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## Security and the Belt and Road: A Critical Analysis of Threats to Chinese Nationals and Businesses in Pakistan

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### Introduction and Background

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

Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled the idea of a 'Silk Road Economic Belt' in a 2013 speech at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University. Designed to stimulate economic development by enhancing regional and global inter-connectivity, BRI aims to integrate the world's largest land-mass—from Gwadar to Shanghai, from Vladivostok to Lisbon, and from Moscow to Singapore—through a network of hard and soft infrastructure linked to China—from transportation, telecommunication and

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energy infrastructure to financial integration and sociopolitical coordination (Rolland 2017).

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

According to a media report, about 71,000 Chinese nationals visited Pakistan in 2016, while more than 27,500 visa extensions were granted in the same year, a 41% increase on 2015, suggesting more Chinese are staying in Pakistan for longer (VOA 2017). According to a 2017 estimate, up to 10,000 Chinese individuals are currently working on CPEC-related projects in Pakistan, while another 20,000 are involved as entrepreneurs, traders and in other jobs. While thousands of Chinese nationals are working on Belt and Road projects in Pakistan, this second wave of Chinese arrivals, numbering in the thousands, comprises entrepreneurs, traders and tourists. Some of them are opening restaurants, shopping stores and language schools, while others are exploring what products they could sell in Pakistan (a market of 207 million people) or what products they could make in a cost-effective manner in Pakistan. In Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, Chinese visitors now outnumber other foreigners, and the country's first-ever Chinese-language newspaper, *Huashang*, has been launched. In hotels, shops and roadmaps, instructions in the Chinese language are increasingly common (Hashim 2017).

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

non-Muslims as legitimate methods of enforcing a Takfiri supremacist agenda. The Takfiris are also known as Khawarij (i.e. those extremists who excommunicate and condemn the mainstream community and resort to violence to enforce their ultra-orthodox beliefs; Syed et al. 2016). Islamist extremist groups in the Middle East and South Asia, such as Islamic State (IS or ISIS, the international Takfiri terrorist group), Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jundallah, may be described as Takfiri or Khawarij militants, and are often influenced by radical or extremist ideologies in some sections of the Salafi (or 'Wahhabi') and Deobandi communities (Bennet-Jones 2016). In addition to the Pakistan-origin Takfiris or Khawarij, some of the roots of anti-Chinese violence may be sourced to Chinese Islamist militants, some of whom are present in Pakistan's tribal areas along with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and their local handlers such as LeJ (Mehboob 2011; Smith 2009).

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

According to an estimate, militants trying to disrupt CPEC's projects in Pakistan killed 44 workers and wounded more than 100 during 2014–2016 (Hassan 2016). This ongoing threat has increased Chinese worries about CPEC's security. The issue deserves an urgent policy response given the strategic and economic importance of CPEC for both China and Pakistan. The current approach by the Pakistani government is, in the main, focused on physical security and protective intelligence, with limited or no attention to the ideological roots of violence.

This chapter offers a critical overview and analysis of security threats to Chinese nationals and businesses in Pakistan. For this purpose, it compiles

and analyses all such attacks carried out from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2017. While the analyses in the mainstream media usually point towards the Baloch separatist threat to CPEC, this study adds value to our knowledge by highlighting the Takfiri Islamist or Khawarij dimension of the threat. The chapter may guide government and security officials and policymakers in Pakistan and China to direct their attention to the two main sources of violence which pose physical and ideological threats to BRI in Pakistan. While these groups are a source of physical threat to human life, logistics and installations, they are also an ideological threat to the nation states of China and Pakistan due to their separatist, secessionist and/or Islamist supremacist agendas. The chapter may help readers to understand and address the security aspects and requirements of engaging with or employing Chinese individuals and businesses in Pakistan.

## Threats to Chinese Nationals and Businesses in Pakistan

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

In 2006, a group of Chinese nationals were kidnapped by Takfiri Islamists from a Deobandi madrassa in Islamabad, who accused them of prostitution. In February 2012, Hua Jing, a Chinese female travelling in

Peshawar, was shot and killed in the street in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) as revenge for the Chinese government killing Muslims in Xinjiang province (Reuters 2012; Small 2015). In May 2014, a Chinese cyclist, Hong Xudong, was kidnapped by a Takfiri Islamist group which claimed to have targeted him for being Chinese. He was eventually released in August 2015 in what was described as ‘an intelligence operation’ (BBC 2015). In March 2015, militants set five oil tankers on fire and abducted four local workers reportedly carrying fuel for a Chinese company working on the Saindak Copper Gold Project in Balochistan’s Chaghi district. Police sources believed that the tankers were targeted specifically because they were supplying oil to a Chinese company (Pantucci and Lain 2016). In a statement, the Baloch militant group Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) criticized CPEC, describing it as an exploitative project on Baloch soil (Singh 2016).

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

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

exploring these opportunities in consultation with British insurance experts (Arduino 2017).

The issue of increased business cost due to increased security is also noted in Pakistan. For example, in August 2017, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), the power sector regulator in Pakistan, allowed power producers to charge (consumers through a tariff) 1% of the capital cost of 19 power projects worth \$15.56 billion under CPEC for 20–30 years on account of the security cost. NEPRA worked out the annual cost at about \$2.92 million. In its order, NEPRA referred to Article 10 of the CPEC Agreement, which provides that ‘the Pakistani party shall take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of Chinese personnel and projects’ and noted that the country had established a special security force/division of the armed forces to ensure the security of CPEC projects (Kiani 2017).

There is also an issue of criticism and suspicion by India and the USA about CPEC and the increasing cooperation between Pakistan and China. While India alleges that Pakistan is responsible for cross-border militancy in Kashmir, Pakistan alleges that Indian agencies are responsible for violence in Balochistan and intend to disrupt CPEC. A Pakistani intelligence official told a Karachi-based publication: ‘We are now quite certain that foreign militants living in Pakistan and their Pakistani hosts, infuriated with Islamabad’s cooperation with Beijing, are carrying out these attacks’ (Ansari 2007; Smith 2009).

There are also questions about the Takfiri ideologies and fatwas emanating from the Darul Uloom Deoband, an ultra-orthodox madrassa based in India where the Deobandi Islamist movement began and whose ideology is adhered to by the likes of the Taliban and LeJ (Bennet-Jones 2016; Syed et al. 2016).

## Pattern of Violence

Based on an extensive review of media reports and research studies published in English and Urdu languages within and outside Pakistan, Table 7.1 offers an overview of almost all notable attacks on Chinese nationals and China- or CPEC-related workers in Pakistan from 1

**Table 7.1** An overview of attacks on Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan (2001–2017)

| Location            | Date             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kharan, Balochistan | 12 August 2017   | Armed militants hurled grenades at the buildings of the National Highway Authority, the residence of engineers working on CPEC projects. Baloch separatist group Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) accepted responsibility (TBP 2017).                                                                                                                                      |
| Karachi, Sindh      | 10 July 2017     | A roadside improvised explosive device (IED) went off minutes after a motorcade of Chinese engineers passed through Steel Town, one of Karachi's industrial quarters. The engineers were working on CPEC-related projects in Thatta. Two were injured. An obscure Sindh separatist group, Sindh Revolutionary Army, claimed responsibility (Dawn 2017a).                    |
| Islamabad           | 6 June 2017      | Two Chinese nationals were assaulted in Islamabad after a business deal turned sour. Their cash and travel documents were looted (Nawaiwaqt 2017).                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Quetta, Balochistan | 24 May 2017      | Two Chinese citizens were kidnapped from the Jinnah Town area of Quetta (Shah 2017). The abductees were later killed by Islamic State (IS) (Patranobis 2017). A few days before, the Pakistan Army's media arm (ISPR) had claimed a major success against a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and IS nexus of militancy in a remote warren of caves in Mastung district (Dawn 2017b). |
| Turbat, Balochistan | 19 May 2017      | Militants gunned down three workers building a Chinese-funded highway, linking Gwadar to Quetta. They were making a trip to a marketplace in the small town of Hoshab. They had been working on the road under the Frontier Works Organisation (The Nation 2017a).                                                                                                          |
| Gwadar, Balochistan | 13 May 2017      | Two gunmen on a motorbike killed ten construction workers in Peshukan Ganz who were working on CPEC-related road projects. Another two workers sustained injuries. BLA claimed responsibility for the attack (Anadolu Agency 2017; Press TV 2017).                                                                                                                          |
| Rohri, Sindh        | 14 December 2016 | A targeted attack (near the Patni area) on a convoy of Chinese engineers working on CPEC projects. The blast occurred along a road leading to three campsites set up for Chinese staffers. No injury was reported (Zee News 2016). A student of Shah Abdul Latif University was later arrested for alleged involvement (Memon 2017).                                        |

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

| Location                             | Date             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pasni, Balochistan                   | 26 November 2016 | Two persons working on a CPEC project were killed on their way to work (RFE/RL 2016).                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Ormara, Balochistan                  | 16 October 2016  | An attack on a Chinese convoy through an IED. Four workers were killed. Baloch militants claimed responsibility (Kumar 2016).                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Hub, Balochistan                     | 28 September     | Two Chinese engineers were killed and another two injured in the Windar Kinraag area of Hub district. They were working on the Dudher Zinc Project, part of CPEC. BLA claimed responsibility for the attack (Singh 2016).                                                                                   |
| Karachi, Sindh                       | 30 May 2016      | A Chinese engineer and his driver and private guard were injured when a roadside bomb exploded, as their vehicle passed through Steel Town. A Sindh separatist group claimed responsibility for the attack (Boone 2016; <i>The Economic Times</i> 2017).                                                    |
| Mastung, Balochistan                 | 23 March 2015    | Five oil tankers were set on fire and four drivers abducted, carrying fuel for a Chinese company working on the Saindak project (Baloch 2015a; Shah 2015). Takfiri groups have attacked Shia Muslims and travellers to Iran in this area on several occasions ( <i>The Nation</i> 2016).                    |
| Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 19 May 2014      | Pakistani Taliban (TTP) kidnapped a Chinese tourist on a bicycle near Dera Ismail Khan. TTP said: 'We want our detained militants to be released and we kidnapped him for this purpose' (Craig and Khan 2014). He was later recovered in August 2015.                                                       |
| Chaghi, Balochistan                  | 14 July 2013     | An attack on a convoy of fuel tankers linked to Chinese operations in Chaghi district. Four trucks were destroyed (Baloch 2015a). On more than one previous occasion, Takfiri militant groups affiliated with Taliban had claimed responsibility for attacks on fuel tankers (NBC 2011).                    |
| Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan           | 22 June 2013     | 11 tourists were killed by Takfiri militants affiliated with Taliban and LeJ in Nanga Parbat mountainous area. Three Chinese were among the slain tourists (AFP 2014). TTP claimed responsibility for the attack. The perpetrators were reportedly from Diامر, Mansehra and Chilas (Kohistan) (Burke 2013). |

(continued)



Table 7.1 (continued)

| Location                     | Date             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Karachi, Sindh               | 21 May 2013      | A targeted bomb blast in Clifton seafront in Karachi was aimed at a van full of 11 Chinese port workers and engineers, ahead of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Pakistan (Reuters 2013). One engineer was injured during the attack (Malik 2016).                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Karachi, Sindh               | 23 July 2012     | A bomb attack outside the Chinese consulate in Karachi. Three people were injured. One car and three motorbikes were destroyed. Another bomb planted in a motorcycle near the Chinese consulate in Karachi was defused (Mirza 2012).                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 28 February 2012 | Similar attacks in Central Asia have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups. A Chinese female student and her local companion were killed in Peshawar (Mehsud 2012; The Telegraph 2012). Takfiri extremists from TTP and LeJ are known to operate in this area. TTP claimed that she was killed in revenge for 'Chinese atrocities' on Muslims in Xinjinag.                                                                                  |
| Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa     | 1 September 2008 | TTP kidnapped two Chinese telecommunications engineers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Hub, Balochistan             | 19 July 2007     | A suicide car bomber, apparently targeting a convoy of Chinese mining technicians and engineers, killed at least 29 people, including 7 police officers, and injured 30 others in Hub. The bomber rammed into a police van that was escorting the Chinese. The dead were Pakistani nationals while the Chinese workers were unhurt (BBC 2007; Shah 2016). Suicide bombing in Pakistan is usually a characteristic of Takfiri Islamist groups.     |
| Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 8 July 2007      | Three Chinese workers were killed and another Chinese wounded. The attackers were shouting religious slogans when they opened fire on the four Chinese nationals in a three-wheel auto-rickshaw factory at Khazana, near Peshawar (Xinhua 2007a). The police inquiry revealed that Takfiri militants with long hair, beards and caps were involved in this pre-meditated murder. At least one madrassa student was also involved (The News 2007). |

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

| Location                                              | Date             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Islamabad                                             | 22 June 2007     | Seven Chinese citizens along with two Pakistanis were kidnapped by armed militants (Anthony 2007) from an acupuncture clinic and massage centre in Islamabad, by a radical Deobandi madrassa's female and male students belonging to Lal-Masjid/Jamia Hafsa ( <i>Xinhua</i> 2007b; Hussain 2011).                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Hub, Balochistan                                      | 15 February 2006 | Three Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were ambushed in their vehicle by gunmen on motorcycles. They were involved in the construction of the Attack cement factory. The attackers struck as the workers were leaving the factory. All were killed (BBC 2006; Shah 2016; <i>Xinhua</i> 2006). Unconfirmed reports say BLA claimed the attack.                                                                                                                  |
| South Waziristan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas | 9 October 2004   | Taliban militants kidnapped two Chinese engineers working on Gomal Zam dam in South Waziristan. One Chinese engineer was killed ( <i>China Daily</i> 2004; Dawn 2007). Taliban from South Waziristan and their Uzbek affiliates were found to be involved in this attack.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Gwadar, Balochistan                                   | 3 May 2004       | A car bomb killed three Chinese engineers and injured another ten. The engineers were developing a Beijing-funded deep-sea port in Gwadar (Shah 2016). The blast occurred at around 9 a.m. as 12 Chinese engineers were being taken to work in a van. Islamist militants had attacked foreigners in the past, including the 2002 attack in Karachi when a suicide bomber killed 11 French naval engineers, and the attack on the US consulate in the same year (BBC 2004). |
| Sibi, Balochistan                                     | 7 May 2001       | One person was killed and three others, including a Chinese engineer, seriously injured when the survey team of a Chinese company was attacked in the Sunny area of Sibi district (Raman n.d.).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

January 2001 to 31 December 2017.<sup>1</sup> It shows that most of these attacks have been carried out by two distinct groups: Takfiri Islamists and Baloch separatists.

A deeper analysis of Table 7.1 reveals that attacks by Takfiri Islamist militant groups or suspects are the most serious, not only in terms of number of attacks but also in terms of deaths, injuries and abductions.

Figure 7.1 shows that 54% of all attacks on Chinese or CPEC-related projects have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist or Khawarij groups, 31% by Baloch separatists and 15% by others or those unknown. While a few of these attacks remain unclaimed by any group ('not known'), there is a known strategy and pattern of silence or denial on some occasions by Takfiri Islamist groups as a face-saving exercise, by simply disowning the bloodbath and creating confusion about the actual masterminds of their attacks (Mir 2013).

Figures 7.2 and 7.3 show that 67% of all fatalities may be attributed to Takfiri Islamists, while Baloch separatists are responsible for 29%. Moreover, 76% of all injuries may be attributed to Takfiri Islamists and 14% to Baloch separatists. Table 7.1 shows that all abductions thus far (18 Chinese nationals kidnapped) have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups, who usually try to swap hostages in exchange for free-

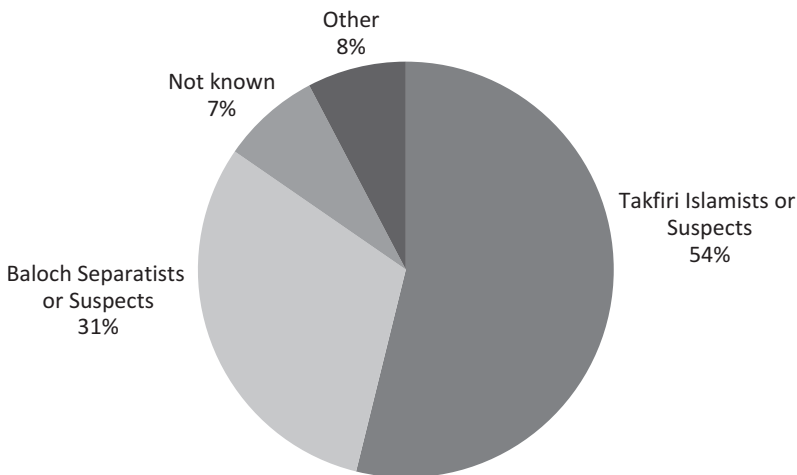


Fig. 7.1 Attacks on Chinese in Pakistan: incident count by type of attacker

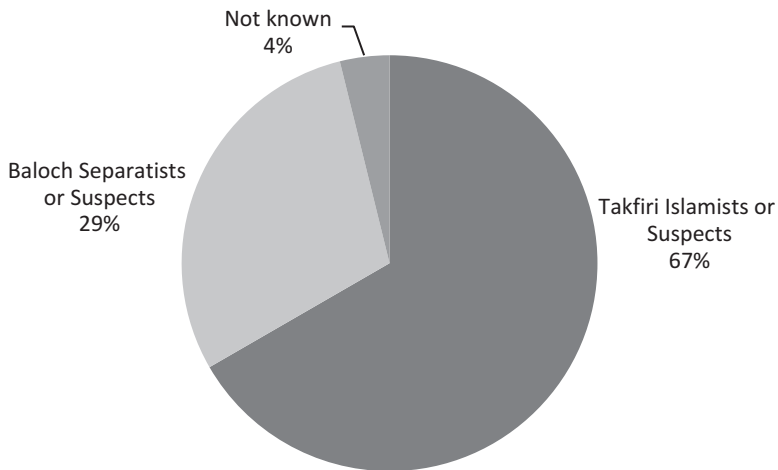


Fig. 7.2 Fatalities by type of attacker

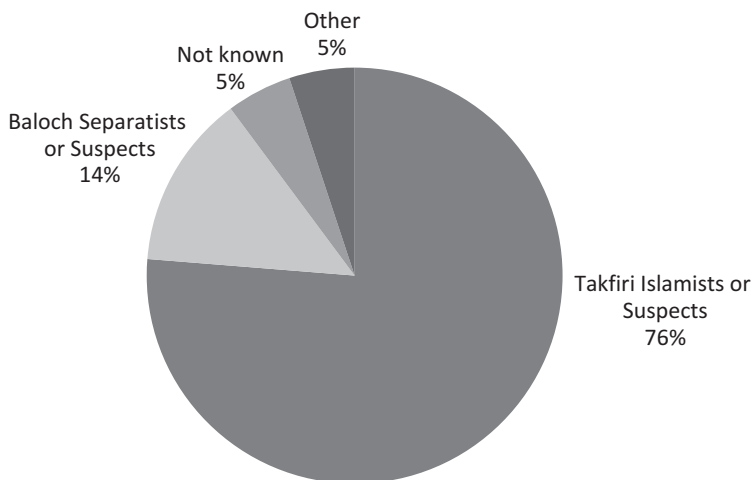


Fig. 7.3 Injuries by type of attacker

dom of the arrested terrorists of TTP, LeJ, Al-Qaeda and other affiliated militant groups. It may be noted that TTP, an umbrella organization of Islamist militant factions and an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, is battling the Pakistani government to enforce a hegemonic Islamist agenda. It has also attacked foreign individuals and organizations (Mehsud 2012).

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 indicate the scale of fatalities and injuries sustained by Chinese nationals in Pakistan, showing that 72% of all such killings are carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups, while Baloch separatists are responsible for 28%. In terms of injuries of Chinese nationals, responsibility lies with Takfiri Islamists (67%), Baloch separatists (17%), and others (16%).

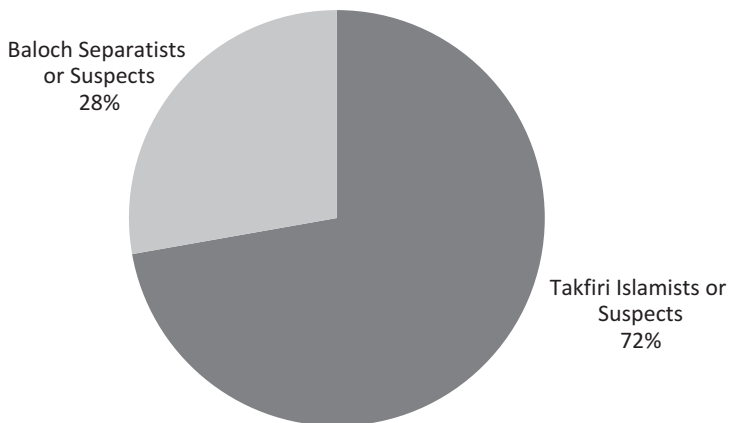


Fig. 7.4 Chinese fatalities

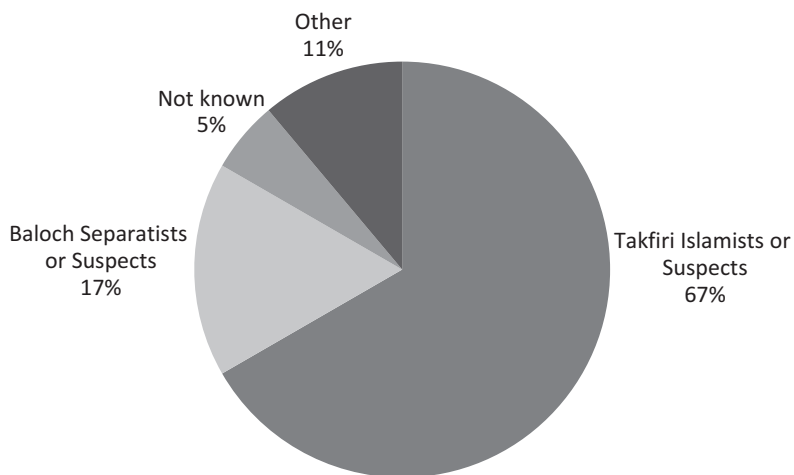


Fig. 7.5 Chinese injuries

In terms of the geographical spread of these attacks, the statistics suggest that while the Baloch separatist attacks are limited to certain specific areas in Balochistan, the Takfiri Islamist attacks are more widespread throughout the country, from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northwestern Pakistan to various parts of the Sindh and Balochistan provinces in the south.

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

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

In 2014, an affiliate group of TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, warned that it would hit Chinese interests in Pakistan. The ninth issue of the Ahrar's official magazine, *Ihya-i-Khilafat*, carried an article by Ehsanullah Ehsan, a key commander and official spokesperson, under the title of 'Hidden Motives Behind the Chinese Investment in Pakistan'. The militant group asked Beijing to stop persecuting Xinjiang Muslims or face action (*The Nation* 2014).

It may be noted that in addition to the data already provided, there was another kidnapping of a Chinese engineer in December 2017. The incident took place in December, but a formal police report was lodged only in January 2018. The Chinese engineer, Pingzhi Liu, 36, went missing on 20 December 2017 while working on a tunnel linked to a river for the Karot power project Kahuta (Dawn 2018). Given that the incident took place in the Punjab province where banned Takfiri or Khawarij groups are known to operate, their role in this kidnapping may not be ruled out.

## Takfiri Islamist Militancy in Pakistan

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

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

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

In fact, there is some evidence of foreign intelligence agencies trying to recruit and use Takfiri terrorist groups in Pakistan to promote cross-border terrorism. For example, quoting US intelligence memos, Perry (2012) reports that Israeli Mossad agents posed as US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers to recruit members of Jundallah, a Pakistan-based Sunni (Takfiri) extremist organization that has carried out a series of attacks in Iran and assassinations of government officials for attacks against the Iranian government. The covert Mossad operation was carried out in 2007–2008. The Mossad agents used US passports and currency to pose as CIA spies to try to recruit members of Jundallah. 'The report sparked White House concerns that Israel's program was putting Americans at risk', the intelligence officer told Perry (2012), who notes that Israel's operation jeopardized the US



administration's fragile relationship with Pakistan, which was under immense pressure from Iran to crack down on Jundallah.

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

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

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

There are other similar incidents of attacks on Chinese workers by Takfiri groups. In October 2004, a group of kidnappers including two militants from South Waziristan's Mehsud tribe and three Uzbeks

abducted and killed a Chinese engineer near Jandala in Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal area. The two kidnapped Chinese engineers, Wang Ende and Wang Peng, were working on a dam project in Pakistan for Chinese firm Sino Hydro Corp (*China Daily* 2004).

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

It may be noted that despite LeJ's primary target being the Shia, Bareilvi Sunni and Sufi Sunni communities, it has been responsible for attacks against multiple targets, including Christians, Ahmadis, Pakistani military and government officials as well as foreign nationals. LeJ was also involved in the killing of four US oil company workers in 1997, Daniel Pearl's abduction and beheading in 2002, the Marriott hotel bombing in Islamabad in 2008, the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore in 2009, and the attack on the Pakistan Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in 2009 (Shahid 2016). Shahid notes that LeJ works in tandem with the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other militant outfits for many of these attacks. In particular, its international or Al-Alami faction actively collaborates with IS and Al-Qaeda, such as in the attack that targeted a Shia procession in Kabul in 2011. In 2015, 43 Ismaili Shias were massacred in Karachi by Jundallah, an affiliate group of TTP and LeJ, that carried out this attack on behalf of IS. After this attack, Jundallah's spokesperson Marwat said in a media statement that 'these people were Ismaili, and we consider them *kafir* [infidels]. In the coming days, we will attack Ismailis, Shias and Christians.' He asserted that IS is like a brother to Jundallah and that 'whatever plan they [Islamic State] have, we will support them' (*The Express Tribune* 2014).

Similarly, members of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (an affiliate of LeJ and TTP) acted as the foot-soldiers for IS in the Quetta hospital bombing in August 2016. Ideologically, the 'Islamic purification' that IS seeks through Sufi Sunni and Shia killings brings it closer to TTP, LeJ and other Deobandi militant groups. While TTP has more influence in certain Islamist sections of the Pashtun population, LeJ is more useful for IS owing to its deeper infiltration into the Punjab and other provinces, as well as into mainstream Pakistani politics through Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat (ASWJ, a banned Takfiri

outfit which was previously known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, SSP). LeJ started operating in 1996 as an offshoot of SSP. When the government banned LeJ and SSP in 2002, SSP formed ASWJ, which continues to operate publicly despite being banned itself. With Gwadar port formally launching trade through CPEC, the entrance to the economic 'lifeline' is in Balochistan. Evidently, Pakistan cannot afford any remnants or sleeper cells of Takfiri militant groups in any shape and form (Shahid 2016).

On 13 November 2016, even as the CPEC convoys of trucks converged in Quetta en route to Gwadar port, a Sufi Sunni shrine in Balochistan's Khuzdar district was targeted by a powerful bomb, killing at least 52 people and injuring more than 100. The explosion at the Shah Noorani shrine was a known hallmark of Takfiri militants (Ramachandran 2016), who allege that Sufi Sunni practices are tantamount to polytheism and idol worship. While this attack did not target the CPEC project directly and was a sectarian attack by Takfiris on Sufi Sunnis, it raised apprehensions about Balochistan's vulnerability to terrorism and violence. In another similar attack, on 5 October 2017, a suicide bomber targeted the shrine of Pir Rakhel Shah situated in Fatehpur, in the Jhal Magsi district of Balochistan. At least 22 people, including Sufi Sunni and Shia Muslims and two police officers, were killed and more than 30 others injured in this attack (*The News* 2017).

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

## Islamist Militancy in China

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

Historically, China's control over Xinjiang has been fragile. The region came under full Chinese control during the Qing Dynasty in the eighteenth century. The region was briefly autonomous as the 'East Turkistan

Republic' during the Chinese civil war. Han–Uyghur relations have been tense since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Many Uyghurs viewed the Chinese central government's criticism and restrictions on religious practice during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) as major affronts to their religious and cultural identity (Millward 2007; Tanner and Bellacqua 2016). After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, a wave of political reforms was initiated by his successor, Deng Xiaoping. These reforms included some easing of religious suppression (Kindropp and Hamrin 2014). Further reforms in 1980s included relaxing some past assimilation policies, undertaking repairs to damaged mosques and other religious facilities, and inclusion of minority representatives in key party and government positions in Xinjiang (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016). The decade of the 1980s was particularly notable for a reopening of contacts between China's Uyghur population and Muslims in Central Asia and the Middle East. However, this period of liberalization also provided an opportunity for a rising tide of social protest and violence in Xinjiang during the 1990s. Some Chinese analysts emphasize incitement and support from foreign-based radical organizations and Islamist ideologies as a cause of Uyghur social violence (Millward 2007). Xinjiang was also affected by major geopolitical events in the 1980s and early 1990s. These include the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the era of the Afghan jihad, which culminated in the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan in 1988 and, later, the formation of five newly independent Muslim-majority Central Asian states on Xinjiang's western frontier. Some Chinese Uyghurs fought in the Islamist resistance against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and later returned to Xinjiang with a radicalized mindset. Chinese scholars point to these as examples of destabilizing events in the region (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016).

In the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, there were 22 Chinese Uyghur detainees caught fighting with Al-Qaeda and Taliban, so China considers Xinjiang as its frontier against Islamist terrorism and violence (Wayne 2007). In recent years (2012–2016), many Chinese Uyghurs travelled to Syria to wage jihad along with IS and Al-Qaeda militants against the Assad regime (Lin 2016). According to an estimate, there are about 2000 Chinese Uyghurs in IS and other jihadist groups in Syria. In December 2015, China expanded its anti-terrorism law to conduct

operations abroad with the consent of host governments. In August 2016, it signed a military agreement with Syria and also formed an anti-terror alliance with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Lin 2016).

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

The bulk of the Uyghur community in Pakistan, numbering a couple of thousand, is in Rawalpindi, and operates under the close watch of the Chinese government. Particularly since 9/11, the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad has maintained a strong interest in Uyghurs in Pakistan, extending benefits such as funding for scholarships to collect precise information about their numbers and locations (Wright and Page 2011). Indeed, the dominant majority of them are peaceful and moderate. Chinese officials have talked about estimates of between 40 and 80 Uyghur militants in Pakistan.

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

Owing to this gradual radicalization, nearly 200 people died in Urumqi riots in July 2009 (BBC 2009; Escobar 2011; Small 2015). The first day's rioting, which involved at least 1000 Uyghurs, began as a protest but escalated into violent attacks that mainly targeted Han people. Two days later, hundreds of Han people clashed with both police and Uyghurs. Chinese officials said that most of those killed were Hans. The government's official line was that the violence was not only initiated by the protesters, but was also pre-meditated and coordinated by Uyghur separatists abroad. Eligen

Imibakhi, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Xinjiang Regional People's Congress, blamed these riots on 'extremism, separatism and terrorism' (*Xinhua* 2009).

In March 2008, a flight from Urumqi to Beijing had to make an emergency landing in Lanzhou after a failed terrorist attempt. Reports citing Chinese sources claim that a 19-year-old Uyghur woman, along with a Central Asian and a Pakistani national (all three of them carrying Pakistani passports), were involved in a 'meticulously planned, tightly coordinated, terror attack activity'. Subsequent accounts suggest that the woman, Guazlinur Turdi, had 'spent a significant amount of time in Pakistan' and that the third suspect, a Pakistani man who was detained a week later, had 'masterminded' and 'instigated' the attack (Small 2015).

In July 2011, Islamist militants waged systematic attacks in Kashgar, stabbing random people and setting fire to a restaurant. In total, 23 people were killed including 8 attackers. Subsequent investigation found the involvement of ETIM. Chinese state media confirmed that all the suspected attackers were Uyghur, and an initial investigation by the Kashgar government concluded that the perpetrators were recruited in Pakistan and gained explosives and firearms training at training camps in Pakistan along with Taliban and Al-Qaeda (Wivell 2011). The Kashgar city government reported that one of the men involved had confessed to receiving explosives and firearms training in ETIM camps in Pakistan (CCTV 2009).

## Attacks in Neighbouring Countries

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

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

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

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

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

China continued with its Strike Hard campaign against these militants and also pressed governments in Central Asia to clamp down on the 'three evils': terrorism, separatism and religious extremism (Haider 2005). The founding in 1996 of the Shanghai Five, which later evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, was in large part a product of Beijing's concerns about Uyghur militants and their foreign backers (Small 2015).

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

## Baloch Separatist Militancy

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

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

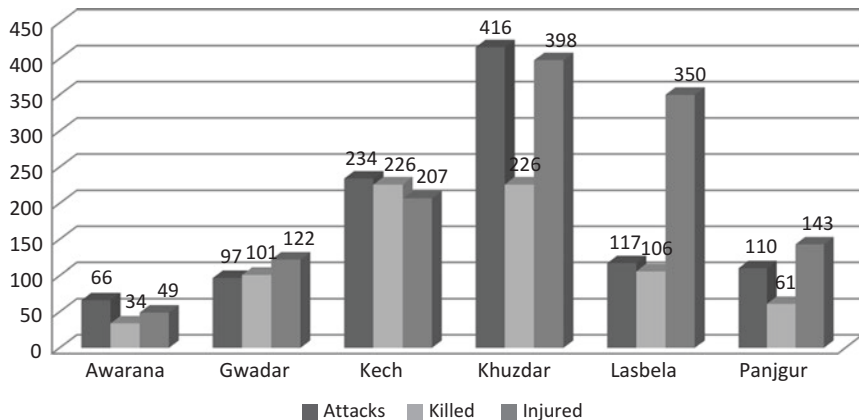
Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province in terms of area (347,190 sq km) and the smallest in terms of population (12.3 million, representing less than 6% of Pakistan's total population), is largely under-developed (PBS 2017). In terms of ethnic composition, 55% of people in Balochistan speak Balochi as their first language, while 30% speak Pashto and 5.6% speak Sindhi. Some 70% of the population of Balochistan lives below the poverty line (PBS 2017). There is an acute shortage of water in parts of the province and living conditions and health indicators are worrisome.



The maternal death rate in Balochistan is 785 out of every 100,000, which is much higher than the overall maternal death rate in Pakistan, which stands at 278 out of 100,000 (Baloch 2015b).

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

The Balochistan section of CPEC originates from Gwadar, connecting it to Karachi and the northern part of Pakistan through the eastern and western routes. Security threats to CPEC in Balochistan also appear from neighbouring districts of Gwadar and the Makran Coastal Belt, for example Kech, Awaran and Lasbela. However, the militant landscape of these districts is largely linked to Panjgur and Khuzdar districts. A review of reported terrorist attacks between 2007 and 2014 suggests that Kech and Khuzdar are the most volatile districts in this region (see Fig. 7.6; Sial 2014). It may be noted that most of these attacks are not targeted against CPEC projects or Chinese nationals. Overall, 1040 terrorist attacks took place in these six districts (Gwadar, Kech, Awaran, Panjgur, Lasbela and Khuzdar) between 1 January 2007 and 31 July 2014, representing 23% of total attacks reported from Balochistan during that period. Targets hit in most of these attacks included security forces, civilians, political leaders, non-Baloch settlers and workers, gas pipelines and power pylons, railways tracks and government installations and property.



**Fig. 7.6** Terrorist attacks in Gwadar and neighbouring districts (1 January 2007–31 July 2014). Source: Adapted from Sial (2014)

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

## Cooperation Between Baloch Separatists and Takfiri Islamists

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

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

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

Ironically, some of these Islamists have been used by certain sections within the Pakistani establishment for proxy-jihadist purposes in Afghanistan and elsewhere, as well as to counter separatist militancy in Balochistan (Sellin 2017). However, in certain Baloch sections, there seems to be a confluence of Deobandi and nationalist ideologies. Some secular Baloch leaders and parties have warned against the increasing influence of Takfiri ideology and blame the state and its security agencies for injecting Islamist (mostly Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi) ideologies

and madrassas into Balochistan (Baloch 2016). Such a convergence between Takfiri ideology and Baloch separatism is particularly evident in terror attacks by Islamists within Iranian Balochistan, where dozens of Iranian security personnel and ordinary civilians have been killed by Baloch separatists while also using the Sunni–Shia sectarian discourse.

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

Ayesha Siddiqi points towards the increasing Deobandi influence in certain Baloch communities: ‘Another explanation pertains to Sunni Baloch killing the Shias. In a recent report from Quetta, journalist Wajahat S Khan, who has good military contacts, highlighted the fact that people in Quetta blame the Deobandi LeJ. However, he added that

most of the LeJ members in Balochistan, known as the Jhangavis, are Baruhis [Brahuis], which is a sub-clan of the Baloch' (Siddiqua 2013).

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

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

According to Akbar (2012), the top-most hierarchy of LeJ belongs to the lower-middle class in Balochistan. The historical stance of Balochs has been secular, which makes the recent connections with religiously motivated violence a rare occurrence in their history. Akbar proposes that this recent surge of religiously motivated violence can be traced back to the surge in religious schools or madrassas throughout the province, sponsored by the covert funding of Saudi Arabia and facilitated by certain sections within the Pakistani establishment. This increase in madrassas is said to provide religious militancy with an intended aim to counter

the separatist movement. The secular Baloch separatists claim that these madrassas are the key reason for the rise of religious or sectarian militants. However, there are no armed conflicts taking place between the two groups (separatists and Islamists) currently. The Baloch separatists claim that this is because they are engaged in a war against the Pakistani government, so they cannot oppose the rise of extremist Islamic groups.

In June 2010, Abdolmalek Rigi, the now executed leader of Jundallah, was arrested in an anti-terrorism operation by Iranian forces and subsequently faced a court trial and was hanged for his role in acts of terrorism. However, some of the Pakistan-based Baloch nationalist and separatist groups protested, along with Jundallah and ASWJ, and condemned Rigi's execution. They expressed solidarity with him and called for three days of mourning (Jang 2010). This news was also reported in Pakistan's English-language newspapers. Dawn (2010) reports that 'Baloch National Front announced a three-day mourning on the death of Rigi and condemned his hanging in Iran. A statement issued by the front said a "black day" would be observed in Balochistan ... [Moreover] Lawyers boycotted courts in several district headquarters of Balochistan in protest against the hanging of Jundallah leader Abdolmalek Rigi by Iranian government ... The call for boycott was given by the Baloch Bar Association.'

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

## Concerns in India and the USA

CPEC passes through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and India has repeatedly raised concerns over it. India is most anxious about the construction of CPEC through Gilgit Baltistan and the opening and operation of

Gwadar port by China (Patranobis 2017). The Indian leadership is perturbed about CPEC and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed it 'unacceptable' during his visit to China in May 2015 (*The Express Tribune* 2015).

The US administration under President Trump has shown similar anxieties about CPEC. In October 2017, the Trump administration informed Congress that it believes CPEC passes through a disputed territory, referring to Pakistan's northern areas (Gilgit Baltistan), which India claims are part of the disputed Jammu and Kashmir territory. Secretary James Mattis said that the USA opposed the One Belt One Road (OBOR) policy in principle because there were many belts and roads in a globalized world, and a singular nation should not take up a dictatorial position for the OBOR proposition. It also opposed the one going through Pakistan because it passed through a disputed territory. The US position on CPEC may further worsen the already tense relations between the USA and Pakistan. Prior to the USA announcing its discontent over the CPEC route, Pakistan had opposed the greater role that the USA has assigned to India in Afghanistan. Mattis said, 'There are areas where, also, strategically, we need to confront China where we think it's unproductive—the direction they're going in' (Iqbal 2017).

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

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

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

Notwithstanding these misgivings, India may consider the positive aspects of CPEC and more fully engage with BRI for reciprocal benefits. As suggested by Jeganaathan (2017), Pakistan and India may consider opening the Kargil–Skardu road so that India could access Pakistani, Central Asian and Russian energy resources and vice versa. Similarly, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic



Cooperation, which is a regional organization comprising seven countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand), may be expanded to include Pakistan and Afghanistan, as it would enhance road connectivity from Kolkata to Lahore and Kabul.

## Security Measures

According to one estimate, there are close to 8000 Chinese nationals working in Pakistan, and China has raised a 15,000-strong armed force specifically to safeguard Chinese nationals working in the country (Neelakantan 2017; Raza 2017). These measures are in addition to close collaboration between China and Pakistan against terrorism. Joint China–Pakistan efforts target the activities of ETIM, and its affiliates and trainers are being suppressed through joint efforts. While terrorism continues to be a menace, the leaders of both countries have expressed great commitment towards fighting against terrorists (Malik 2016).

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

In September 2017, leaders of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in their joint declaration expressed grave concern about the intensity of terrorist activity from Taliban and other groups in Afghanistan. BRICS leaders, who met in China’s Xiamen city, said the activities of insurgent groups was unacceptable. In a strongly worded declaration, the BRICS nations named Pakistan-based Deobandi and Salafi/Wahhabi militant groups. ‘We strongly condemn terrorist attacks resulting in death to innocent Afghan nationals. We, in this regard, express concern on the security situation in the region and vio-

lence caused by the Taliban, ISIL/Daesh, al-Qaeda and its affiliates including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, TTP and Hizb ut-Tahrir', read the declaration issued by the BRICS countries. The BRICS declaration further states, 'We reaffirm that those responsible for committing, organising, or supporting terrorist acts must be held accountable' (Popalzai 2017).

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

In 2007, the Government of Pakistan created a Joint Task Force comprising Chinese Embassy officials and Ministry of Interior officials to ensure the security of Chinese citizens in Pakistan (Rahman 2007). Today, there are 3044 Chinese nationals working on CPEC projects in Sindh. It has been reported that seven security headquarters have been established for each project, with a total of 3044 well-trained police officers deployed for the security of Chinese nationals only. The eighth project is for the National Transmission & Despatch Company (NTDC) Transmission line, which stretches from Matirai to Lahore; 15 Chinese are involved in this project who have been provided with 65 security personnel. Moreover, 137 non-CPEC projects in Sindh province have employed 1971 Chinese, and 1373 security personnel have been deployed for them. It was reported that the total sanctioned strength of the Special Protection Unit was 2662, of which 1349 are currently deployed. A force of 563 personnel guards the coal-based power Plant at Port Qasim. Similar security arrangements have been made for the Thar project, Blocks I and II, where a total of 46 and 413 security personnel, respectively, have been deployed. A force of 555 personnel is providing security to the four wind power projects in Thatta district and 1197 personnel guard the 126 km NDTC transmission line from Sukkur to Ghotki.

Another force of 76 personnel guards the transmission line from Matirai to Lahore/Faisalabad, while 75 personnel guard the Sindh section of the 548 km railway line being laid from Karachi to Peshawar (SATP 2017). Moreover, an 8000-strong Special Protection Unit was set up by Punjab province in 2014 to guard foreigners, mostly Chinese (VOA 2017). According to an official report generated in July 2015, there were 2954 Chinese working in 131 projects in Punjab, living in 31 residences. About 6983 security personnel were appointed for their security (Elahi 2015).

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

In the aftermath of the Peshawar school massacre in 2014 and subsequent domestic public pressure, Islamabad formulated the National Action Plan, drafted jointly by the government, parliament and army in 2015, a 20-point package of measures to combat terrorism in the country. In particular, Pakistan Army chief General Raheel Sharif took a bold stance against terrorism and emphasized that the country had no other option than to eliminate all manifestations of extremism and terrorism at the grass-roots level. He further reiterated that Pakistan's security forces will not stop unless they achieve the end objective of a terror-free Pakistan. While the subsequent military operation (Zarb-e-Azb) was largely successful in reducing incidents of terrorism in Pakistan, the operation had a strict domestic focus, meaning that only anti-Pakistan militant groups were identified as targets (Wolf 2016). Thus, those militant groups which

are operating in Afghanistan or Indian-administered Kashmir were largely spared. Similar leniency was shown to certain Takfiri Islamist sections in Balochistan in order to use them to confront Baloch separatist groups. Heinkel and deVillafranca (2016) note that Islamabad sometimes links the Baloch groups to anti-Shia (anti-Hazara) massacres in Quetta, but Takfiri groups such as SSP and LeJ, some of them with known links with elements of the Pakistani establishment and led by local ethnic Baloch, likely conducted these attacks.

While the Pakistani military undertook operations against groups that attacked government official and security forces within Pakistan such as TTP, it did not take action against other groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba. Similarly, Afghan Taliban, SSP a.k.a. ASWJ and the Haqqani Network leadership allegedly enjoy safe haven in Balochistan and tribal areas. Although the Pakistan military operation disrupted the actions of these groups, it did not directly target them. Wolf (2016) suggests that the Pakistani establishment has to realize that terrorist organizations are not reliable allies for states. While some of these militants had an informal but deeply rooted alliance with some sections of the security agencies for many years, in the end they turned against the state and the society.

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

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study has highlighted the multi-pronged threats to CPEC which emanate from Takfiri Islamist (or Khawarij) militants and Baloch separatist militants. Both of these groups pose a threat not only to the physical security of Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan, but also to the very ideology of the nation states of Pakistan and China, and the idea of the Belt and Road.

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

While the Pakistani government has established a special security force for the protection of Chinese individuals and CPEC-related projects, the issue of physical security and protective intelligence is closely linked with ideological security. In other words, the ideological roots of both forms of violence need to be understood and addressed. In particular, policymakers and government officials need to focus on Takfiri Islamist violence and its roots in certain type of madrassas, mosques and groups. Most importantly, the Pakistani state may wish to re-consider its unstated policy of using Islamist or jihadist groups to combat Baloch separatist militancy or conduct jihadist operations in Kashmir or Afghanistan. Small (2015, p. 91) argues that a 'Pakistani military that grows ever more closely enmeshed with an Islamist and militant agenda undermines China's basic strategic goals in South Asia. A Pakistani military that can no longer keep China off the terrorist target list, that has even become a target in its own

right, undermines China's security at home and the safety of its projects and personnel abroad.'

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

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

implications for group or social behaviours, then targeted killings, as a method, affect individual behaviours.

Moreover, while the evidence presented in this study was collected through news in mainstream media, future scholars may wish to triangulate this information through other means of evidence, for example by contacting the victims of such violence in China and Pakistan or by analysing the terror-related archives of the security agencies in Pakistan. However, it is acknowledged that access to such data may be difficult due to issues of confidentiality and sensitivity.

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

In Pakistan, the attacks highlight several important aspects of Sino-Pakistani relations. The first is the employment of thousands of Chinese technicians, engineers and other workers by Chinese companies or state entities in Pakistan. The second is the threat to these workers by Takfiri Islamist and Baloch separatist militants. The third is the increased alarm with which these attacks are viewed given the historically close Pakistan-China relationship (Smith 2009).

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

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

## Note

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

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