2014) framework, Asian nuclear states vary in assured retaliation, so some states adopt credible minimum deterrence rather than pursuing an arms race. This highlights the dimension of economic and strategic sustainability in policy practice. CMD entered official discourse to preserve flexibility and avoid unconstrained growth, particularly in South Asia.

Pakistan's nuclear doctrine evolved differently. Scholars and officials trace Pakistan's nuclear doctrine as having evolved from CMD to Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) to counter India at 'all rungs' (Khan, 2014; Noor, 2023). The Carnegie study by Tasleem (2016) explains that the rationale behind the evolution of Pakistan's doctrine was to focus on dynamic deterrence capable of responding to India's moves and persistent rejection of NFU. Analysts argue that in Pakistan's FSD, usage of short-range systems (Missile Nasr) for signalling and escalation control fills the gap, while some warn of crisis instability (Ahmed, 2016; Hooey, 2019). In a strategic literature review, perceptions of India-Pakistan doctrines and capabilities have been separated from reality, underscoring crisis management requirements (Levesques, 2021). Naeem Salik's book tracks how the institutional learning, doctrine, and C2 maturation provide the background for FSD's emergence since 1998 (Scholar Pakistan, 2021). It also shows the dimension of Pakistan's strategic and economic sustainability constraints in

developing and maintaining its nuclear forces. The scholarly work of Kristensen et al. (2024) and Cunningham and Fravel (2015) on China's nuclear policy primarily examines China's deterrence vis-à-vis the US and India, rarely extending the analytical lens to Pakistan. In comparative terms, case studies of China and Pakistan have been discussed separately, such as in Narang's (2014) typologies, with no sustained comparative examination across the four evaluation dimensions: doctrinal evolution, force structure and modernization, escalation control and signaling, and economic and strategic sustainability. Even though Pakistan faces inadequate resources, it pursues FSD, which risks an action-reaction spiral with India. To fill that policy gap, a systematic analysis of Pakistan's adaptation to Chinese practices (survivability, signalling discipline, restrained buildup) across these four dimensions is required to sustain deterrence without fuelling an arms race. While both doctrines are well studied individually, little research compares them or examines their links.

3. Theoretical Framework

Deterrence Theory

"Deterrence" refers to persuading an adversary not to take an undesired action by threatening unbearable costs. From the Classic Cold War, Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, and Glenn Snyder formulated two core forms of deterrence:

1. Deterrence by punishment (threat of retaliation)
2. Deterrence by denial (making an attack too costly or unlikely to succeed)

For these two forms of deterrence to work, forces of a state must have the capability and credibility for the second-strike assured retaliation simultaneously (Nye, 2014). Unlike the bipolar Cold War system, the Asian nuclear landscape is shaped by regional rivalries, asymmetric capabilities, and resource constraints. That is why deterrence stability becomes more fragile in the Asian region.

- **Minimum Deterrence vs. Assured**
- **Retaliation vs. Escalation Control**

China and Pakistan's nuclear trajectories reflect three distinct deterrence paradigms: Minimum deterrence, assured retaliation, and escalation control. For minimum deterrence, China (during the Mao-Deng era) and Pakistan (post-1998) maintained a small arsenal just enough to inflict unacceptable damage. Countries pursued this strategy to ensure survivability, but technological advances and precision-strike capabilities eroded their credibility (Narang, 2014). Assured retaliation is a type of deterrence that guarantees a response after absorbing a first strike. China's model of assured retaliation underscores its NFU pledge and modernisation efforts—mobile ICBMs, SSBNs, MIRVs (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). The last paradigm includes escalation control, which involves using nuclear options (tactical weapons) to manage escalation in a crisis. Under FSD, Pakistan developed the Nasr missile (TNW), exemplifying deterrence by escalation control (Ahmed, 2016; Hooey, 2019). However, there have been mixed arguments for and against escalation control deterrence. Its supporters believe it plugs the gap; critics warn it heightens the risk of early nuclear use and crisis instability (Sankaran, 2014).

Sino-Pak Comparison Through Deterrence Theory

China's adherence to NFU and its assured retaliation with modernisation demonstrates

its focus on survivability rather than numerical parity (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). China's posture is about deterrence by punishment (strategic retaliation) with restraint in signalling. In contrast, Pakistan initially claimed 'minimum credible deterrence,' but moved to 'full-spectrum' with an escalation-control logic (Khan, 2014; Noor, 2023). Therefore, it combines deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial at the tactical level.

China sustains credibility with a smaller but survivable force because retaliation is likely, deterrence stays credible without early use. On the other hand, Pakistan, with a tight budget, faces the risk of instability due to its reliance on escalation control instead of survivability (Haseeb et al., 2014; Nawaz & Guruswamy, 2014). Credibility comes from signaling willingness to use nuclear weapons sooner, which lowers thresholds and increases instability. Deterrence theory suggests Pakistan could adapt Chinese lessons on assured retaliation and survivability to strengthen deterrence without overextending through escalation control (Narang, 2014).

4. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative and analytical approach to understand China's nuclear strategy evolution and its implications for Pakistan's doctrine trajectory. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study since nuclear doctrines are not shaped by quantitative variables. Instead, doctrines are shaped by political, strategic norms and choices.

The study systematically compares China's 'credible minimum deterrence' with Pakistan's 'minimum credible deterrence' and subsequent 'full-spectrum deterrence.' It also takes a thematic approach to trace the evolution of doctrines under broad themes (deterrence by punishment, denial, assured retaliation, escalation control). The thematic comparative approach can better illuminate the logic, evolution and adaptability of each state's nuclear thoughts than statistical modelling. The paper answers the central question: 'How has China's nuclear strategy evolved from minimum deterrence to credible minimum deterrence, and what lessons does this hold for Pakistan's nuclear posture?'

Research Design

This study has been conducted to be conceptual and policy-oriented. It uses deterrence theory as the guiding analytical framework to compare China's nuclear doctrine, from 1964 to the Xi era, with Pakistan's nuclear posture, from 1998 to the present. A comparative study helped identify doctrinal convergences, divergences, and lessons applicable to Pakistan.

Data Sources

To conduct a comparative study, the paper employed both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official documents such as China's Defence White Papers (since 1998) and Pakistan's NCA statements, speeches, and interviews from policymakers in both countries (Xinhua, 2019). Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journals (Journal of Strategic Studies, Asian Security, International Security, and Contemporary South Asia), reports from leading think tanks, and scholarly books such as Khan (2014) and Cunningham and Fravel (2015).

4.1 Case Study: China

Origins of Chinese Nuclear Strategy (1964 Onwards)

On 16 October 1964, China entered the nuclear club by detonating its first nuclear device at Lop Nur (Project 596) (Burr, 2014). It was when China established its baseline

doctrine centred on political deterrence with limited forces. Chinese officials made statements to maintain the defensive posture (Xinhua, 2019). Beijing clarified that the usage of nuclear weapons would be for deterrence and political signalling, not warfighting. In its doctrine, the NFU pledge serves as a foundational principle and later became a reiterated policy in official white papers (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015).

Evolution of China's Strategy

China's nuclear strategy has evolved significantly from Mao's political leadership to Xi's. Mao stayed in power from 1960 to 1976 and used a minimal arsenal for political deterrence with rudimentary delivery systems. Even though robust second-strike means didn't exist then, Mao emphasised assured retaliation in principle (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Therefore, deterrence under Mao was declaratory and symbolic, not numerically competitive.

From the late 1970s to 1989, Deng's leadership followed Mao's period, characterising consolidation and survivability. He focused on improving missile reliability, mobility, and command-control while preserving NFU and a small force during his period. He also emphasised retaliatory punishment rather than counterforce warfighting, which reflects his early escalation control thinking (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015).

After Deng, Jiang's period (1990s–2002) marks gradual modernisation (mobile ICBMs) in response to US precision strike and missile defence trends (Kristensen et al., 2024). Jiang reaffirmed coherence with assured retaliation in academic and policy analyses. From 2002 to 2012, Hu diversified delivery systems (improved ICBMs and the sea-based leg with Type 094/Jin-class SSBNs carrying JL-2) (Martin, 2024). The diversification shifted China from a 'minimum' inventory to a more credible assured-retaliation posture.

Since 2012, Xi has accelerated the expansion and infrastructure build-out—new ICBM silo fields, DF-41, and progress toward JL-3 on future Type 096 SSBNs—along with reiterating NFU (Xinhua, 2019). China is estimated to have developed 600+ warheads in 2024–25, marking the fastest growth rate globally (Kristensen et al., 2024; SIPRI, 2025; Kuramitsu, 2025). China's rapid modernization therefore, illustrates the dimension of both force structure modernization and economic/strategic sustainability considerations. Considering this, scholars debate whether this remains within an assured-retaliation framework (Hiim, 2024).

Nuclear Modernisation, Force Structure, Second-Strike Capability

In its defence white papers, China declares NFU 'at any time and under any circumstances' and nuclear security assurance to non-nuclear states, anchoring its assured-retaliation model (Xinhua, 2019). Looking at the trends, China's stockpile grew rapidly from 2023 to 2025—600+ warheads in 2024—building 100 warheads each year with 320–350 new silos nearing completion (Kristensen et al., 2024; Defence Intelligence Agency, 2024).

China developed triad maturation for the second-strike survivability: land, sea, and command posture. China expanded silo-based ICBMs and mobile DF-41 to strengthen land response to ensure prompt retaliatory options (Kristensen et al., 2024). Likewise, to maintain deterrence at sea, Operational Type-094 (Jin) SSBNs (six boats) with JL-2 and future Type-096 with JL-3 were employed (Martin, 2024). In addition to deterrence at land and sea, China,

with its reiterated overall assured retaliation stance, is increasing the readiness of silo units. Modernisation of early warning and command readiness emphasize escalation control and signalling for credible retaliation strike as assessed by the U.S. (Defence Intelligence Agency, 2024).

Cunningham and Fravel (2015) highlight China's doctrinal continuity and capability growth simultaneously. The purpose behind persistent modernisation is to strategically guarantee retaliation against an improving adversary ISR/BMD without escalating to nuclear war. Despite debates about recent expansion, China's strategic posture frames it as credible-minimum, not maximalist (Binnendijk & Gompert, 2023).

5. Pakistan's Nuclear Posture

Since the independence of Pakistan, its nuclear posture has evolved reactively—maintaining existing deterrence in the 1990s, flexible MCD in the 2000s, and FSD in the 2010s. The evolution was shaped in reaction to India's Cold Start, BMD, and modernisation efforts (Khan, 2014; Noor, 2023).

Force Structure and Modernisation

In May 1998, Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests (Chagai-I & II) as a response to India's Pokhran-II nuclear test (Kerr, 2016). Historically, the tragedy of 1971 and India's nuclearization shaped Pakistan's perceived conventional imbalance with India. To counter India's superior conventional forces and nuclearization, Pakistan began to mature its nuclear program. Politically, Pakistan's decision boosted civilian and military trust, increasing national unity around the nuclear program. Like China, Pakistan also declared that nuclear weapons were for deterrence against India, not for warfighting (Khan, 2014).

Minimum Credible Deterrence (MCD) Doctrine, Escalation Control and Signaling

Leaders of Pakistan introduced 'Minimum Credible Deterrence' between 1999–2001 (Khan, 2014; Ahmed, 2019). Even after initial articulation, 'Minimum' was left deliberately undefined. Pakistan keeps adjusting its doctrine for defence against India's evolving doctrine and technology. However, the core principles remain the same, such as no declaration of NFU to offset India's conventional advantage (Tasleem, 2016). It designs arsenals for survivability and assured retaliation, not parity. By maintaining centralised control under the National Command Authority (NCA) and the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), Pakistan avoids an arms race while ensuring readiness for credible deterrence (Scholar Pakistan, 2021).

Pakistan faces challenges to its posture despite maintaining credible deterrence. The challenges include India's cold start doctrine, Indian Ballistic Missile Defence, and canisterization of its missile systems. India developed a strategy of rapid yet limited conventional strikes (Cold Start) to undermine Pakistan's nuclear threshold (Sankaran, 2014). In response, Pakistan's development of Tactical nuclear weapons (Nasr) helps deter even shallow incursions (Ahmed, 2016).

Secondly, Pakistan owns a retaliatory strike capability, which was a challenge in the presence of India's functional BMD system. To address this perceived threat that might destabilise retaliatory capability, Pakistan has prompted investment in countermeasures such as MIRVs, cruise missiles, and decoys (Levesques, 2021). Finally, Pakistan has introduced Tactical nuclear weapons (Nasr) as part of its 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' (Abid, 2023). Scholars debate whether

TNWs strengthen deterrence and limit war or lower the nuclear threshold and heighten escalation risk (Kurita, 2025; Hooey, 2019). Some are of the view that over-reliance on TNWs is risky, while some highlight the limited options for Pakistan to pursue other than FSD (Sankaran, 2014). Due to a lack of escalation-control tools, Pakistan may not be able to resist/counter India's Cold Start doctrine and BMD System while maintaining an assured retaliation posture. These scholars further argue that survivability alone cannot guarantee deterrence against India's conventional superiority; deployment of TNWs is the viable option for now to plug the deterrence gap at the tactical level and strengthen Pakistan's position (Ahmed, 2016; Khan, 2022).

5.1 Lessons for Pakistan

Pakistan needs to take China's approach of strategic patience, geoeconomic ballast, and survivable assured retaliation to develop a credible and sustainable alternative to quantitative expansion and overdependence on TNW to counter India's cold start strategy and BMD (Narang, 2014; Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Contrary to the critics' argument that Pakistan's abandonment of TNWs without endangering deterrence is not possible, this study presents a survivability-focused deterrence model as a more sustainable alternative. Adoption of China's emphasis on assured retaliation and survivability can help Pakistan ensure long-term stability. Whereas TNWs may only help to deter shallow incursions (Sankaran, 2014).

Doctrinal Evolution: Strategic Patience & Restraint

3. Pakistan needs to anchor deterrence in credibility instead of pace-matching. As China uses doctrine to dampen the action-reaction cycle, Pakistan can also leverage that by treating 'minimum' as political restraint and 'credible' as a technical requirement (readiness, C2, and survivability) to counter open-ended threats from India. In Chinese White Papers, China carefully gives statements by being transparent where it stabilizes and opaque where it deters (Xinhua, 2019). By doing it the same way, Pakistan can reduce worst-case scenarios and stay opaque about targeting or readiness details.
4. During a crisis, crisis management should be prioritized over posturing by investing in a hotline, pre-notified exercises, and de-risking measures for transparency to successfully keep limited provocations from cascading (Levesques, 2021).

Economic and Strategic Sustainability: Economic Integration as Security

5. Persistent crisis in South Asia disrupts trade and growth. Since the opportunity costs of arms racing are real, even modest normalization could raise GDP trajectories for both India and Pakistan. For instance, Atlantic Council research found that military competition often depresses GDP (Nawaz & Guruswamy, 2014). Pakistan cannot bear heavy fiscal pressures due to its narrower economic base. When defining 'minimum,' Pakistan should strategize by internalizing those macro costs (Haseeb et al., 2014).
6. Pakistan should leverage geoeconomics to ease security dilemmas. Complementing CPEC and regional corridors with deterrence can expand trade and lower budgetary pressure on

continuous modernization. Nuclear stability complemented by economic interdependence can reduce the vulnerability of Pakistan in times of crisis and fiscal pressures (Nawaz & Guruswamy, 2014). This way, geoeconomics can make peace more profitable than escalation without replacing deterrent efforts.

7. Increasing warheads does not ensure credibility, but fiscal sustainability does. Within a stable macroeconomic framework, if a deterrent is coherently funded it is more believable to both adversaries and allies than one with situational surges that strain the exchequer (Haseeb et al., 2014). With fiscal discipline, Pakistan can strengthen the international legitimacy of its doctrine characterized by sufficiency rather than unchecked expansion.

Force Structure and Modernization: Prioritizing Survivability over Numbers

8. China's military modernisation emphasizes survivability to guarantee second-strike capability rather than parity with the US (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Similarly, Pakistan should build an assured second-strike before counting warheads. Its analogue is modest but essential; enhancing mobility, enhancing secure command and control (C2), and securing long-range ALCM options can reach the target.

9. To counter Indian BMD, Pakistan needs to hedge against it by quality, not quantity. Qualitative countermeasures are often cost-effective compared to expanding inventories. Developing MIRVs, depressed trajectories, cruise profiles, and decoys with retaliatory doctrine, Pakistan can maintain credible deterrence (Levesques, 2021; Ahmed, 2016).

10. Without C3I (command, control, communications, and intelligence), no deterrent can be considered credible. That is why Pakistan needs to secure its communication systems and early-warning capabilities to absorb a first strike and still respond. Therefore, the development of a disciplined alert posture is mandatory at the core of credible minimum deterrence (Scholar Pakistan, 2021).

Escalation Control and Signaling: Risks of Over-expansion

11. Since competitive laddering is intensifying in Asia, Pakistan's engagement in the arms race might result in outstripping its fiscal capacity (SIPRI, 2025). Even though China is now growing from 500 to 600 warheads by 2025 and building 350 silos, Pakistan should not mirror trajectories it cannot economically sustain (Haseeb et al., 2014).

12. Pakistan relies on expanding TNWs to counter Cold Start, which may deter limited incursions; however, TNWs trade stability for signalling. These weapons lower the threshold, burden C2 (command and control), and risk rapid escalation leading to potential delegation risk (Kurita, 2025; Hooey, 2019). To keep its usage in Pakistan's favour, Pakistan should retain a limited TNW capability with clear messaging to fill the deterrence gaps.

13. To avoid eroding deterrence credibility, Pakistan should not

stretch its 'credible minimum' to justify countering India's Cold Start, BMD, and expanded conventional capabilities. The more elastic 'credible minimum' becomes, the harder it is for adversaries to discern where Pakistan's thresholds lie. The ambiguity might result in confused adversary expectations, weakened deterrence, and blurred doctrine. Therefore, Pakistan needs to keep its retaliatory core explicit to avoid warfighting roles (Noor, 2023; Khan, 2022).

14. Increasing just numbers can cause preemptive fears among adversaries and does not even guarantee deterrence. It is okay to expand the arsenal size, but with the simultaneous upgradation of survivability and C2, it will not cause crisis instability and vulnerability. The China case proves that structure carries more weight than size for credibility (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015; Binnendijk & Gompert, 2023).

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the comparative analysis shows that China's strategy demonstrates how disciplined restraint can increase credibility, whereas unchecked expansion can cause unintentional escalation (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). It exemplified that credible deterrence does not require warfighting roles or numerical parity. Instead, it focuses on survivable second-strike capability, a clear NFU pledge, and doctrinal signalling. China's success in deterring great powers and avoiding escalation spirals with the US was possible through its selective modernisation and assured retaliation framework (Binnendijk & Gompert, 2023).

In contrast, Pakistan's shift from CMD to FSD was driven by India's Cold Start doctrine, BMD, and conventional superiority. FSD is adaptive; however, the comparative findings indicate this type of deterrence poses certain risks such as lowering nuclear thresholds through TNWs, expanding numbers without survivability and strong C2, and creating delegation risks, crisis instability, and escalatory pressures (Sankaran, 2014; Kurita, 2025; Hooey, 2019).

The policy implications from this research recommend that Pakistan to be concerned with the quality of their weapons stockpile and survivable second-strike options (and not simply expanding its warhead inventory), as was shown through China's disciplined modernization (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). This is especially important due to Pakistan's limited fiscal resources and the conventional military disparity with India (Haseeb et al., 2014; Nawaz & Guruswamy, 2014). In terms of capability development, strategic patience and selective modernization would be appropriate to achieve capability in mobility, survivability, and secure command-and-control, rather than rapidly increasing numbers, as China has pursued an incremental improvement in capabilities consistent with the credibility of deterrence (Kristensen et al., 2024). Economic and fiscal integration is a key element in supporting credible deterrence. Maintaining economic and fiscal interdependence, while avoiding an arms race that will strain national budgets, reduces the risk of destabilizing actions as illustrated by comparative analysis (Nawaz & Guruswamy, 2014). Finally, doctrinal clarity and signalling discipline are equally essential in maintaining stability in the region. Pakistan should establish 'minimum' as political restraint and 'credible' as

technological assurance, as ambiguity in establishing a threshold increases the potential for miscommunication in a crisis-prone environment in South Asia (Noor, 2023; Khan, 2022). By learning from China's balancing of survivability, signalling discipline, and economic balance, Pakistan can ensure sustainable, effective, credible nuclear capability and deterrence in the face of regional challenges. This paper debates and compared the nuclear doctrines of China and Pakistan and provides conditional, policy-relevant insights that are contextually adaptable to Pakistan's security environment (Narang, 2014).

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