

The Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment and the Baloch National Question in Pakistan

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Abstract

The passage of the eighteenth amendment bill in 2010 represented a critical milestone in Pakistan's constitutional history. It sought to better manage the perennial federal-provincial tensions by restructuring the country's constitutional framework to assuage the grievances of the ethno-regional movements opposed to the centralised state system, especially in Balochistan, where Pakistan's territorial integrity faces its toughest challenge. Islamabad's inflexibility in accommodating ethnic dissidence through various institutional measures has exacerbated ethnic tensions and hardened nationalist sentiments. The eighteenth amendment aimed to reverse deformations introduced during dictatorships and promote a more federal polity. More than a decade has passed since the introduction of the bill, yet the question lingers: Did the amendment achieve its intended goal of mitigating the ethnic conflict in Balochistan? This article scrutinises the current situation in Balochistan and offers a critically oriented analysis of the amendment's impact on the province's security scenario. It contends that the amendment fell short of its objectives because it remained silent on issues of critical import to the Baloch and failed to address the underlying issues fuelling the conflict.

Keywords

Federalism, nationalism, natural resources, Gwadar Port, insurgency

Introduction

The eighteenth amendment, passed in 2010, was a landmark event that brought sweeping constitutional reforms. It returned Pakistan to a parliamentary system of government and consolidated democracy by extending the scope of high treason to deter future coups. The act sought to harmonise the centre–province relations and fulfil the long pending demand of smaller ethno-linguistic groups for greater autonomy by abolishing the concurrent list and devolving power to the provinces. It was expected that the act would, inter alia, help to better manage the conflict in Balochistan, where demands for greater self-rule were most intense.

The protracted low-intensity insurgency in Balochistan is informed by the idea that the province should be governed by the Baloch – the largest ethnic group within the region. And importantly, its abundant resources must remain under their effective control. Islamabad's failure to grant the province equal political and economic rights has been a foundational grievance at the heart of

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