



**WEBINAR**

**FROM THE PERIPHERY  
TO THE CENTER: WHAT PEOPLE  
AT OUR MARGINS ENDURE**

 **6PM**  **Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 2025**

**BRIEF REPORT**

# Conceptual Framework

Pakistan's diverse peripheries, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) hold immense social, cultural, and political significance. Yet, these regions continue to face marginalisation through governance gaps, economic disparities, and structural inequalities. Their grievances are too often reframed as security threats and overshadowed by misrepresentation deepening mistrust and widening the gap between the peripheries and the state. In moments of unrest, ethno-nationalist actors frequently exploit these vulnerabilities, distorting authentic community voices to advance divisive agendas. Recent events in Pakistan make this discontent visible: protests in Gilgit-Baltistan over trade halts at the Khunjerab Pass; demonstrations in AJK against heavy taxation; long-ignored development needs in Balochistan; resurgent militancy and political rifts in KPK. These movements largely stem from genuine grievances, yet they often snowball out of proportions that blur the line between legitimate dissent and manipulated unrest, leaving the true voices of these communities silenced. The session underscored how the absence of proper communication between the state and its people has allowed a narrative vacuum to persist, one that manipulative actors readily exploit. By shifting the focus from crisis to context, the webinar reasserted the need to humanise these struggles and foster trust between the centre and its peripheries through justice, inclusion, and sustained dialogue.

# Discussion Points



**Usama Khan**

Director, South Asia Times

- The webinar was hosted and moderated by Usama Khan. He began by noting that while Pakistan's political and security discourse is often dominated by central or urban narratives, voices from the periphery rarely make it to the policy table. This neglect has deepened alienation and fostered distrust between citizens and the state.
- The session was structured around four key regions, KP, Balochistan, AJK, and GB each represented by experts from the respective areas to ensure authenticity of perspective.
- The moderator highlighted that the discussion was not meant to dwell solely on grievances but to explore pathways for mutual understanding, inclusion, and constructive policy reform.
- The moderator also questioned the long-term cost of political ambiguity, especially in light of growing protests all across Pakistan.



## **Tahmeed Jan**

### **Executive Direct IRCRA**

**Representative from Khyber  
Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA**

- The security landscape in KP remains volatile. While areas like Hazara, Peshawar, Charsadda, and Mardan have seen relative stability, recent attacks in areas near Peshawar show that terrorism has again become part of daily life. Southern KP, particularly D.I. Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, North and South Waziristan, and parts of ex-FATA, remain the most disturbed regions, with ongoing militant activity.

#### **Major Reasons Behind Public Dissent:**

- The FATA merger was a major turning point. While youth had high hopes for reform and integration, the process was rushed and poorly implemented, creating frustration among locals and providing space for elite families and anti-state groups to criticize the state.
- The resurgence of TTP has eroded public confidence. A perception has grown that the state's own policies enabled TTP's re-entry into KP, reinforcing distrust toward institutions.
- The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan also impacts local sentiment. Many in ex-FATA view the Taliban's system as "Islamic governance," creating unrealistic expectations and ideological confusion about Pakistan's own political system.
- The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) capitalized on policy failures and amplified anti-state narratives, convincing some that the government funds or facilitates terrorism. Though its influence has declined recently, the mistrust it sowed remains.
- Security check posts remain controversial, seen by locals as both protectors and oppressors. Constant troop rotations disrupt trust-building, while poor coordination allows individuals with questionable backgrounds to mediate between citizens and security forces.
- Military operations generate ambivalence as well. People resent displacement and lack of transparency yet fear the consequences of inaction. Public trust in counterterrorism is low due to poor communication and perceived inefficacy of these operations.
- Locals face impossible moral dilemmas, coerced by militants at night for food and shelter, then labelled collaborators by the state



# **Dr. Dost Muhammad Barrech**

**Associate Lecturer at University of Balochistan**  
**Representative from Balochistan**

- Balochistan is central to Pakistan's geography and identity, "Balochistan is miniPakistan, and Pakistan is mega-Balochistan." It connects South Asia with the IndoPacific, Central Asia, and the Middle East, making it a strategic crossroads of regional connectivity.
- The province holds vast potential: a 750 km coastline, diverse topography, mineral wealth (70% of Pakistan's minerals), extensive uncultivated plains larger than Switzerland, and significant livestock and fruit production. Yet, its population barely 6% of Pakistan's total, remains impoverished and underdeveloped.
- Despite being portrayed as a "game changer," CPEC's benefits have largely bypassed Balochistan. Of the \$28 billion invested under CPEC, only \$860 million (mostly in Gwadar) reached the province.
- Local perception reflects widespread disenchantment: nearly 98% of surveyed Baloch respondents believe CPEC has not improved their lives. Basic infrastructure deficits persist, such as the absence of expressways, high road fatalities, widespread poverty, stunted growth, and minimal female empowerment.
- CPEC has amplified three key grievances:
  1. Visible development elsewhere has deepened feelings of exclusion among Baloch citizens.
  2. An extended insurgency (now two decades long) has led to militarization and restricted civic space.
  3. Governance has become more centralized, top-down since CPEC's inception, reducing provincial agency that once existed under earlier democratic setups.
- Despite these challenges, Balochistan holds untapped potential under CPEC Phase II, particularly in agriculture, mining, and IT sectors.
- Blue economy opportunities remain largely unexplored: the fisheries sector currently generates around \$10 million annually but could reach billions if developed like the Maldives model, where the blue economy contributes 36% to GDP.
- Balochistan's rare earth reserves can become pivotal amid global US-China competition, as 92% of rare earth processing currently rests with China. American and other international interest in diversification offers opportunities for Balochistan's mining sector.
- Special Economic Zones (SEZs) could be transformative. Citing Deng Xiaoping's Shenzhen model, Dr. Barrech suggested that localized SEZs could significantly boost GDP and employment. A strategic shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics is essential for Pakistan's future. If approached inclusively, Balochistan can emerge as the cornerstone of Pakistan's economic strength rather than a symbol of deprivation.



# Farzana Yaqoob

**Former MLA**

**Representing Azad Jammu  
& Kashmir (AJK)**

- AJK recently witnessed large-scale and violent protests led by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a movement that has been active for years advocating for people's rights. The protests stemmed from genuine public grievances over inflation, governance, and political instability.
- A new structure of youth mobilisation has emerged, influenced by social media and reminiscent of movements like the Arab Spring. However, just as in the Arab Spring, rapid mobilisation without sustainable reform risks disillusionment. In Pakistan, the 2018 elections similarly saw youth-led political energy channeled through online spaces.
- Since 2014, social media has been weaponised, shaping Pakistan's political discourse and amplifying polarisation. This trend is also visible in AJK's politics, where youth are increasingly politically aware and vocal.
- Historically, the ruling party in Pakistan also governs AJK. After the 2021 elections, political instability deepened when AJK saw three Prime Ministers within one term. This disrupted constitutional order and eroded public trust, especially among the politically aware youth.
- India's constitutional change (revocation of Article 370) in 2019 directly attacked the Kashmiri identity. The muted response from Pakistan's government at the time deeply disappointed people in AJK, fueling frustration that had long been contained.
- Inflation, especially rising prices of flour and electricity, became the tipping point. Traders, being the most affected by economic instability, emerged as the face of the movement and gained public support, especially from the youth.
- The AJK government, under the current PM, mishandled the crisis through micromanagement and lack of timely communication. Instead of providing a formal, written response to the JAAC's 38-point charter, authorities relied on verbal promises, resulting in mistrust and eventual violence. It is to be noted that, the 36 of the 38 demands were later accepted, many of which had already been budgeted but not publicly communicated. This lack of communication cost people their lives.
- The tragedy could have been prevented had the government issued a white paper clarifying which demands were already being addressed. The lack of transparency led to unnecessary bloodshed.
- It is imperative we understand that the people who protest are our own people seeking accountability, representation, and recognition of their legitimate rights.



## **Deedar Karim**

**PHD Scholar at Fudan University  
Shanghai, China**

**Representing Gilgit-Baltistan (GB)**

- GB has witnessed frequent and prolonged protest movements in recent months. The Sust Dry Port protest alone continued for 68 days, reflecting growing frustration among the people. Protest culture has become normalized as residents increasingly view it as the only way to attract government attention.
- People across GB, regardless of background, are united in demanding full constitutional representation similar to Pakistan's provinces. The absence of this status keeps GB in a "grey zone," leaving its citizens without voice or clarity in governance. While many citizens understand the government's constraints, especially regarding Pakistan's stance on Kashmir, but the majority of people view equal constitutional rights as overdue and essential.
- The persistent unrest stems from a lack of effective intermediaries between the people and the state. Existing administrative channels are weak and unresponsive, leaving citizens dependent on protests as their only means of communication.
- Pakistan's bureaucratic structure is thick and rotational, meaning officials serve in GB temporarily without understanding its ground realities. This limited engagement deepens the disconnect and prevents sustainable policy implementation.
- The lack of a proper provincial assembly or empowered MPAs exacerbates grievances. Without representation in the National Assembly and Senate, the people feel politically voiceless and unable to advocate for their needs.
- Although GB does not fall under the regular federal tax system, the revenue generated particularly from tourism, is not reinvested locally. Full constitutional status would allow the region to claim its rightful economic and developmental share through constitutional mechanisms.
- It is important we maintain solidarity with the state while strengthening institutional bridges and intermediaries. Protest should not be the default mode of expression; effective communication channels and genuine representation must be built to ensure long-term stability.

# Webinar Highlights



# Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen provincial and local governance structures to bridge the gap between citizens and the state.
- Allocate a fair share of revenues from tourism, trade, and natural resources to local communities through transparent fiscal frameworks.
- Prioritise development and infrastructure in border and peripheral regions to foster economic integration and stability.
- Replace militarised responses with community-based security approaches that engage local stakeholders.
- Differentiate genuine local grievances from militant or external manipulation through dialogue and informed policy.
- Establish consistent communication channels between the government and local populations to prevent protest escalation.
- Empower civil society, educators, and journalists as intermediaries to rebuild trust and ensure two-way engagement.
- Promote responsible media coverage to counter distortions and highlight authentic regional voices.
- Expand education, health, and skill development initiatives to strengthen human capital in marginalised areas.
- Encourage youth participation in civic and peacebuilding processes to sustain long-term stability and inclusion.



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