



Security Nexus Perspective

GHOSTS AT THE BORDER: SOUTH ASIA'S UNFINISHED WARS

From Balochistan to Kashmir, the region's unresolved grievances refuse to stay buried

By Shyam Tekwani – 2 May 2025

In South Asia, the wars never truly end. They only change shape.

In the spring of 2025, two seemingly disconnected acts of violence shattered the illusion of stability in the region. In March, [militants hijacked a passenger train](#) near the Bolan Pass in Balochistan, executing soldiers in cold blood. A month later, [gunmen in Kashmir's](#) Pahalgam Valley ambushed and turned a tourist convoy into a massacre. In both capitals, [the reaction was reflexive](#): condemn the violence, [blame external enemies](#), declare the situation contained.

But South Asia's leaders are not fighting terrorists alone. They are fighting the consequences of their own betrayals.

Across [Balochistan](#), [Kashmir](#), [Manipur](#), and beyond, decades of [enforced disappearances](#), broken promises, and brute militarization have hollowed out the social contracts meant to hold these nations together. The grievances that drove rebellions from the 1940s through the 1990s - demands for dignity, recognition, and political agency - were never meaningfully addressed. They were buried beneath asphalt and propaganda, paved over by development projects and security checkpoints.

States may claim victory. But their victories are mirages, shimmering above mass graves and refugee camps, dissolving the moment anyone looks too closely. South Asia's unfinished wars are not relics of a violent past. They are live ammunition, loaded into the future.

The Persistence of Grievance

[Balochistan](#) has been at war with Pakistan for most of its modern history - though you would not know it from the maps printed in Islamabad.

Rich in gas, minerals, and coastline, the province has been plundered for decades under the language of national development. Projects like the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor \(CPEC\)](#) promise progress but deliver exclusion: minerals are mined, ports are secured, but Baloch homes are raided, and [Baloch sons disappear without trace](#).

The insurgency endures not because of foreign conspiracies, as Islamabad endlessly insists, but because the Pakistani state remains incapable of seeing its [Baloch citizens](#) as anything other than a security problem to be managed.

In [Kashmir](#), the Indian government claims to have "[normalized](#)" the valley after revoking its autonomy in 2019. Normalization, however, [looks a lot like occupation](#). Heavily armed soldiers outnumber local leaders; dissent is criminalized; internet shutdowns suffocate public life. Tourism campaigns and investment summits cannot erase a generation raised under curfew and surveillance.

[Manipur's descent into ethnic bloodshed](#) in 2023 exposed another fault line Delhi prefers to ignore. Long-simmering tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities erupted into violence that shattered any illusions of northeastern integration. The central government's delayed, politicized response made clear what many Manipuris had always suspected: they are citizens of India only when convenient.

Even the [Rohingya, stateless and exiled from Myanmar](#), find themselves entangled in South Asia's ethnonationalist calculus. Fleeing genocide, they are criminalized anew in Bangladesh and India - trapped between the countries that reject them and the memories that refuse to let them go.

South Asia's states have excelled at suppressing rebellion. But failed at extinguishing the reasons rebellions rise in the first place.

Diasporas, Proxies, and the New Front Lines

The wars South Asia tries to forget at home have found new life abroad.

Across [Canada, Australia, Britain, and the United States](#), diasporic communities have become the memory-keepers - and, increasingly, [the agitators](#) - for the struggles their home states would rather erase.

Khalistan flags fly outside Indian consulates in Vancouver and [Melbourne](#). Tamil activists march through London, demanding accountability for the [massacres in Mullivaikkal](#). Kashmiri protests in Washington and New York refuse to let India's crackdown slip into diplomatic amnesia.

For host countries, these movements pose uncomfortable questions. Freedom of expression collides with fears of extremism. Clashes erupt between communities carrying wounds that their new homelands do not fully understand - or wish to manage.

Meanwhile, South Asian states pursue their adversaries across borders. India faces allegations of [targeting Sikh activists for assassination in Canada](#) and the [United States](#). Pakistan continues to court Kashmiri separatists abroad while crushing Baloch dissent at home. [Sri Lanka](#) lobbies furiously to

Ghosts at the Border: South Asia's Unfinished Wars

brand Tamil diaspora organizations as fronts for terrorism, even as it stonewalls investigations into its own wartime atrocities.

In this landscape, proxies thrive. Militant groups, both old and rebranded, navigate a transnational web of sympathizers, donors, and disillusioned youth. Intelligence agencies play familiar games under new names, fueling conflicts that [no longer respect national boundaries](#).

The old insurgencies have not been defeated. They have been globalized. And the longer South Asia's governments confuse military suppression with political resolution, the more they will find their battles bleeding across oceans - and into the streets of the world's great cities.

The Illusion of Victory

South Asia's governments have long mistaken silence for stability.

In Punjab, India broke the back of the [Khalistan insurgency](#) through brute force - fake encounters, mass disappearances, and secret cremations. The fields grew green again, the trains ran on time. But the wounds were never closed, only hidden. Today, the [movement's heart beats](#) not in Amritsar but in Brampton and Surrey.

In Sri Lanka, the [military crushed the Tamil Tigers](#) with [overwhelming brutality in 2009](#). Civilians were shelled alongside militants; [surrendering fighters were executed in cold blood](#). Colombo declared victory. Yet [Tamil families still search for their missing](#), still mourn their dead - and still organize across the diaspora for justice that remains undelivered.

In Kashmir, Delhi boasts of new [highways and investment corridors](#), showcasing the region as a trophy of unity. But when the visitors leave and the cameras are packed away, [the checkpoints, the raids, and the quiet despair remain](#).

Victory parades fade. Grievance endures. Suppressing insurgency may end battles. It does not end the ideas that fueled them. And where ideas survive, so too does [the possibility of rebellion](#) - reshaped, reimagined, waiting for its next moment.

In a region where [history is rarely past](#), and memory is rarely voluntary, states that rule through repression are only ever buying time. And often, not very much.

The Future That Refuses to Forget

South Asia's unfinished wars are not accidents. They are the inevitable consequences of states that confuse conquest with consent, and erasure with reconciliation.

Governments can suppress protests, dismantle insurgencies, rewrite textbooks, and pave over mass graves with shopping malls. What they cannot do is legislate memory out of existence.

Every [disappeared son in Balochistan](#), every [half-widow in Kashmir](#), every [refugee child born stateless in a Rohingya camp](#) carries forward the memory of betrayal - a memory that outlives soldiers, politicians, and peace accords alike.

For now, South Asia's leaders congratulate themselves on stability bought through silence. But history suggests a harsher reckoning: that ghosts do not stay buried forever. They return - sometimes in

Ghosts at the Border: South Asia's Unfinished Wars

marches and protests, sometimes in elections, sometimes with guns. And as long as memory endures, so too will the specter of unfinished wars across [South Asia's contested frontiers](#).

The region's future will not be decided by GDP figures or infrastructure projects alone. It will be decided by whether its governments can summon the political courage to face the truths they have long suppressed - or whether they will continue down a path [where forgetting is demanded](#), and rebellion becomes inevitable.

And as long as memory endures, so too will the specter of unfinished wars across South Asia's contested frontiers, where the ghosts at the border are watching.



The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of DKI APCSS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the United States Department of Defense (DoD) of the linked websites, or the information, products, or services contained therein. DoD does not exercise any editorial, security, or other control over the information you may find at these sites.

May 2025