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The China-donated Gwadar Technical and Vocational Institute in southwest Pakistan's Gwadar on October 1, 2021, just after the building's completion. (Photo by Str/Xinhua via Getty Images)

Lashkar-e-Tayyaba: China's Handmaid in Balochistan

C. Christine Fair

Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), also known as Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) within Pakistan, is the most well-known terrorist organization based in and backed by Pakistan which operates mostly in India with limited forays in Afghanistan.¹_While LeT is most known as a proxy of the Pakistan army to execute its preferred external security policies, the organization is also important to the Pakistan state because it advances internal security objectives as well. For example, the organization is part of the state's fight against the Islamic State in Pakistan.²_It is also the only jihadi organization in Pakistan which "remains tied to the Nationalist-Islamist aims of Pakistan's security establishment."³_The organization is also opposed to sectarianism and holds that anyone who has recognized the supremacy of Allah cannot be killed irrespective of their offence; rather, they can only be rehabilitated through dawa (invitation to embrace the LeT's interpretation of Islam) and tabligh (proselytization).⁴_While the LeT advocates brutal murder of non-Muslims—especially Hindus abroad, it disdains communal violence within Pakistan. Instead, the LeT organization uses its charity and proselytization arms to attempt to convert Pakistani Hindus, especially in Sindh where Hindus are concentrated. Equally, it opposes efforts to undermine any given political regime in Pakistan whether civilian and military because it shares the state's prioritization of stability.⁴_Notably, the Le' remained studiously silent during the recent implosion of former Imran Khan's government and his showdown with the army. Finally, the LeT has emerged as a key partner of the Pakistani state's bid to promote and secure public support for the controversial Chinese-Pakistan Economic Quarter (CPEC), particularly in Balochistan.

However, the LeT's promotion of China's growing presence in Balochistan has not had the salubrious effects the Pakistani state anticipated. In this essay, I present results from survey data to demonstrate Baloch antipathy to Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and the Punjabi ethnic group from which it hails. Next, I briefly recount the organization's actions in Balochistan as well as its efforts to promote CPEC and then I present key results from the survey data. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

Jamat-ud-Dawa in Balochistan and Beyond

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For much of Pakistan's history, Balochistan has been a restive province with long bouts of ethnic insurgency largely stemming from the fact that many Baloch did not want to be a part of Pakistan when it was created. Whereas the residents in much of the territory that became Pakistan had a voice in the matter in the 1945-47 election, the Baloch did not. Since about 2005, the province has been in an active state of insurgency after a long period of relative peace. One of the major problems in Balochistan is that it is resource rich, expansive in territory and sparsely populated, with little political power. The Pakistan state, which is dominated by the Punjab, has long been extractive in Balochistan while failing to develop the province and its peoples. Baloch complain that they only get gas or electricity hookups when the army builds a cantonment, reflecting the fact that Balochistan is the least developed of Pakistan's provinces.⁶

Adding to the accumulating list of ossifying Baloch grievances against the Pakistan state is the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC transport and infrastructure corridor stretches between Gilgit-Baltistan in the north, which shares a border with China's restive Xinjiang, and the Chinese-built Gwadar port in Balochistan, in the south. While the Baloch have long nurtured concerns about Punjabis colonizing their province; these anxieties have intensified since the April 2015 announcement of CPEC. At that time, the enterprise promised \$46 billion for energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan, including the aforementioned development of the deep-sea port at Gwadar.⁷ While Baloch have long decried the unfair distribution of economic benefits and other developments in the central government, they now also repine about the negligible benefits of CPEC for the Baloch in their own provinces. As Ismail and Camba note, Balochistan shoulders a disproportionate burden for CPEC by affording 62 percent of the requisite land, including the Gwadar coastline where traditional communities used to earn their livelihood. However, Balochistan gets only 4.5 % of the CPEC budget. In contrast, the more developed provinces of Sindh and Punjab have (or have been promised) the most lucrative CPEC highways and projects.⁸ The Baloch are also enduring significant losses as a result of CPEC. The Baloch have argued that the various projects are squandering precious resources like water and also access to traditional fishing areas; meantime, CPEC roads are displacing Baloch who are being ousted from their land without compensation. These developments necessarily exacerbate the Baloch's long-simmering concerns and growing anger about outsiders taking over their homeland.⁹

Indeed, large-scale Punjabi migration to Balochistan, which has resulted in the growth of Punjabi-dominant enclaves in the province, has been a long-standing irritant to the Baloch, who further view the Pakistan state as colonizers seeking to make them minorities in their own province and homeland.¹⁰ Furthermore, the Baloch have also become antagonistic towards the Chinese workers who are undertaking CPEC-related and other projects in Balochistan. The Baloch believe the foreign workers are the tip of a spear of Chinese colonizers who are working closely with the Pakistan "deep state"—centered in Rawalpindi with collaborators in Islamabad—which they read as "Punjabi," to rob Balochistan of its resources while the "owners" of these resources enjoy none of the benefits.¹¹ While ther is surely logic to this master narrative of Chinese-Deep State-Punjabi collusion, the workers there are not imperial masterminds. Because the Chinese fear the situation in Balochistan and because they have habits that are deeply offensive to locals, such as pork consumption and disporting with Chinese prostitutes,¹² they live in enclaves with Chinese-provided security working closely with Pakistani security forces.¹³

For all of these reasons, Pakistan's Baloch generally but Baloch militants in particular energetically oppose the initiative throughout the presumed CPEC route. To counter Baloch militants, the Pakistani state has waged a relentless counterterrorism campaign, most recently since 2005, which includes extrajudicial disappearances, torture and murder. Non-kinetically, the Pakistani security establishment has long relied on the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, along with its philanthropic wing the Filah Insaniat Foundation (FIF), in Balochistan because the organization actively promotes the "ideology of Pakistan." (Note that in 2010, the United States designated FII as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and the United Nations did so, too, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011).¹⁴ The Pakistan army hopes that this Islamist, state ideology will be an effective ideological countermeasure to the Baloch ethnic identity and its irridentist aspirations largely by subsuming the latter under the former.¹⁵

Balochistan has been a focal point of JuD activity and that of its various other fronts like FIF. In 2012, a JuD representative explained that in Balochistan the organization will focus on developmental and welfare projects because it believes that Baloch grievances can "only be resolved by JuD."¹⁶ Hafiz Abdur Rauf, the chairman of FIF, claimed that "JuD will minimize the differences between the

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people" and further remarked that JuD will mobilize volunteers from across Pakistan to work in the province, something which the Baloch decry as "colonization." (Indeed, Baloch routinely label migration from elsewhere in Pakistan to Balochistan as "colonization." Because so often the migrants are Punjabis and because Punjabis are so dominant in the Pakistan army, many Baloch use "colonizer" and "Punjabi" interchangeably.) Hafiz Saeed, the amir of JuD, explained that Pakistan's government needs "JuD's ideology to resolve the issues of Balochistan."¹⁷

JuD is an important ally of the Pakistani state in Balochistan for several reasons. First, many Pakistanis who consume Pakistan's print or televised media widely believe that India, Afghanistan, and even the United States are behind the secular, ethno-nationalist insurgency in Balochistan. The arrest of Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, an Indian intelligence operative purportedly in Balochistan, has rendered moot any doubts among Pakistanis about the foreign hand behind the Baloch rebels.¹⁸ (While Indians are adamant that the Pakistanis snatched him from Iran rather than Pakistan, there is no doubt he was an intelligence operative.¹⁹) JuD's own propaganda aligns with that of the Pakistani state: by virtue of being Baloch ethnic militias, the militants are Indian agents and can no longer have legitimate grievances on the basis of being Pakistanis. Second, the Baloch insurgents pose an existential threat to the state because the claim to be secular, and they oppose—or are outright hostile to—Islamism and to the state's efforts to mobilize Islam as the national ideology. Third, Balochistan has also witnessed sanguinary sectarian violence against the ethnic Hazaras perpetrated by Deobandi, anti-Shia militias such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. As will be explained, JuD discourages sectarian outbursts as destabilizing of the state. Finally, Balochistan is becoming a center of activities of the Islamic State, which is an existential foe of JuD.²⁰ Thus, JuD is quite correct that if it can propagate its ideology successfully throughout the province, many of the problems of Balochistan can be mitigated principally by vitating the ethno-nationalist character of the Baloch grievances and by tempering Deobandi sectarianism in the province.

Despite Baloch objections, FIF had a monopoly on relief efforts in 2015 when a deadly earthquake hit Quetta and environs.²¹ The state did this previously in 2013 when it sought to promote JuD and FIF and their brands. In September 2013, after another deadly earthquake, Pakistan gave exclusive permission to FIF to undertake relief while denying permission to Médecins Sans Frontières, which was ready to deploy services to the affected region.²² With other competitors removed, FIF and JuD, with its Punjabi roots and Islamist militant ties, was at the forefront of relief in both disasters. This was not a covert affair: in fact, FIF's relief activities were widely reported internationally as well as in Pakistan's print and televised media. As in 2013, JuD and FIF widely touted its relief effort in 2015. While much of the social media posts have been removed as Pakistan has once again feigned to shut down and proscribe the organizations; the Facebook page of the Quetta branch of FIF is still available. The photos show the organization's vehicles disporting with the well-known black and white flag of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (Picture 1) as well as posing along with army officers from the Baloch Regiment with their maroon berets (Picture 2). In 2017, Newsweek Pakistan reported that Hafiz Saeed was "rumored to have 200,000 men deployed these days in Tharparkar and Balochistan 'conquering' people that Pakistan doesn't like."²³

Afterwards, the Baloch nationalists expressed outraged at FIF's provision of relief services. These Baloch correctly interpreted the Rawalpindi's promotion of this organization in the province as a state-sponsored initiative to embed "jihadi agents" in the area and "inculcate religious extremism to counter secular Baloch nationalism." The spokesperson for a Baloch nationalist organization (BSO-Azad) explained that the government of Pakistan government deliberately denied secular aid organizations from participating in relief operations while allowing the FIF exclusive access because FIF is considered an asset in , the Pakistan army's counter-insurgency operations in the province. Moreover, the government awarded FIF health and education projects in numerous localities in Awaraan such as Awaraan City, Labach, Dalbidi, Ziaratdan, Malaar and Gishkor.²⁴

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FIF Rescue Vehicle aids flood relief efforts in Quetta, Pakistan, on November 23, 2015. (Facebook/FIF Quetta)



FIF activists posing with the Baloch Regiment in Quetta, Pakistan, on November 23, 2015. (Facebook/FIF Quetta)

Colonizing Pakistan to Enrich China

While CPEC is most popularly considered a transport effort to improve Pakistan's shambolic road and rail connectivity as well as power projects, CPEC is also a platform for agricultural exploitation.²⁵ China's need for food likely explains the most under-studied component of the so-called Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor: Chinese exploitation of Pakistan's agricultural resources. In 2017, The Dawn obtained and leaked the CPEC masterplan. Most of the commentary of that plan focused on its dodgy finances whose terms were set by China rather than the market, the road and rail investments as well as power generation. Curiously, no one paid attention to the most striking observation, namely that the "main thrust of the plan actually lies in agriculture, contrary to the image of CPEC as a massive industrial and transport undertaking, involving power plants and highways. The plan acquires its greatest specificity and lays out the largest number of projects and plans for their facilitation, in agriculture."²⁶

The CPEC agricultural plan provides a roadmap that spans the entire supply chain and exploits Pakistan's own innumerable dysfunctions in its agricultural sector. For example, it observes that 50 percent of Pakistan's agricultural products rot during harvesting and transport because Pakistan has no significant cold-chain logistics and processing facilities. Consequently, the plan calls for the provision of seeds and other inputs, like fertilizer, credit and pesticides while noting that various Chinese enterprises "will also operate their own farms, processing facilities for fruits and vegetables and grain. Logistics companies will operate a large storage and transportation system for agrarian produce."²⁷

As with much of CPEC, the Chinese are motivated by their concerns about Kashgar Prefecture, which is a part of the so-called Xinjian Autonomous Zone. As is well-known, this is where the Chinese are using every means necessary—including genocide—to rid itself of

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the restive Muslim Uighurs.²⁸ The Chinese are keen to replicate the strategy they used in Tibet in Xinjiang. This plan calls for social re engineering by diminishing the problem population by all means possible and active settling of Han Chinese. It also calls for better economic and logistical integration with the rest of the country concomitant with these re-engineering efforts. One of the issues that China wants to address is the poverty and under-development in Kashgar. The bulk of the plan aims to expand economic opportunities for the Kashgar Prefecture generally and Xinjiang Production Corps, coupled with the opportunities for profitable engagement in the domestic market. This is the primary market for Pakistan, which is hardly a windfall for Pakistan.

An optimist may look at this and see some measure of opportunities in Pakistan. And indeed, the Pakistani press has not raised many alarm bells about this aspect of CPEC. This is odd because, as Huma Yusuf has lucidly explained, within twenty years, Pakistan will be the most water-strained country in the region. While twenty years may sound a long way away, currently, 30 million Pakistani have no access to potable water.²⁹ Perhaps one of the reasons why few have been concerned about the ongoing exploitation of Pakistani resources to advance the food demands and political interests of Beijing is because Pakistan has not had a serious discussion about its water crises, much less considered appropriate policy measures. At best, water scarcity is seen as a precipitant of conflict with India. The full dimensions of Pakistan's water problems are rarely addressed much less understood.

Yusuf notes that corruption and mismanagement of water is rife yet has not concentrated the attention of Pakistanis. She notes how the cartelization in the sugar industry and Pakistan's obsession with being a sugar exporter exacerbates these water challenges due to the water intensity of the crop. Equally important is the link between malnourishment and water scarcity. Ironically, malnourishment is highest in Pakistan's most irrigated districts because producers prioritize water resources to grow cash crops for export over domestic food security. Nor have Pakistanis fully grasped the fact that water is required for much of Pakistan's export-oriented sectors like textiles because cotton requires a lot of water. When the water is gone, so is any hope of Pakistan becoming an economic powerhouse.³ This exposes the vacuity of claims touting CPEC's benefits for Pakistan.

Once again, the state depends upon its right-hand proxy: the Jamaat-ud-Dawa. Hafiz Saeed has been an outspoken proponent of the China initiative which is an odd position for a purported defender of the global umma to take given China's well-known genocide of the Uyghur Muslims. Indeed, one of the Chinese strategic goals of CPEC is to economically integrate the traditionally Uyghur city of Kashgar with the rest of China and the world at-large to make Kashgar more attractive to far greater settlement by Han Chinese. In addition to being a dogged proponent of CPEC, Hafiz Saeed denounces any criticism of the initiative as injurious not only to Pakistan's Muslims but indeed to the Umma. Addressing a seminar on the 51st Defense Day of Pakistan, he has accused the United States and India of "spreading terrorism and unrest across Pakistan." He continued explaining that "America's issue is China; India's issue is Pakistan. The interest of both has become one, because of CPEC. This is the basis of their new pact. This is the preparation of a terrifying war." He elaborated that "India and America are worried that if the CPEC project succeeded, the entire Muslim world would stand beside Pakistan. And, the (resultant) new defense and economic pacts that will take place will oust America not only from this region and the Middle East, but from all important places and waters of the world. America will have to get out of all these places. That is why today the biggest hurdle before them is Pakistan."

But the most explicit and detailed support for CPEC comes from the manifesto of the Milli Muslim League (MML), which is the political party formed by JuD to contest the 2018 elections. The MML laid out its vision for the country's domestic and foreign policy agendas in the October 2017 issue of Invite, an English magazine published by JuD. The MML's stated positions are in complete alignment with that of the deep state. Notably, the party is committed to CPEC, ³² and says it will work to persuade those Baloch in Balochistan who currently oppose the project to embrace the importance of Chinese projects in the country as critical to securing Pakistan's financial independence.³³

The Baloch See Through It

Because of the organization's overwhelming Punjabi composition³⁴ and its execution of the state's policies at home and abroad, many Baloch see JuD to be simply an extension of the Pakistan army—and for good reasons. Thus, it is curious that Pakistan's deep state

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seems so confident that Jamaat-ud-Dawa will succeed in advancing the state's interests and those of China's in Balochistan.

In fact, public opinion data suggests that the state's various stratagems are failing. In 2013, my colleague Karl Kaltenthaler and I fieldec a survey among a large representative sample of 7,656 Pakistanis to assess their views on a variety of sensitive issues, using an indirect form of questioning. We oversampled in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to ensure our ability to generate valid estimates in these provinces, which have small populations in spatially concentrated ethnic enclaves because of their rugged terrain.³⁵

We generated a measure of support for LeT from a survey item that asked respondents whether they believe that the organization does or does not do a range of activities, including: 1. tries to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule; 2. provides social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools; 3. tries to oust foreigners from Afghanistan; 4. tries to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant; 5. rids Pakistan of apostates and munafiqin (those who spread discord among Muslims); 6. engages in dawa (proselytization) to spread correc understandings and practice of Islam. If a respondent indicated that the group did one of these activities, we coded it as a one otherwise zero. We then added up the total score for each of the six questions. A score of six suggests the highest support for the organization while zero indicates the lowest.

We then executed regression analysis of this variable against several variables that contain pertinent information about the respondent, including: gender, a measure of wealth, educational attainment, age, the district in which they live, the interpretation of Islam they embrace (Barelvi, Shia, Ahle-e-Hadith, Deobandi, Jamaat-e-Islami) as well as their ethnicity (Pashtun, Punjabi, Sindhi, Baloch, Muhajir).

Unsurprisingly, Punjabis were most supportive of the group. This was not surprising given that the organization is a Punjabi organization with strong ties to the Pakistan military, which is also Punjabi dominant. And those who espouse the Ahle-e-Hadith tradition, which JuD propounds, were also most likely to support them. In contrast, those who embrace any other Islamic interpretativ tradition opposed the group.

For purposes of this study, Baloch were the staunchest opponents of the group while those in Sindh came in second in their opposition The reasons for Sindhi opposition are similar to that of the Baloch. Sindhi nationalism is vibrant, they tend to be more liberal than Punjabis, and the province is home to many sectarian and communal minorities who are being targeted by JuD for conversion if non-Muslim or to foreswear their own sectarian beliefs in an embrace of the Islamic ideology propounded by JuD.³⁶ These results are consistent with the Baloch view of the organization as a Punjabi-led and existential threat.

Conclusions and Implications

The Pakistani state has long relied upon LeT/JuD/FIF to prosecute its agenda in Balochistan. Secure in the state's belief that the organization faithfully propagates the ideology of Pakistan and is in complete alignment with the state on domestic security affairs, the state has created the conditions that have enabled the organization to build deep roots in Balochistan. With the increasing salience of CPEC, it has become ever more important that the state placate the restive Baloch to make it safe for Chinese exploitation. However, given the strong Punjabi nature of the organization and its explicit alignment with China and CPEC, throwing Jamaat ud Dawa into Balochistan is like throwing ghee onto a fire. It has had precisely the opposite effect. While a detailed exposition of the role of the organization in Sindh is beyond the purview of this essay, it is likely that very similar issues undergird Sindhi antipathy towards the organization as well.

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