

Terrorism Monitor

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p.1

Briefs

Jacob Zenn

p.3

Can the Egyptian Military and Tribal Militias Curb Islamic State in Sinai Province's Eleven-Year Insurgency?

Jacob Weiss

p.6

Pakistan's Negotiations with Tehrik-e-Taliban: Can the Afghan Taliban Break the Ice?

Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai

p.7

The Majeed Brigade: The Baluch Liberation Army's Suicide Squad

Abdul Basit

Taliban Outreach to India and China Indicates New Diplomatic Phase

Jacob Zenn

In the Taliban's continued quest to gain international legitimacy and abandon its reputation for "terrorism," it has been increasingly establishing and improving diplomatic relations with regional neighbors, China and India. The earthquake that struck Afghanistan's border region with Pakistan in June exemplified the Taliban's deepening ties with China. The Taliban's embassy in Beijing, for example, went so far as to not only announce that China would "stand by" Afghanistan by providing humanitarian aid

to the country through various government agencies, but also specifically that the "provincial government of China's Xinjiang Province is providing one million Chinese yuan in aid for the earthquake recovery" ([Twitter/@beijing_embassy](https://twitter.com/beijing_embassy), June 26).

Considering that the Taliban has formerly hosted anti-Chinese Uighur militants in Afghanistan, it was notable for the Taliban to accept collaboration with Xinjiang Province, which Uighur nationalists and jihadists both call "East Turkistan" (aljazeera.com, April 25, 2016). The Taliban was, in essence, legitimizing the provincial government of Xinjiang, which makes sense in light of its crackdown on sympathizers to "East Turkistan" independence movements.

Chinese state sponsored *Global Times* also highlighted the Chinese government's aid provision to the Taliban by releasing photos of Taliban officials receiving \$7.5 million worth of tents, towels, folding beds, and other supplies "to help Afghans survive the country's deadliest earthquake in two decades ([Twitter/ @globaltimesnews](https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews), June 27)." Besides the earthquake-related support to the Taliban, China is also facilitating new business ties with Afghanistan. The first step in this initiative will be for China to introduce business visas for Afghan citizens, which Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi had requested to the Chinese embassy in Kabul (muslimmirror.com, June 27).

While the Taliban has been building closer relations with China, it has also rapidly been bolstering its relations with India. On June 24, for example, the Taliban welcomed India's provision of 27 tons of aid to earthquake victims, which involved two flights to Kabul from India and a "technical team" that was re-deployed to the Indian embassy in Kabul. This signaled that the Taliban and India could soon formally restore diplomatic relations (hindustantimes.com, June 24). India is further justifying its support to the Taliban as being part of the "historical and civilizational relationship" between the people of India and Afghanistan. And although India has not resolved to restore diplomatic relations with the Taliban anytime soon, the Indian government has pursued a "step by step" process to conducting activities in Afghanistan, which could potentially lead to the restoration of formal diplomatic ties at some point in the future (theprint.in, June 23).

For India, improving relations with the Taliban could irritate Pakistan, which itself

is struggling to have as much influence over the Taliban as many analysts had expected (hindustantimes.com, June 24). The Taliban, for example, is not constraining the activities of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), otherwise known as the Pakistan Taliban, enough that the TTP can no longer attack Pakistan. For China, improving relations with the Taliban will contribute to its broader regional economic initiatives if security in the country can be restored.

Meanwhile, for the Taliban, which is still seeking to receive broad international legitimacy, recognition from rivals like India and China would only further this diplomatic agenda. If ultimately the TTP can reach a peace agreement with Pakistan and the Taliban's own rival, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), can be defeated, then for the first time since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Afghanistan may see relative peace.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Papuan Insurgency Escalates in Indonesia

Jacob Zenn

The insurgency in Indonesia's easternmost province of Papua has continued to escalate in 2022, despite not garnering significant attention outside of Indonesia itself. The turning point this year occurred in March, when the insurgents killed eight cellular phone company employees. The West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), which is the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement (OPM), claimed the attack, which resembled a similar attack in

2018. At that time, TPNPB alleged the cellular phone company employees were, in fact, part of the Indonesian army's engineering squad, which is how they justified their attack (benarnews.org, March 3). The same logic seems to have been at play in the March attack.

Following this attack in March, the insurgents continued with their most common tactic involving hit-and-run ambushes on Indonesian police and the stealing of their weapons. On June 18, for example, a Mobile Brigade (Brimob) officer was killed in Jayawijaya regency and two of his weapons were stolen (antaranews.com, June 18). That attack was not claimed by TPNPB, and Brimob suspected other decentralized Papuan insurgents were behind that operation (tempo.co, June 20). Indonesian security forces have identified two other insurgent groups besides TPNPB operating in Papua, which are called the Paniai Group and the Intan Jaya Group and are references to the regencies in Papua where those two groups operate (tempo.co, June 27). It is, therefore, possible that another "Jayawijaya Group" is emerging to operate in that regency as well.

One of Indonesia's strategies to deal with the growing insurgency is to establish three new provinces out of what is now just Papua province. They would be South Papua Province, Central Papua Province, and Papua Mountains Province (suara.com, June 28). While the Indonesian government views this as necessary to improve the distribution of development services, which in turn would aid in countering the insurgency, Papuan locals tend to fear that the initiative will simply lead to more transmigration into Papua. This, in turn, would displace the local population and cause further grievances

that the insurgents could exploit for recruiting purposes.

In addition, grievances have been caused by perceptions from Papuan locals that Indonesian security forces and intelligence agencies have fired indiscriminately on villages (benarnews.org, June 8). Although Indonesian officials deny these allegations, neither these denials nor the government's developmental initiatives have quelled the resurgence of TPNPB or the other regency-based insurgents. Without international support, TPNPB and the other insurgents are unlikely to see sufficient pressure placed on Indonesia to change its policies dramatically. However, the continued attacks are straining the Indonesian military and, in perhaps a best case scenario for the insurgents, they could force the government to the negotiation table to cede certain insurgent demands for greater autonomy.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Can the Egyptian Military and Tribal Militias Curb Islamic State in Sinai Province's Eleven-Year Insurgency?

Jacob Weiss

On May 7, days after Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi claimed terrorism was on the brink of eradication in Sinai, Islamic State in Sinai Province (ISSP) carried out the largest terrorist attack in Egypt since July 2020 (Masrawy, April 26). ISSP militants killed eleven Egyptian soldiers and wounded at least five others at a military checkpoint near a water pumping facility in Ismaili province (Egyptian Army, May 7). While ISSP capabilities in Sinai have decreased over recent years amid

tribal militia and military operations, the attack highlights the unrealistic nature of al-Sisi's claims.

Throughout 2022, ISSP militant activity in the Sinai Peninsula has been constant. The militants' main theatre of operations around Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and Bir al-Abd have seen regular assaults, sniping, and IED attacks on military and tribal militia positions. [1] Moreover, soldiers and locals suspected of collaborating with the military have been kidnapped or assassinated ([The New Arab](#), April 2). Attacks on energy infrastructure have also been frequent, with two attempted bombings of a natural gas pipeline in Bir al-Abd in April alone ([Arabi21](#), May 1).

Despite al-Sisi's optimism, the authorities do not seem to be preparing for any imminent triumph over ISSP. Toward the end of 2021, Israel even assented to an Egyptian request to increase the number of Egyptian troops deployed to the Sinai ([Al-Monitor](#), November 9, 2021). Furthermore, in April, a Presidential Decree extended the ongoing state of emergency in the Sinai Peninsula for a further six months, when additional security measures were imposed, including curfews, entry bans on certain areas, and a prohibition of the use of motorbikes ([Sharq al-Awsat](#), April 4).

Reduced ISSP Capabilities Post-2018

While al-Sisi's claims are overstated, the scale of the ISSP insurgency has declined significantly since 2018. In the four years following the start of the insurgency in 2014, ISSP had managed to shoot down civilian and military aircraft and launch regular complex attacks on civilian and military positions ([Al-Jazeera](#), July 16 2015). However, the insurgency, while persistent, has since become increasingly small-scale, with the majority of attacks only resulting in single fatalities or casualties. Additionally, since 2020, ISSP has rarely been able to operate outside of the North Sinai Governorate. It is no surprise that the May 7 attack gained substantial international media coverage,

given the unusually high number of fatalities and the attack's location outside of ISSP's usual area of operations.

Egypt's success in degrading ISSP capabilities results from two factors: the 2018 Comprehensive Operation Sinai and the increased participation of tribal militias in counter-ISSP operations. Egypt's initial response to the insurgency could aptly be described as a scorched earth policy. The 2014 creation of a militarized buffer zone along the Israeli border saw the destruction of thousands of homes. Mass evictions, demolitions of farmland and homes, arbitrary arrests and even executions became a common tactic throughout large swathes of the North Sinai Governorate. [2] In total, nearly a quarter of North Sinai's 450,000 residents left the region. The Comprehensive Operation Sinai, in contrast, saw more effective channeling of Egyptian brute force. The operation, which came after the Rawda Mosque attack in late 2017 that killed over 300 civilians, targeted ISSP supply lines with checkpoints established on all major roads linking towns and cities throughout the peninsula. [3] While the operation made civilian life extremely difficult, with supplies of food and essential goods at times limited, ISSP militants were starved into surrendering and the group's capacity to import arms and explosives was significantly reduced ([Jerusalem Post](#), September 25, 2021).

In counter-ISSP operations, the increased participation of tribal militias, such as the Sinai Tribal Union (STU), helped the military benefit from its local geographic knowledge ([al-Monitor](#), January 3). The normalization of Bedouin collaboration with the military also increased effective human intelligence networks. From 2020 onwards, enticed by economic incentives and encouraged by government promises of redeveloping the region after ISSP's defeat, more and more tribe members joined pro-military tribal combat units. Now in 2022, tribal militias have taken a lead role in recapturing territory lost to ISSP. In what the STU calls "cleansing operations," the STU has recaptured

villages, such as Sabat, Mozahlef, Mahdia and Moqatta, that had been controlled by ISSP for years ([Madamasr](#), May 24).

Faced with an increasingly hostile local environment and gradually losing territorial control as a result, ISSP has increased operations aimed at deterring local collaboration with the military and anti-ISSP tribal militias. Kidnappings and assassinations of STU militants and their families have occurred on a near-weekly basis since March ([The New Arab](#), April 2). Meanwhile, ISSP social media campaigns aimed at portraying those collaborating with the military as anti-Islamic have also increased. ISSP, through associated media outlets, has described the STU and other pro-military tribal militias as "Mossad groups," alleging that they collaborate with Israel. ISSP will also likely seek to use the May 7 attack to aid recruitment. The attack's location outside of ISSP's usual operational hub in an area only roughly 30 kilometers east of the Suez Canal highlights the group's relevancy and capabilities despite its current difficulties.

Conclusion

While the Egyptian military's increased reliance on tribal militias to combat ISSP has been largely successful, the Egyptian government will have to redevelop the peninsula's infrastructure and regenerate the local economy if it wants to avoid future instability in North Sinai. The fighting has devastated the local economy, which relied on tourism and farming before the insurgency. With economic opportunities stripped away, many have turned toward to fighting in government-aligned militias as one of the sole economic opportunities available. The slow return of displaced residents and the newly announced state agricultural and residential development plans both highlight the government's intent to support the tribal community ([Madamasr](#), January 20).

However, the extension of curfew measures and increased troop deployments to the peninsula suggest that

normal civilian life is not expected to resume anytime soon. The longer emergency rule in the peninsula continues, the longer tribal communities will be forced to rely on militancy for subsistence, and the harder eventual reintegration into the economy will become. Even if ISSP is eradicated from the peninsula, so long as post-insurgency life does not recover economically, the local population will remain just as marginalized and disaffected as in the pre-insurgency period. This time, the only difference will be that the population will be significantly more armed, militant, traumatized, and hostile to the state. This, in turn, would benefit any potential ISSP revival.

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Notes:

[1] The Egyptian military's tight control of access to North Sinai makes reporting difficult. However, statistics regarding security incidents in North Sinai have been collated from Telegram and social media accounts linked to the Egyptian army, ISSP and the STU and other tribal militias, as well as local media, such as Madamasr, Akhbar Sinaa Al-Aan, Sinaa Mubasher and Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmia, and the author's access to a private database of security incidents in Egypt.

[2] See Human Rights Watch, "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai!" (Human Rights Watch, May 2019).

[3] Ibid.

Pakistan's Negotiations with Tehrik-e-Taliban: Can the Afghan Taliban Break the Ice?

Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai

The Taliban government in Afghanistan is facilitating ongoing negotiations between Pakistan and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the "Pakistani Taliban," to forge a peace deal between the two parties ([Twitter/@Zabehulah_M33](https://twitter.com/Zabehulah_M33), May 18). The Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, made it clear there was significant progress in the negotiation process when the Pakistani delegation was in Kabul in May. He noted that a second delegation had arrived in Kabul to convince both sides to reach an agreement. The TTP extended its ceasefire until further notice as a result, which signaled that the group was near to reaching an agreement (pakobserver.net, June 3). Another sign of positive developments was the fact that the former head of Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the current Corps Commander Peshawar, Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed, were both in Kabul from early May to lead the negotiations with the TTP ([Khaama.com](http://khaama.com), May 17).

Pakistan's Expectations

Since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August last year, TTP attacks on Pakistani security forces have accelerated despite Taliban pledges that Afghan soil will not be used as a base of terrorist operations against any country (a pledge also made in the Doha agreement with the U.S). These repeated pledges led Islamabad to expect that the TTP would not be able to use Afghan soil as a sanctuary for carrying out attacks in Pakistan. [1] Nevertheless, it has become clear that this was a false hope; with every passing day TTP attacks have surged in Pakistan's tribal areas following the Taliban takeover of Kabul (Dawn, January 23). Pakistan has, therefore, constantly requested the Taliban punish the TTP and not allow it to use Afghan soil for attacks against Pakistan. Nevertheless,

there has been a lack of action from the Taliban side (Dawn, January 27).

In late January 2022, Pakistan's National Security Advisor, Moeed Yusuf, visited Afghanistan to meet with Taliban leadership to discuss the TTP issue and demand the TTP be prevented from using the Afghan soil as a base to attack Pakistan's tribal areas. The Taliban, however, has taken a middle path and facilitated talks between the Pakistani government and TTP instead of cracking down on the latter. The Taliban is confronting several challenges in the political, economic, and security realms, including combating Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), which has distracted it from reigning in the TTP (South Asia Journal, September 16, 2021).

Why are TTP Attacks Accelerating?

For several reasons, TTP attacks accelerated in Pakistan following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. First, the Taliban released all jihadist prisoners in jails across Afghanistan immediately following its takeover. Among these prisoners, a handful of former TTP militants were released, including the former deputy head, Molvi Faqir Muhammad, who was in Bagram's prison for eight years (PIPS Quarterly Monitor-1, September 2021). The release of TTP members emboldened the Pakistani Taliban and added to its cadres.

Second, the Taliban victory inspired TTP fighters, giving them hope that they, too, could one day rule over the tribal areas of Pakistan just as the Taliban took control of Afghanistan.

Third, the TTP feared that the Taliban may prevent them from using Afghan soil in the future, even going so far as to limit TTP activities because of the Doha agreement with the U.S. (Doha agreement, February 29, 2020). Therefore, due to Pakistan's and the Taliban's close contact, TTP knew Pakistan would demand the Taliban act against them. To date, though,

the Taliban has not been willing or able to stop the TTP from using Afghan soil for their attacks because the Taliban have good relations with TTP, which is based on a variety of shared networks, personnel, and experiences, including fighting together against U.S. forces in the region ([Twitter/Kabulnewstv](#), June 4). On the other hand, Islamabad has proven unable to exert enough pressure to compel the Taliban to crack down on the TTP.

Fourth, the seriousness of the Pakistani government's desire for negotiations provided leverage to the TTP and enabled it to have a better bargaining position. Pakistan wants to resolve this security issue because it is hurting its economy by delaying the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as well as hurting trade with the Central Asian states. The TTP knew that if Pakistan desperately sought a peace deal, then an accelerated offensive would force Pakistan to be more willing to agree to TTP terms. In September last year, for example, Pakistani President Arif Alvi hinted at conditional amnesty to TTP if the group laid down its arms ([Express Tribune](#), September 11, 2021).

Conclusion

In the past, the Pakistani government has attempted numerous times, such as in the Shakai agreement of 2004, Srarogha agreement of 2005, and Swat agreement of 2008, to make a deal with the TTP to end the insurgency ([The News](#), November 9, 2021). However, none of those agreements yielded the desired results of peace, stability, and the dissolution of the TTP. With the Taliban involved in the process this time, there may be light at the end of the tunnel. If the Taliban is serious about resolving the conflict between the TTP and Pakistani government, it has the ability to place enough pressure on TTP to strike a deal because the TTP leadership is mostly based in Afghanistan. If Pakistan implements a strategy for negotiations by carrying both carrots, such as ensuring further support to the Taliban in the future, and sticks, such as showing signs of a

military operation in tribal areas against TTP, then the chances of a successful settlement may also increase.

Pakistani officials could still risk undermining any peace deal if they do not refrain from statements like that of Rana Sanauallah, in which he said that "negotiation with TTP is heading under the Constitution of Pakistan" ([Dawn](#), June 22). This is because TTP does not recognize the Pakistani constitution. This whole situation led to a strongly worded, negative reaction by the TTP ([Twitter, Abd. Syedd](#), June 24). Moreover, in the TTP-Pakistan talks, the former seems better placed due to its offensive on the one hand and the determination of the Pakistani government to realize positive outcomes of the negotiations on the other. The chance of a positive result in forging a deal is further facilitated by an influential mediator, the Taliban, which has the capacity to be a guarantor of the agreement. Pakistan will need to wisely play its cards and limit the TTP to minimal demands.

*Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai is the author of **The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow** (Routledge, 2021).*

Notes:

[1] Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, *The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow* (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 150.

The Majeed Brigade: The Baluch Liberation Army's Suicide Squad

Abdul Basit

The April 27 female suicide attack by Shari Baloch targeting Karachi University's Confucius Institute underscored a turning point in the operational tactics of the Baluch insurgents from hit-and-run

guerrilla operations to suicide attacks. The suicide attack was preceded by near-simultaneous gun-and-suicide assaults on the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) camps in March in Baluchistan's Noshki and Panjgur districts ([Dawn](#), February 2). The Baluch Liberation Army (BLA)'s suicide squad, the Majeed Brigade, claimed responsibility for these attacks ([BBC Urdu](#), February 5). The Majeed Brigade's newfound embrace of suicide terrorism will lead to more high-profile attacks and likely provoke stronger counter-terrorism reactions from the Pakistani state.

The Majeed Brigade's Background

The Majeed Brigade is named after two brothers, Majeed Langove Senior and Majeed Langove Junior, who carried out suicide attacks in August 1974 and March 2010, respectively. [1] Majeed Senior tried to assassinate then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto when he was on an official visit to Quetta. He wanted to kill him for dismissing the National Awami Party's government in Baluchistan, but Majeed Senior lost his life during the operation ([BBC Urdu](#), February 3). Majeed Junior sacrificed himself to save his associates when Pakistani security forces raided the house where they were staying in Quetta's Wahdat Colony. Majeed Junior held back the raid to give his associates time to escape.

Following Majeed Junior's killing, BLA's now late leader, Aslam Achu, established the insurgent group's suicide squad, and labeled it as the Majeed Brigade. The Brigade carried out its first vehicle-borne suicide attack in December 2011 when Baaz Khan Marri targeted Shafeeq Mengal, the son of former Pakistani federal minister Naseer Mengal, on Quetta's Arbab Road. Shafeeq, who had run a death squad

targeting Baluch insurgents in different parts of the province, escaped unhurt, but 13 other people were killed in the attack ([Express Tribune](#), December 13, 2011).

Subsequently, the Majeed Brigade went into dormancy due to lack of funds and recruits, and it took the group seven years to carry out its second suicide attack when a bus carrying Chinese engineers was targeted in Dalbadin in August 2018 ([Dawn](#), August 12, 2018). Aslam's son, 22-year-old son Rehan Aslam Baloch, perpetrated the attack. Majeed Brigade suicide bombers have also hit the Chinese Consulate in Karachi ([Dawn](#), November 23, 2018); Gwadar's Pearl Continental Hotel ([Express Tribune](#), May 11, 2019); and the Pakistan Stock Exchange ([Dawn](#), June 29, 2020).

Leadership, Recruitment, and Financing

Basher Zeb, a close aide of Aslam Achu and a former Chairman of the Baluch Student Organization-Azad (BSO-Azad) faction, is BLA's overall head, while Hammal Rehan Baloch is the Majeed Brigade's operational chief. Rehan is well-educated and speaks multiple languages, including English, Urdu, Baluchi, and Persian. Gulzar Khan is the logistical head of the Majeed Brigade and Junaid Baloch is its spokesman. The overall strength of BLA is 1,000 to 1,500 fighters, while the Majeed Brigade has 100 to 150 members in its ranks, including women ([Stanford University Database](#), 2019). The Majeed Brigade recruits and trains suicide bombers alongside plotting and executing such attacks ([Express Tribune](#), July 27, 2019).

The Majeed Brigade has three units: logistics, which handles the transportation and deployment of suicide bombers before

any attack, intelligence, which selects targets and conducts reconnaissance, and operations, which recruits and trains suicide bombers ([The Baluchistan Post](#), July 20, 2020). Meanwhile, the Majeed Brigade collects finances from Baluch dissidents and diaspora living in Europe, North America and the Middle East through Hawala (an informal method of transferring money without the movement of cash) and Hundi (an informal written pay order made by a party directing another person to pay a certain amount to a party named in the order) networks. The Pakistani state maintains that BLA gets funding from the Indian intelligence agencies as well ([The Nation](#), May 16; [The News International](#), May 8, 2021).

The Majeed Brigade is well-armed and possesses high-grade weapons, including improvised explosive devices (IED), anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, grenades, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and various automatic weapons like M4 rifles as well as BM-12, 107MM, 109MM type rockets ([Terrorism Monitor](#), January 25, 2019). The Majeed Brigade militants have access to sophisticated explosives like C4 for making suicide vests. Although the Majeed Brigade is fast becoming a more lethal arm of the BLA, being a BLA member is not a prerequisite to join the Majeed Brigade. Insurgents from other Baluch separatist organizations who volunteer for suicide terrorism can join the Majeed Brigade ([The Baluchistan Post](#), July 20, 2020). As per Majeed Brigade recruitment policy, the minimum age of the suicide bomber is 18 years old.

Unlike jihadist organizations, the Majeed Brigade's bombers are not kept in isolation before their attacks. In contrast, they have the freedom to meet their families and friends. Furthermore, the suicide bombers

also take part in the selection of their targets and planning their attacks ([YouTube/The Baluchistan Post](#), May 13). If a would-be-bomber is not satisfied with the political logic of selecting a particular target, he or she has the freedom to choose a different target. Likewise, at any stage, a volunteer has the full freedom to withdraw from the suicide mission.

The Majeed Brigade's targeting strategy revolves around hitting the conventionally superior adversary's interests and installations where orthodox guerrilla tactics are ineffective, such as in the main cities. Targets are selected for their political, military, economic and symbolic significance as well as their ability to generate publicity for the group at the international level. For instance, the FC camps in Noshki and Panjgur districts were chosen for their military significance. This enabled the suicide bombers to carry out gun-and-bomb attacks and storm the FC camp to create a 72-hour standoff, and gain maximum publicity ([Express Tribune](#), February 6). On the other hand, the attacks on the Pakistan Stock Exchange attack in Karachi or at various CPEC projects in Baluchistan were targeted for their economic significance.

For the Majeed Brigade, each suicide attack has three stages and goals. When a suicide bomber blows him or herself up, the political objective is achieved, as it earns publicity for the group by highlighting the Baluch insurgent movement. When the video statement of the suicide bomber is released during the second stage, it attracts interest from potential new suicide bombers. [2] When the bomber detonates, whether the target is hit or not, it is a win-win for the Majeed Brigade because the bomber becomes a martyr figurehead and an icon, such as the Majeed Brothers,

Rehan Aslam Baloch, and the April 27 Karachi female suicide bomber Shari Baloch. The third and final stage revolves around the military goal: if the target is destroyed, the military goals are also achieved ([The Baluchistan Post](#), July 20, 2020). Indeed, all goals were achieved in Shari Baloch's suicide attack where the target was destroyed, maximum media publicity was achieved to attract new recruits, and the political goal of targeting the Confucius Center was highlighted, the latter being a target that Baluch separatists consider a symbol of Chinese state imperialism.

Conclusion

For the Majeed Brigade, the decision to shift from hit-and-run guerrilla tactics to suicide bombing was a difficult strategic choice ([Independent Urdu](#), February 14). The group risked being bracketed alongside the jihadist groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, or "Pakistani Taliban") and the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). BLA also risked losing external donors like India, which supported it for its secular leanings. The switch to more extreme tactics could deprive the Baluch separatists of the support and sympathy it enjoyed within the international community. [3] At the same time, however, embracing suicide terrorism also highlights their devotion to reviving a separate and independent homeland for their people.

The decision to engage in suicide attacks has also generated heated debates within Baluch separatist organizations. Some Baluch separatists believe it will hurt the cause of Baluch nationalism by providing the Pakistani state with the pretext it needs to crack down on them. Concurrently, these dissenters theorize that suicide

attacks may alienate the Baluch masses, who might not take kindly to such extreme tactics. The other school of thought believes that suicide terrorism will earn the Baluch separatists a reputation of being wedded to the cause for a separate homeland and force the Pakistani state to rethink its tactics. Although the Majeed Brigade has grabbed headlines with its audacious suicide attacks, especially Shari Baloch's, only time will tell if suicide terrorism can propel Baluch separatism forward or undermine it.

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Notes

[1] The Majeed brothers' third sibling Ameer Bukhs was also affiliated with BLA and was killed in a security forces' operation in February 2010.

[2] Author's interview with Zia ur Rehman, a Karachi-based Pakistani journalist and researcher, June 6, 2022.

[3] Authors' discussion with Malik Siraj Akbar, a Baluch journalist based in Washington D.C., May 25, 2022.

