



Iran, Pakistan, and the Baloch Militancy

For Prelims: [NATO \(North Atlantic Treaty Organization\)](#), [Liberation of Bangladesh](#), [Taliban](#), Iran, Pakistan, and the Baloch Militancy, Sunni Militant group, Jaish al-Adl, [Terrorism](#).

For Mains: Iran, Pakistan, and the Baloch Militancy, Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the relationship between **Iran and Pakistan has taken serious hits** over Iranian missiles and drones that struck two alleged bases of the **Jaish al-Adl (JAA), an anti-Iran Baloch militant group**, in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

- Pakistan reacted strongly to the “blatant breach” of its sovereignty and carried out its own cross-border missile strikes on **alleged terrorist sanctuaries in Iran**.
- **The JAA came under the scanner of Indian security agencies** following the abduction of an Indian, [Kulbhushan Jadhav](#). The group allegedly traded Jadhav to Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).



Who is Jaish al-Adl?

- Jaish al-Adl, or the Army of Justice, is a **Sunni Militant group that emerged in 2012**. It is primarily composed of **members from the ethnic Baluch community**, residing on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border.
- The group is considered an **offshoot of the Jundullah organisation**, which saw its strength diminish after Iran arrested many of its members.
- Jaish al-Adl's main objectives include **seeking independence for Iran's eastern Sistan province and Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province**. These goals, advocating for the **rights of the Baluch people**, make the group a **common target for both the Iranian and Pakistani governments**.
- The ethnic Baluch community faces discrimination in both Iran and Pakistan, with concerns about a lack of fair distribution of resources and wealth in their respective provinces. Baluch separatists and nationalists demand a more equitable share and often resort to insurgency as a means of expressing their grievances.
- The group's presence in Balochistan, particularly in the border regions, has been a source of tension between Iran and Pakistan.
 - Both countries have a history of suspicion and accusations regarding each other's involvement in supporting militant activities.

How has been the Relationship Between Pakistan and Iran?

- **Pre-1979 Alliance:**
 - Before the **1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran**, both countries were firmly allied to the **United States** and had, in 1955, joined the **Baghdad Pact**, later known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), a military alliance modeled on **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)**.
 - Iran provided material and weapons support to **Pakistan during its wars against India in 1965 and 1971**.
 - The Shah of Iran expressed concern about the **"disintegration" of Pakistan after the Liberation of Bangladesh**.
- **Post-1979 Shift:**
 - The Islamic Revolution in Iran led to the **rise of an ultra-conservative Shiite** regime under **Ayatollah Khomeini**. This was concurrent with Pakistan's own Islamization under military dictator **General Zia-ul-Haq**.
 - The two countries found themselves on opposite ends of the sectarian divide.
- **Geopolitical Differences:**
 - Iran went **from being an ally to a sworn enemy** of the United States almost overnight, the Americans embraced Pakistan closer.
 - Since 1979, has been a major reason for the Iranian distrust of Pakistan, which increased after **09/11 as Islamabad extended unqualified support to the US "War on Terror"**.
 - Iran's post-1979 foreign policy, which focused on exporting the revolution, made its Arab neighbours nervous.
 - Each of these oil-rich kingdoms was **effectively controlled by a small group of families**, not unlike the Shah's regime in pre-revolution Iran. Pakistan's continued strategic ties with these Arab kingdoms **added rough edges to its relationship with Iran**.
- **Afghanistan Conflict:**
 - Iran and Pakistan found themselves on **opposite sides in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal**.
 - Iran backed the **Northern Alliance against the Taliban**, a group initially supported by Pakistan.
 - Tensions escalated after the Taliban **massacred Persian-speaking Shia Hazaras** and Iranian diplomats in **Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998**.
- **Attempts at Reconciliation:**
 - Despite historical tensions, both countries **made attempts to improve ties**. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto expressed regret over tightening U.S. sanctions against Iran in 1995, and Pakistan **imported gas from Iran during her government**.
 - However, relations soured after General Pervez Musharraf took power in 1999.

What is the Balochistan Dynamics between Iran and Pakistan?

- **Geographical and Demographic Context:**
 - The Iran-Pakistan border, known as the **Goldsmith Line**, spans approximately 909 kilometres from a tripoint with Afghanistan to the northern [Arabian Sea](#).
 - Roughly 9 million ethnic **Baloch people inhabit both sides of the border, residing in the Pakistani province of Balochistan, the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan**, and neighbouring areas of Afghanistan.
- **Shared Baloch Identity:**
 - Baloch people share a **common cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity** that transcends the modern borders imposed on the region.
 - Despite living in different countries, the **Balochs maintain strong ties based on historical and cultural connections**.
- **Marginalisation and Grievances:**
 - The Baloch in both **Iran and Pakistan have experienced marginalization**, feeling politically and economically distant from the dominant regimes in each country.
 - **In Pakistan**, the Baloch face **challenges as an ethnic minority** within a Punjabi-dominated political structure.
 - **In Iran**, they are not only an **ethnic minority but also a religious minority**, with the majority being Sunni in a predominantly Shia country.
- **Economic Disparities:**
 - The Baloch homeland is **rich in natural resources**, but economic disparities persist. In Iran, a significant portion of the **Baloch population lives under the poverty line**.
 - In Pakistan, despite massive investments in projects like [China's Belt and Road Initiative](#), **improvements in their lives have been limited**.
- **Nationalist Movements:**
 - Baloch nationalism has **historical roots dating back to the early 20th century** when new international borders were drawn in the region.
 - The marginalisation of the Baloch people in both Iran and Pakistan has fueled separatist **movements seeking a "Greater Balochistan" nation-state**.
- **Insurgency and Cross-Border Movements:**
 - Baloch insurgents operate on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border, attacking military and occasionally civilian targets.
 - Insurgents, affiliated with groups like the **Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)** and the **Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)**, have been involved in armed struggles against the respective states.

What are the Implications of Escalating Tensions Between Pakistan and Iran?

- **Regional Stability:**
 - Escalating tensions between Pakistan and Iran **could contribute to regional instability**, especially given the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and South Asia.
 - The relationship between Pakistan and Iran **may further strain, impacting diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties**.
- **Proxy Dynamics:**
 - Both Pakistan and Iran have been accused of **supporting proxies in regional conflicts**. Escalations may heighten proxy dynamics, with each country trying to exert influence in the other's internal affairs or supporting certain factions in ongoing regional conflicts.
- **Impact on Balochistan:**
 - Balochistan could witness increased unrest. **The Baloch nationalist movements might gain momentum**, and there could be repercussions for the local populations.
 - The situation might draw in **other regional actors, such as India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, or Israel**, further complicating the geopolitical landscape and potentially leading to a broader regional conflict.
- **Security Concerns:**
 - Escalating tensions may raise security concerns for neighbouring countries, particularly Afghanistan. The region is already grappling with **security challenges, and heightened tensions could exacerbate the situation**.
- **Implications for India:**

- The tensions **may impact India's relations with Iran**, especially considering India's involvement in projects like the Chabahar port. India may find itself in a delicate diplomatic position, balancing its ties with both Iran and the United States.

What is India's Stance over the Faceoff Between Pakistan and Iran?

▪ Zero Tolerance Towards Terrorism:

- India emphasised its "**uncompromising position of zero tolerance towards [Terrorism](#)** ." This statement underscores India's consistent stance against terrorism, aligning with its long-standing concerns regarding cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

▪ Understanding Actions in Self-Defense:

- India acknowledged and **expressed an understanding of "actions that countries take in their self-defence."** It suggests a recognition of the complex security dynamics in the region and a cautious approach to the actions taken by countries to address their security concerns.

Conclusion

- The implications of escalating tensions between Pakistan and Iran are multifaceted and extend beyond bilateral relations.
- The situation has the potential to impact regional stability, security dynamics, and the broader geopolitical landscape in the Middle East and South Asia.
- Diplomatic efforts and de-escalation measures will be crucial to mitigate the risks and prevent further deterioration of the situation.
- Indians should raise the issue of Terrorism at international forums such as the United Nations (UN) and present evidence of **Pakistan's involvement in supporting or trading with militant groups like JAA, which abducted Kulsbhushan Jadhav** and traded with the Pakistan Government.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. What is the importance of developing Chabahar Port by India? (2017)

- (a) India's trade with African countries will enormously increase.
- (b) India's relations with oil-producing Arab countries will be strengthened.
- (c) India will not depend on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- (d) Pakistan will facilitate and protect the installation of a gas pipeline between Iraq and India.

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. In what ways would the ongoing U.S-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to this situation? (2018)

Q. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries. (2017)

