ISSLP

Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics

Effective Strategies for Preventing and Controlling Security Incidents and Crises in Sistan and Baluchestan Province

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The geographical location of Iran in the Middle East has exposed the Islamic Republic of Iran to numerous environmental security threats and challenges. Issues such as illegal immigration, drug and illicit arms trafficking, organized crime, the entry of smuggled and unauthorized goods, border insecurity, and attacks on border outposts, along with ethnic and religious movements, constitute key threats and challenges to Iran's national security. These challenges are exacerbated by neighboring powers and foreign actors involved in the affairs of Iran's bordering countries. In response to these challenges, various individuals—including politicians, security forces, social actors, and high-ranking officials—have attempted to devise effective solutions. However, none has been able to offer a reliable and sustainable plan. The present study, conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, combines library resources with field research in different regions of Sistan and Baluchestan Province to identify the multiple dimensions of the problems faced. This article aims to explore the multifaceted causes of crises and security-related crimes in the province through a comprehensive and precise lens, drawing on systemic and holistic perspectives within the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. Ultimately, the study presents practical and experience-based strategies to address and resolve these issues.

Keywords: security, security crises, terrorism, organized crime.

1. Introduction

Security studies, as a sub-discipline within political science and international relations, has for over half a century sought to answer fundamental questions such as: How is security created and developed? Is the realization of security possible? What factors contribute to the instability of security both domestically and across borders? What constitutes security threats and challenges? How can security crises be managed and controlled, and how can their recurrence be prevented? These are among the critical inquiries addressed by this field.

Environmental changes, natural disasters, contagious diseases, terrorism, military conflicts, and the growing variety of crimes and other man-made factors all contribute to environmental insecurity, exposing humanity to existential risks and halting societal progress. Furthermore, the existence of controlled borders and tension-free frontier regions plays a pivotal and directive role in establishing security and state

sovereignty in any country. Such conditions reduce opportunities for internal and external adversaries to interfere. Consequently, both field investigations and theoretical studies concerning security hold significant importance.

Iran faces numerous difficulties in managing its borders due to a range of factors, including the extensive length of its borders, numerous neighboring states, political, economic, and security instability in adjacent countries, the arbitrary nature of many border demarcations, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, and regional imbalances. Given the accumulated evidence and incidents in recent years, certain borders of the country can indeed be described as crisis-prone. Among these, the management of the eastern border regions has proven to be significantly more challenging, costly, and ineffective compared to others. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following key question: What factors have contributed to the occurrence of security incidents and crises in Sistan and Baluchestan Province?

It appears that both of these questions may be answered by applying the core tenets of the Copenhagen School's security theory. According to this framework, the following ten factors can be hypothesized as contributors to the problem: (1) drug trafficking, (2) the presence of numerous scattered villages near the border, (3) the presence of extra-regional forces in neighboring eastern countries, (4) uneven economic development in border areas, (5) instability in eastern neighbors, (6) illegal entry of foreign nationals, (7) geographic isolation and distance from central governance, (8) ethnic-religious tensions, (9) underdevelopment, and (10) terrorist activities and the presence of terrorist groups, along with the issues of trafficking (of goods, fuel, and humans).

Prior to the present study, several related works have been conducted that attempted to address these challenges. However, the outcomes have generally been unsatisfactory, with many problems remaining unresolved. Koulayi, in his 2007 article "Factors and Motivations Behind Human Trafficking (with Emphasis on Central Asia)," discussed the underlying factors of human trafficking and its expansion. He also referenced the situation in Sistan and Baluchestan Province and the role of border-related issues in the spread of trafficking (Koulayi, 2007). Rezaee and colleagues, in their 2012 article "Discourse Analysis of Communication Processes and Propaganda Statements in the Sistan and Baluchestan Bombings," aimed to present a communication-cognitive model of bombings as media events. They partially addressed the activities of terrorist groups in the region, attributing these to factors that attract individuals toward collective violent political actions (Rezaee et al., 2012).

In 2014, Pishgahi Fard and Mirzadeh Kouhshahi, in their article "Explaining the Factors Influencing Border Management Crises between Iran and Pakistan," argued that characteristics such as the historical background and formation of the border, the country's capacity for security and policing, as well as the cultural and economic features of border areas and the neighboring country's cooperation, all play crucial roles in the emergence and management of border crises. They identified the weak local economy, cultural deficiencies in border areas, cultural incompatibility with the national mainstream, fundamentalism and terrorism, and the political and economic instability of neighboring countries as major challenges Iran faces in effectively managing its border with Pakistan (Pishgahi Fard & Mirzadeh Kouhshahi, 2014).

Given the existing literature and studies on the security concerns in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, a noticeable gap remains for a structured, comprehensive, and theoretically grounded investigation in this field. Addressing regional security crises with a methodical and systematic approach is clearly both necessary and urgent in the current context.

2. Materials and Methods

This article has been written using a descriptive-analytical method, drawing upon library resources including books and scholarly articles.

3. Theoretical Concepts

To engage with the subject matter, it is essential to first clarify the key concepts of security, security crises, and terrorism. Therefore, this section begins by explaining these foundational concepts.

3.1. Security

Security, alongside basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, has always been one of the fundamental pillars of human life. It underlies the provision of other

necessities. Without security, society is vulnerable to psychological turmoil, and it becomes impossible to ensure the fulfillment of other essential needs. For this reason, ensuring security is a central concern of any government. When a government succeeds in this task, it demonstrates its competence to society and gains broader public cooperation for future planning.

Objectively, security is defined as the absence of threats to acquired values; subjectively, it refers to the absence of fear that such values will be attacked (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The presence of security is as vital as the perception of being secure and is a basic human need (Boldrin et al., 2015). The concept of security is also considered one of the key indicators of quality of life, while social harms such as poverty, unemployment, trafficking, migration, and terrorist-like violence are among the most significant consequences of insecurity (McKinlay, 2001). Scholars have historically viewed security as one of humanity's essential needs. While it was once narrowly defined as the absence of military threats, in today's context, security encompasses political, cultural, social, economic, and even ethnic dimensions.

3.2. Security Crises

In Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, security holds a prominent position. The concept of security is inherently normative and can be interpreted in various ways depending on different perspectives. Therefore, when individuals experience a sense of insecurity, that feeling can quickly spread among the broader population—including individuals, legal entities, and organizations. However, the critical question remains: does any condition that induces a sense of insecurity constitute a security crisis (Shahmoradi et al., 2020)? To address this question, we must analyze the concept of security using the ontological frameworks of the Copenhagen School.

Moreover, there is no consensus on a unified definition of the concept of crisis, and scholars hold differing opinions. Still, one common characteristic of a crisis is that it is inherently destabilizing and threatening (Tajik, 2010).

While it may not be possible to offer a universally agreed-upon definition of "security crisis" in political and social sciences, one relatively comprehensive definition has been proposed by a researcher: "A security crisis centers on concerns about national security and is typically capable of threatening the entire political system. It may disrupt or dismantle institutions and suppress, destroy, or eliminate the ideology of the state. A security crisis is immediate and direct. The threat it poses is perceived as very real and tangible, endangering survival itself, and is often accompanied by rebellion, separatist actions, coups, various levels of armed conflict, military intervention, occupation, and similar events" (Zangeneh Moghaddam et al., 2023).

3.3. Terrorism

The terms "terror" and "terrorism" are used similarly and with the same meaning in most languages worldwide. In political discourse, "terror" refers to acts of violence committed to achieve political objectives, particularly aimed at eliminating rivals. Although terrorism has deep historical roots, it became a persistent preoccupation in the second half of the 20th century, when certain ideologies began to justify violence and coercion as tools for advancing political agendas.

The word "terror" originates from the Latin term *terror*, meaning intense fear or dread (Alizadeh, 1998). Lexically, it is synonymous with spreading fear, sudden killing, and stealthy assassination (Simbar, 2005).

Various sources in political science literature have attempted to define the concept of terrorism. Among them are the U.S. Department of Defense and the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The U.S. Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of—or threat to use—force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives." The *Encyclopædia Britannica* describes it as "the systematic use of terror or unpredictable violence against governments, populations, or individuals to attain a political objective" (Fahiri & Zohayri, 2008). Therefore, any act or threat intended to intimidate or harm citizens, governments, or political figures should be considered terrorism in its technical sense.

Undoubtedly, terrorist acts are characterized by extreme violence, the spread of fear, harm to civilians and the central government, and political objectives. According to one scholar, terrorist acts share the following structural features: first, domestic laws criminalize such acts; second, the impact of these acts is not limited to the borders of the state in which they occur; and third, the

purpose of such criminal behavior is to coerce governments or influence international politics. Additionally, terrorist acts target civilians and key public or private institutions or their representatives to promote widespread violence (Cassese, 2006).

The international system was profoundly affected by the September 11, 2001 attacks, with some referring to that event as a turning point (Simbar, 2005). To such an extent that, in the view of certain societal groups, terrorism has come to be erroneously equated with Muslims (Hatami, 2011).

4. History of Insecurity and Security Crises in Sistan and Baluchestan

Given the need to accurately document the events and crises that have occurred over the past two decades in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, this section presents a brief overview of the active terrorist groups in the region and enumerates specific terrorist activities carried out by these groups from 1996 to 2016.

4.1. Key Terrorist Activities of Jundallah

Jundallah, a group influenced by the teachings of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, began its operations in Sistan and Baluchestan Province in 2004. Although the group employed armed and violent tactics to pursue its goals, its emergence was largely rooted in perceived social injustices and inequalities, which contributed to the development of significant social rifts. As these rifts deepened, they led to the formation of social and even political factions, creating an invisible network of relationships among members and resulting in concentrated social cohesion. This social concentration, in turn, became the principal condition for the emergence of violent social movements and armed conflict that posed serious threats to the political system. Jundallah exploited the local conditions by aligning with several regional bandits (such as the Organization of Baluchistan Fighters), recruiting young Sunni religious students, and organizing them through training programs often supported by the U.S. CIA and Pakistan's ISI. The group launched a series of terrorist attacks across the province, particularly targeting Shia populations. The main actions of this group and its affiliate, the Organization of Baluchistan Fighters, included:

1. Kidnapping two Indian nationals residing in Zahedan, cutting off their ears, and demanding a ransom of 250 million IRR (August 2003).
2. Kidnapping three German and Irish tourists on the Nosratabad road and transferring them to Pakistan (September 2003).
3. Bombing at Azadi Square in Zahedan, in front of the governor's office (April 2004).
4. Killing the bodyguard of the president during his first visit to Sistan and Baluchestan Province (December 14, 2005).
5. Attacking and disarming the Nahouk police outpost in Saravan, taking eight border guards hostage and seizing equipment (January 2, 2006).
6. Setting up a roadblock in Tasouki (Zahedan-Zabol highway), killing 22 individuals, and kidnapping six Shia civilians (March 16, 2006).
7. Kidnapping and abducting Zaahed Sheikhi (a judicial officer), Colonel Hamid Kaveh, and martyrs Mojtaba Zarei, Falahati, and Thani Heydari, stealing their car, and using it in a suicide attack on a Revolutionary Guards' bus (April 3, 2006).
8. Setting up a roadblock in Darzin near Bam, Kerman Province, selecting 12 Shia passengers and executing them (May 13, 2006).
9. Attacking law enforcement officers in Bozorgmehr Boulevard in Zahedan, killing Colonel Shibak and three others, and burning five police vehicles (February 1, 2007).
10. Bombing a bus carrying IRGC members in Sardar Boulevard, Zahedan, killing 13 and injuring 21 (February 14, 2007).
11. Attacking the Negour border outpost, killing two border guards, and abducting seven others who were transferred to Pakistan (February 27, 2007).
12. Ambushing an IRGC convoy in Kourin, Zahedan, killing 11 and injuring nine (July 19, 2007).
13. Blocking the road in Chabahar and kidnapping 21 civilian passengers (August 19, 2007).
14. Assassinating a Shia cleric, Mehdi Tavakoli, in the village of Eftekhariabad, Khash, on the night of Qadr (October 2, 2007), carried out by members of the Organization of Baluchistan Fighters.

15. Kidnapping a 23-year-old Japanese student in Sistan and Baluchestan (Organization of Baluchistan Fighters).
16. Kidnapping three Turkish tourists near Mirjaveh, transferring them to Pakistan, and demanding ransom.
17. Kidnapping the Friday Prayer Imam of Fahraj, Kerman (Hojjat al-Islam Taheri), on March 25, 2008, in retaliation for the execution of two Jundallah members: Abdolghodos Mollazehi and Mowlavi Mohammad Yusef Sohrabi.
18. Disarming the Chamser police outpost in Saravan and taking 16 border guards hostage (June 13, 2008).
19. Attempted assassination of the Imam of the 14 Masumeen Mosque in Zahedan (Hossein Bijari).
20. Assassination of the Deputy Head of the Judiciary in Saravan (Ebrahim Karimi) (June 26, 2008).
21. Suicide bombing at a joint police morning assembly in Saravan, carried out by Abdolghafour Rigi (Abdolmalek Rigi's brother) (December 29, 2008).
22. Detonation of a roadside bomb targeting law enforcement forces in Keshtkan, killing four (March 14, 2009).
23. Suicide bombing at Imam Ali Mosque in Zahedan, killing 25 and injuring 145 (May 28, 2009).
24. Suicide attack at a joint tribal and IRGC commanders' meeting in Pishin, a border area, killing senior IRGC officers and 41 members of local Baloch tribes (October 18, 2009).
25. Suicide bombing in Chabahar on the day of Tasua (December 15, 2010), killing and injuring more than 77 people.
26. Suicide bombing outside Zahedan's Grand Mosque on July 15, 2010 (a month after Rigi's execution), during the celebration of Imam Hussein's birth, killing and injuring 197 civilians and members of the Basij and IRGC (Eftekhari et al., 2010).

4.2. Key Terrorist Activities of Jaish al-Adl

After the dissolution of the terrorist group Jundallah, several of its remaining members formed a new, more organized terrorist group. Salahuddin Farooqi emerged as the leader of this group, known as *Jaish al-Adl*. The group declares its aim in its propaganda and media campaigns as defending the rights of Iran's Sunni minority in Balochistan and supporting Syrian opposition forces in response to what it describes as the Islamic Republic's "intervention" in support of the former Syrian government. The group's three known military branches include the "Abdulmalek Mollazadeh Military Unit," the "Sheikh Ziaei Military Unit," and the "Mowlavi Nematollah Towhidi Military Unit," operating alongside an intelligence branch known as "Zubair Esmaeel Zehi."

1. Killing 14 Iranian border guards, including 12 conscripts and 2 law enforcement personnel, in an attack on the Saravan border post (October 25, 2013).
2. Kidnapping Iranian border guards in Jakigour in February 2014.
3. Executing one of the kidnapped border guards in Jakigour on March 24, 2014, in retaliation for the execution of one of the group's members; this act was condemned by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.
4. Suicide bombing attack on an IRGC staff bus: On February 13, 2019, Jaish al-Adl carried out a suicide attack using a vehicle loaded with explosives against a bus transporting members of the Quds Base of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the Khash-Zahedan road. According to IRGC statistics, 27 were killed and 13 injured.

Notably, over the course of their operations, these two groups instilled fear and conducted hostage-taking operations targeting 21 individuals, extorting an estimated 3 billion IRR. This phenomenon, with deep historical roots and conducive conditions for the spread of insurgency, particularly in eastern Iran and Sistan and Baluchestan Province, remains a significant national security concern (Eftekhari et al., 2010).

4.3. Key Terrorist Activities of Jaish al-Zulm, Ansar al-Furqan, and Sepah-e Sahaba

Jaish al-Zulm is a splinter faction of Jaish al-Adl. The group's formation traces back to the Jakigour border guard hostage crisis. At that time, a serious division emerged among Jaish al-Adl's leadership—while Abdulraouf Rigi was negotiating with local Sunni clerics

and community leaders for the hostages' release, another faction of the group executed Sergeant Jamshid Danaeifar. Abdulraouf, the brother of the executed Jundallah leader Abdolmalek Rigi, was later assassinated in Pakistan on August 28, 2014. His brother, Abdolsattar Rigi, subsequently led Jaish al-Zulm but was arrested by Pakistani intelligence agents. Currently, another Rigi family member, Abdolghani, is believed to head the group. According to its founding statement, Jaish al-Zulm engages in military, political, and cultural activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran (Eftekhari et al., 2010).

Ansar al-Furqan is another terrorist group engaged in anti-Shia propaganda, the promotion of Wahhabism, the formation of proselytization units, and extensive networking among Sunni communities in opposition to the Islamic Republic. The group has a military wing led by Mowlavi Jalil Qanbarzehi, also known as Salahuddin, from Shandak village in the Korin district of Zahedan.

Another active terrorist group announced its existence in 2011, led by Dadsheh Shahbakhsh, son of Darkhan, known as Majidok. This group is responsible for the kidnapping and murder of two intelligence officers. Shahbakhsh, in collaboration with remnants of Jundallah, continues to threaten military and law enforcement personnel as well as pro-government civilians in the region.

5.   Theoretical Foundations of Security Schools

Western thought has produced various intellectual traditions, each offering distinct interpretations of the concept of security. These schools of thought have varying strengths and limitations, making it difficult to determine which one provides the most comprehensive definition. A crucial point is that their development is rooted in Western identity and, more specifically, in a materialist worldview (Khalili, 2009).

Security theories can be categorized according to different criteria: geographical origin, epistemological and ontological dimensions, and the influence of these origins on knowledge frameworks. American security schools stand in contrast to their European counterparts in terms of intellectual genesis. European schools emerged largely as critiques of American theories. Constructivism and world order theory are among the American theoretical developments grounded in liberal, neoliberal, and conservative ideologies. Post-classical

realism was marginalized compared to offensive and defensive realism, which lie at the core of American realist traditions. Constructivism and world order theory occupy a middle ground and share affinities with neoconservatism and classical liberalism. The Copenhagen School, which forms the theoretical basis of this article, belongs to the European tradition alongside classical realism, critical theory, the Paris School, postmodernism, and feminism. European schools have been shaped by British conservatives, French postmodernists, and Marxist theorists, all operating within a modern framework that diverges from classical realist understandings of humanity and ontology.

Ontologically and epistemologically, security schools are influenced by philosophical traditions and have introduced new ideas about the concept of security. Idealist-subjectivist and materialist-rationalist positions are key ontological foundations, while reflective and positivist epistemologies inform these theories. Traditional and world order schools tend to be materialist-rationalist in ontology and positivist in epistemology. Others, such as the Copenhagen and Paris Schools and constructivism, draw from both camps. Importantly, philosophical foundations differentiate American and European schools due to their distinct epistemological approaches to security.

Hegelian and Marxist epistemologies marked turning points in the evolution of security studies. Hegel's relativism, influenced by Kant's critiques of truth and knowledge, led him and his followers to argue that everything must be understood in its historical and temporal context. Moreover, the belief that no phenomenon or idea can be fully grasped in isolation had a lasting impact in Germany and France (Alcoff et al., 2010).

Marxist theory, which holds that the "spirit of the age" emerges from economic structures, offered insights into how power relations shape ideas, identities, and subjective experiences. This perspective also influenced the Frankfurt School. Nietzsche, drawing from similar premises, held that human actions are determined more by life's contingencies than by necessity. He believed that the meaning of "truth" could be disconnected from its original referent, rendering it potentially invalid in the present (Alcoff et al., 2010).

These critiques of Kantian philosophy by Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche led to diverse epistemological approaches

that profoundly influenced practical strategies in politics and society—especially in security studies.

Another key question is whether security should be analyzed nationally or globally. This distinction has generated different research approaches. National versus global security analysis hinges on whether primacy is given to the state or to a unified global system. Realist theories, shaped by Cold War-era bipolarity, emphasize state-centric analysis, while globalist approaches favor transnational frameworks. However, critics argue that neither is adequate, and regional analyses offer a more accurate understanding of security. The Copenhagen School pioneered and developed the regional approach.

"A region refers to a group of neighboring states or political units with close interactions whose security cannot be examined in isolation from one another" (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). According to this perspective, geography has a significant impact on regional security, and global perspectives are insufficient to properly analyze security crises. "Even in today's globalized world, the speed of threat transmission is still directly related to physical distance; the shorter the distance, the faster the transmission," is one of their key premises (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Scholars like Barry Buzan, Caroline Thomas, Mohammed Ayoob, Azar, and Moon emphasize that security challenges in Third World countries are predominantly internal, not external. They advocate for attention to "soft" dimensions such as legitimacy deficits and lack of national cohesion while cautioning against overly militaristic or reductionist approaches. They also highlight the colonial legacy, weak nation-building, and deep state-society divides as contributors to complex, multilayered security problems in the Global South. Notable integrative approaches to these issues include the work of Buzan and Richard Little (Niyakoyi & Ejazi, 2016).

As noted, the theoretical foundation and primary analytical approach of this article are based on the Copenhagen School. This school aligns with the identified causes of security crises in Sistan and Baluchestan. The perspectives of its theorists offer practical frameworks for managing and reducing such crises. According to Barry Buzan's interpretation, state survival is not solely threatened by military factors but also by political, economic, environmental, and social dimensions. The Copenhagen School places special emphasis on social factors, which is why this study draws on its theories to examine existing threats and identify the roots of security crises in Sistan and Baluchestan. From the author's perspective, three key factors—international terrorism, the ideology of an independent Balochistan, and radical Islamist movements—are the primary drivers of Takfiri terrorism and related crises in eastern Iran.

6. Factors Contributing to Security Issues in Sistan and Baluchestan Province

The emergence of security challenges and fragmentation in southeastern Iran has resulted from numerous contributing factors. These have caused persistent disintegration in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, preventing the region's problems from being fundamentally addressed and resolved. The most significant drivers of insecurity and terrorist activities in the area include the province's geographical and border conditions, divergence from the central government, ethno-religious differences, and a lack of economic, cultural, and social development compared to other provinces.

6.1. Geographical Factors

The geographical location of Sistan and Baluchestan Province—bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan and lying along the coast of the Sea of Oman—has created unique spatial, political, and security dynamics. Domestically, the province is positioned on the periphery and not at the center of national attention. This marginal status has resulted in the dominance of negative over positive development indicators, both influenced by and exerting influence on regional power dynamics (Molla Shahi, 2000).

Additionally, the province is one of Iran's largest in area but suffers from natural disadvantages such as persistent drought and the drying of Lake Hamun. The local population frequently crosses borders with neighboring countries, which poses a serious challenge for those responsible for maintaining security (Ahmadypur et al., 2007). The province's peripheral status is therefore directly linked to insecurity, as remote areas are exploited by criminal organizations and anti-government groups, including terrorist factions that

move freely across the borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, becoming major security concerns for both the province and the nation.

6.2. Social and Political Factors

The formation of terrorism in Sistan and Baluchestan can be categorized into domestic and external origins. Domestically, uneven spatial development has weakened national unity and cohesion, leading to violent uprisings and instability.

6.2.1. Domestic Socio-Political Factors

The exclusion of Baluch tribal elites from political participation in ways that would secure their approval, along with the province's security and policing challenges, have created conditions conducive to violence. Additional factors include the unregulated movement of terrorists from Pakistan and Afghanistan into the province, the underdevelopment of political structures and lack of effective civil institutions, severe political divides and unequal distribution of power, the dominance of tribal systems, the powerful social role of Sunni clerics, and widespread public trust in clerical authority over state institutions. These dynamics have led to growing political and social divergence from the central government and increased violent behavior (Mohammadzade, 2012).

A geopolitical analysis of Iran suggests that the further a region is from the country's political center, the less effective government control and law enforcement become. This results in increased likelihood of organized criminal and terrorist activity (Izady & Dabiri, 2013). Terrorist groups sometimes even use public declarations to flaunt their defiance of the state. For instance, following the execution of Jundallah leader Abdolmalek Rigi, the group issued a statement after a bombing in Zahedan: "This operation shows the regime's incompetence; it was carried out in the heart of Zahedan, a city under full security and military control" (Rezaee et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the province's tribal way of life exacerbates its divergence from the central state. In Sistan and Baluchestan, tribal affiliation determines identity, social standing, and individual roles. Tribes serve as dominant social institutions, resolving most conflicts internally rather than through official legal

mechanisms. This tribal structure diminishes reliance on formal governance and fosters a sense of detachment from the state (Kaviyani Rad, 2010). Additionally, the ongoing connections between Iranian Baluch communities and their ethnic kin in Pakistan and Afghanistan—compared to their weaker ties with the Persian-speaking central state—have further heightened their susceptibility to insecurity and related social issues (Hafeznia, 2002).

6.2.2. External Socio-Political Factors

External actors and forces have also played a substantial role in shaping the province's security dynamics. Key foreign contributors to insecurity in Sistan and Baluchestan include:

- Strengthened cultural and religious ties between local ethnic groups and their co-religionists in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Migration of Baluch religious students to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India, where they become ideologically influenced.
- Interventions by extra-regional powers such as the United States and NATO.
- Chronic instability and recurring crises in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Financial and religious support from regional countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, UAE) to extremist groups.
- Non-cooperation by neighboring states in border security and surveillance.
- The presence of fundamentalist organizations and religious movements in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Broader international conditions (Mohammadzade, 2012).

One particularly destabilizing factor has been the longstanding territorial dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the Pashtun border regions. Pakistan's policy of fostering civil war in Afghanistan and seeking its fragmentation—particularly through extensive support for the Taliban, composed primarily of Pashtuns—has had spillover effects on southeastern Iran. These dynamics have increased illegal cross-border migration and undermined the ability of Pakistan and Afghanistan to secure their respective borders.

Consequently, the region has become a haven for drug trafficking and terrorist operations (Mojtahedzade, 1998).

In a televised interview with Press TV, Abdolmalek Rigi confessed that not only had the U.S. and Israel provided support that enhanced the capabilities of Jundallah and similar insurgent groups in Sistan and Baluchestan, but that NATO officials had even requested terrorist operations to be carried out in Tehran (Rezaee et al., 2012).

Another major factor is the security instability in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Political or security unrest in either country can directly impact Iran's border provinces. Moreover, the frequent turnover of eastern governments disrupts consistent enforcement of border laws. One mid-term threat is the absence of a bilateral water-sharing agreement on the Helmand River, which is vital for agriculture and economic activity in several border cities in Sistan and Baluchestan.

When examining the emergence of terrorist groups along Iran's southeastern border, such as Jundallah, regional conditions must not be overlooked. Jundallah was founded in a geographical setting adjacent to radical Salafi strongholds just a few kilometers away. Pakistan's Balochistan Province, which borders Iran's Balochistan region, serves as a hub for extremist and terrorist activity that has fueled insecurity in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran alike. The influence of extremist religious groups in this area is so powerful that the central Pakistani government struggles to assert authority and maintain order (Delavarpour, 2009). Numerous factions affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban operate in this region. Shared religious ideology and cultural proximity facilitate the spillover of extremism into Iranian territory, contributing to the formation of radical factions within the country.

6.2.3.   Regional Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism refers to efforts to revive traditional religious values in opposition to modern Western ideologies and trends in the contemporary era. Fundamentalist groups believe that the version of Islam currently practiced in Islamic societies is not the true Islam. Therefore, they argue that a return to authentic Islam can only be achieved through struggle, particularly through *jihad*. Their rigid and dogmatic beliefs drive them toward violence and extremism in pursuit of their objectives.

Beyond Iran's eastern borders, two major radical fundamentalist groups are unfortunately active. Originating from the Indian subcontinent, these movements emerged out of conflicts between Muslims and Hindus and gained momentum in Pakistan. Given their cultural, religious, and ethnic affinities with ethnic Baluch communities inside Iran, they easily influence local populations in Sistan and Baluchestan. "Many Iranian Sunni clerics are inclined toward the subcontinent, and perhaps due to this influence—and religious affinity with the Taliban—some Iranian Baluch supported the Taliban government as enforcers of Islamic law and even joined its ranks. Consequently, this part of Iran, due to religious homogeneity with areas beyond the border and the influence of clerics within traditional power structures, is susceptible to Islamic fundamentalism" (Kaviyani Rad, 2010).

"Unemployment, low levels of welfare and education, cultural and ethnic-religious tensions, lack of full border control in the southeastern regions, limited activity of border markets, involvement in illicit and informal economic activities, attraction to drug trafficking networks, poor socioeconomic development, and the presence of supporters of Islamic radicalism aligned with Salafi and Wahhabi ideologies—all of which intensify sectarianism—have fueled internal terrorism in Sistan and Baluchestan. Additionally, the post-revolutionary marginalization of tribal leaders under the pretext of anti-feudalism and the empowerment of clerics in their place has contributed to the rise of religious extremism" (Ahmadypur et al., 2007).

Externally, the presence of extra-regional powers—particularly the United States and Israel—in neighboring countries has further aggravated the situation due to their adversarial history with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Their financial support for terrorist groups, combined with Iran's geographic proximity to the impoverished and crisis-stricken states of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the infiltration of terrorist groups from these countries into Iran's southeastern borders, are significant external contributors to terrorism in Sistan and Baluchestan.

Officials must recognize that most individuals drawn into these terrorist groups come from impoverished, uneducated families. Thus, policymakers must prioritize

economic development and the eradication of poverty in the region. This includes comprehensive infrastructure projects, equitable distribution of economic and educational resources, and investment in free public education to reduce the influence of foreign-funded religious schools. Increased oversight of religious institutions in Balochistan should focus on empowering moderate clerics and reducing the influence of international Islamic school networks financed by Saudi Arabia. Complete control over the southeastern borders, greater employment of Sunni citizens in public service roles, and a commitment to locally-rooted governance aligned with national political frameworks are essential. Additionally, promoting the Barelvi school of thought—which holds conciliatory views toward Shia Islam—can counter the spread of the Deobandi school, a driver of anti-Shia sentiment in Sistan and Baluchestan.

6.3.   Economic Factors

Numerous factors contribute to the rise of terrorism at the international level, many of which are shared across different regions, while some are region-specific. In most terrorist acts, civil wars, and guerrilla conflicts, poverty and underdevelopment serve as critical underlying causes. Severe poverty often compels individuals, out of desperation, to align with terrorist groups. Low levels of economic development, diminished political opportunities, a lack of employment prospects, and domestic political instability are commonly cited drivers of terrorism. Poverty, in particular, can be regarded as the primary factor enabling the emergence of terrorism (Najizade, 2008).

In addition to these drivers, deprivation, unemployment, and inadequate services heighten public distrust toward the central government. The poor economic conditions in the region, exacerbated by sectarian propaganda, have intensified a sense of marginalization among the predominantly Sunni population of Sistan and Baluchestan. These communities have developed the false perception that the Shia-dominated central government deliberately weakens and deprives them of access to welfare and public services. Such misperceptions, although inaccurate, contribute to radicalization and confrontation (Rezaee et al., 2012).

According to some researchers, "the insecurity and activities of criminal and terrorist groups in this region are partly the result of underdevelopment and its

consequences—such as poverty, perceived discrimination, alienation from the central government, distrust of state policies, public dissatisfaction, and smuggling" (Izady & Dabiri, 2013).

6.4.   Demographic Factors and Neglect of Strategic Population Planning for Security

One of the key security vulnerabilities in Sistan and Baluchestan is the absence of a comprehensive, strategic demographic planning framework integrated with national security studies. This is despite the fact that Iran's higher-level policy documents have designated the implementation of population-based spatial planning as a national security priority.

"Demographic planning is a form of spatial organization in which population clusters are arranged based on security equilibrium and geographic coherence, avoiding both population hubs and voids that may challenge law enforcement and public order" (Andalib, 2001).

When implemented with a defensive chessboard strategy, demographic planning can significantly reduce security and law enforcement risks. For example, population vacuums in certain border regions of Sistan and Baluchestan—especially when hostile actors to the Islamic Republic are visibly active in neighboring countries—can serve as an incentive for these adversaries to destabilize Iranian border areas.

It is important to note that natural barriers that hinder permanent settlement can become strategic advantages for terrorist groups. Members of Jundallah, for instance, exploited the cover of desert terrain to coordinate and execute terrorist operations.

Developing a ranking system and security index for border provinces—based on the type, intensity, scope, and nature of threats—is essential for strategic soft security management within a mosaic security model. While general security policies may be consistent across border provinces, the implementation must be adapted to the unique threats of each province. Accordingly, establishing a comprehensive border security strategy tailored to the specific conditions of Sistan and Baluchestan—based on threat type, depth, and scope—is vital and aligns with Clause 4-45 of the general policies outlined in Iran's Fifth Development Plan (Mahdavi, 2007).

7.   Conclusion

Security and its associated concerns represent some of the most pressing needs and challenges facing human societies. As a result, numerous scholars in the fields of strategic studies have approached this subject from various angles. This study has likewise attempted, based on the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School, to examine the factors contributing to security challenges in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. Issues such as cultural, economic, and social poverty; the marginalization of local participation in political decision-making and resource governance; neglect of local elites and ethnic dynamics; and insufficient consideration of regional and extra-regional external factors were all discussed. In line with the balanced principles of the Copenhagen School, several solutions can be proposed based on the arguments presented.

Key military and security strategies to prevent and manage security crises in the province include enhancing law enforcement and security capacities at the provincial level, integrating security considerations into demographic planning, and strengthening border surveillance systems through the IRGC, military forces, and Border Guard Command. Establishing comprehensive and sustainable security in Sistan and Baluchestan requires the formation of a coherent and targeted task force—comprising the Provincial Security Council (under the Ministry of Interior), the provincial intelligence office (to boost intelligence oversight), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (to liaise with Afghanistan and Pakistan), the Border Guard Command, the IRGC, and Basij forces. Such synergy would enhance the effectiveness of the state's deterrent policies against smuggling, terrorist infiltration, narcotics trafficking, and general insecurity. Additionally, increasing collaboration between the provincial Passive Defense Council and the IRGC and appointing a military advisor to the provincial governor would improve the responsiveness of intelligence and security institutions in crisis management.

Attention by relevant institutions to the composition, density, spatial distribution of population, and proportional distance between settlements constitutes a foundational aspect of demographic planning for border security. Implementing adequate security arrangements in unpopulated zones, identifying migratory zones, and properly structuring population clusters are key demographic considerations for generating security in Sistan and Baluchestan. Strategic management of demographic planning across administrative divisions is thus essential for achieving comprehensive and sustainable security in the province. This is particularly important given that the migration of border residents toward provincial centers has created population vacuums and vulnerabilities in frontier towns. The Islamic Republic of Iran, along with China and behind the Russian Federation, has one of the largest numbers of neighboring countries—sharing land and sea borders with 15 states—making border policy a critical component of national strategic security management. Article 4-45 of the general policies of Iran's Fifth Development Plan also emphasizes the need to take necessary measures to enhance the "sustainable security of border regions and effective border control." A critical recommendation is the adoption of a post-modern approach to border security production, wherein advanced technologies play an increased role in border closure, control, and surveillance in Sistan and Baluchestan.

Another key strategy is the strengthening of sustainable development infrastructure and the targeted expansion of border markets with a security-oriented approach. Effective implementation and oversight of the processes of security production, distribution, and deployment in the province require the formulation of a dynamic and comprehensive economic and cultural development plan, alongside strengthened security indicators. Fragmented policies and the absence of cross-sectoral coordination in the sustainable development of Sistan and Baluchestan only serve to increase the cost of security management due to overlapping efforts. In some border areas, limited production potential due to geographical constraints has made border market expansion a primary incentive for local settlement. In fact, the establishment of such markets not only encourages local residency but also increases the border security index by attracting population.

Another pillar of the strategy to counter criminal and terrorist activity in Sistan and Baluchestan is the use of social approaches to boost public participation in maintaining law enforcement. Strengthening citizen oversight over the performance of security officials is one method to facilitate civic involvement in achieving security. This strategy functions as a policy tool to effectively control crime, reduce public fear of terrorist

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actions, enhance communication between the police and citizens, and legitimize police strategies in the province—constituting a bottom-up form of participatory security production. By involving local citizens in policing policies, their cooperation with law enforcement agencies is significantly improved. In the discourse of community-based policing, security is not separate from other social dimensions; rather, there is noticeable synergy between law enforcement capacities and the civil sector. Institutionalizing community policing culture within the law enforcement structures of Sistan and Baluchestan increases the social capital of security institutions—a concept confirmed by theorists such as Fukuyama, who emphasizes its significant impact on the establishment of order and security.

Moreover, attention to soft security components, including social capital and civil rights, has a direct relationship with the scope of regional security. The higher the social capital of security and intelligence institutions, the broader their security coverage becomes. Therefore, respect for civil rights and the development of social capital should be embedded within the organizational culture of law enforcement. Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, and ways of thinking among an organization's members. It represents the implicit yet tangible part of an institution, passed on to new members as the accepted way of doing things.

Finally, maximizing the use of local intelligence capacities in the province can significantly enhance the intelligence oversight of security structures. To that end, the establishment of systematic mechanisms for optimizing the use of civilian intelligence capacities in border towns is one effective method of strengthening intelligence awareness. Article 1-44 of the general policies of the Fifth Development Plan obligates relevant institutions to create coherent mechanisms to fully utilize local intelligence capacities. In other words, managing public insecurity cannot rely solely on state institutions—it must also draw from civil capacities. Reinforcing this trend plays a pivotal role in countering emerging security threats in Sistan and Baluchestan.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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