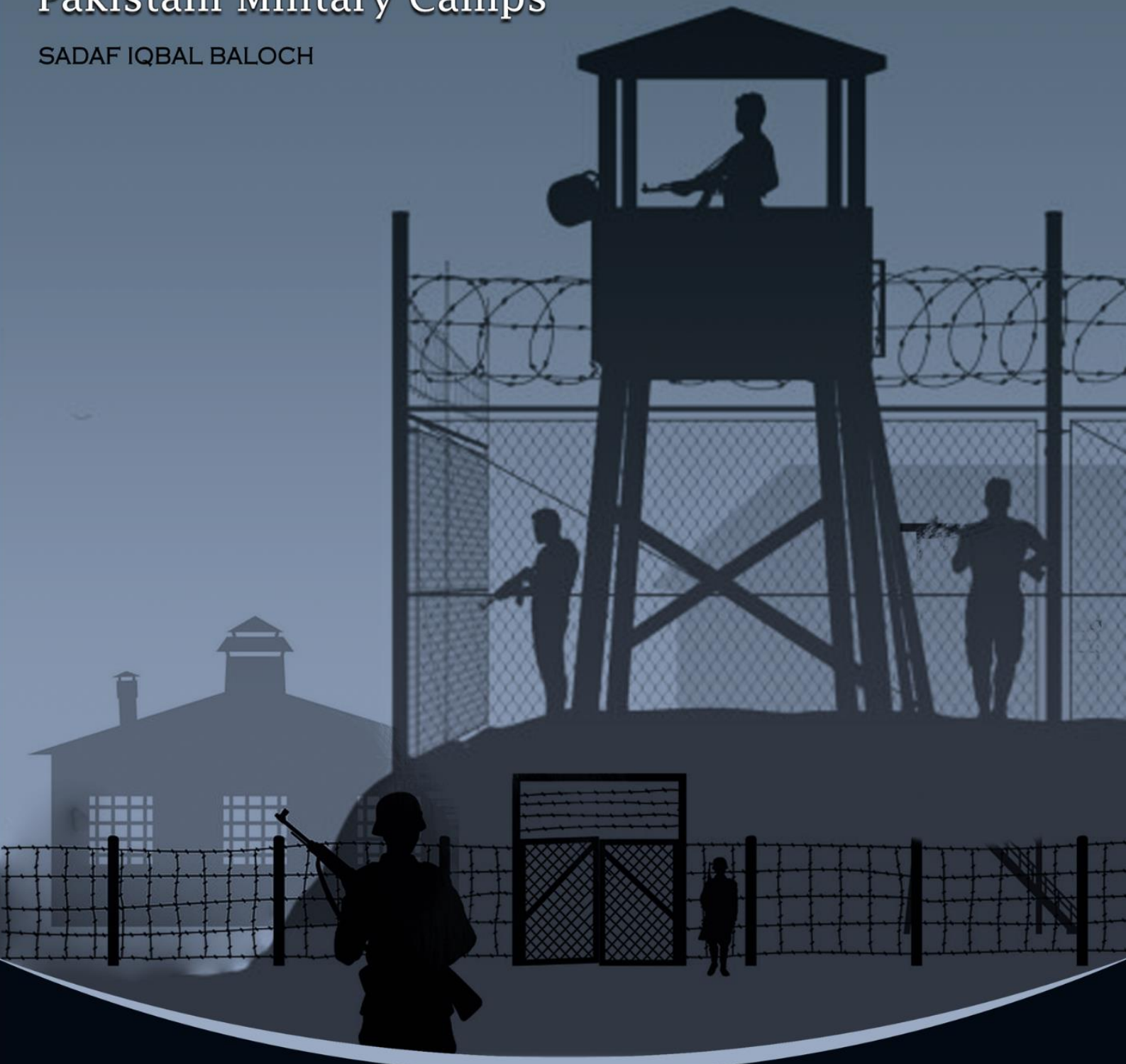


Caught Between Survival, Disappearance, and Resistance: The Dilemma of Visiting Pakistani Military Camps

SADAF IQBAL BALOCH



Caught between Survival, Disappearance, and Resistance: The Dilemma of visiting Pakistani Military Camps

Introduction:

In the conflict-ridden Balochistan region, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings by Pakistan's armed forces have unfortunately become the norm. Thousands of ethnic Baloch, a persecuted minority, have endured unlawful custody and torture for years. More are abducted every week as the forces act with impunity under the guise of controlling a two-decade-long insurgency. They employ various methods, such as seizing entire villages and picking up residents in large numbers. House raids and disappearances from military checkpoints, established every five to 10 kilometers, are other common methods. However, this report delves into the troubling trend of abduction, torture, and killing of those whom the forces summon to their camps. The Human Rights Council of Balochistan (HRCB) aims to assess the impacts this particular method has had on the victims and their families, as well as on Baloch society as a whole.

Even though numerous such incidents occur in Balochistan every month, most go unreported, or only come to light months or even years later, due to a media blackout and limited internet access. A fear of repercussions and concerns about the safety of the abducted loved ones discourage the families from disclosing the army's atrocities. The HRCB, after much effort, has gathered data on 72 such cases that occurred in various parts of Balochistan from 2019 to 2023. Most of the cases are from Awaran, Panjgur, Kech, and Quetta.

It has been many years since the army imposed its own strict rules in several areas of Balochistan. As per these rules, before visiting a nearby village to buy household items, one must secure the approval of army officials first. Obtaining a permission is also necessary to even attend wedding ceremonies and funerals. Males from the age of 12 are regularly ordered to appear in the army camps for interrogation once or twice a week. These visits not only shape their fate, but also have profound consequences for their families. Those who comply face the risk of abduction, and those who don't, live with the fear that their families will be targeted. They are trapped between two extreme situations.

1. Comply or not, suffering is a given

Those who comply with the summons either return in severely critical physical and mental conditions or end up missing or killed, often with little chance for their families to trace their bodies.

One poignant example is Tariq Baloch, who, while taking his child to Karachi for treatment, received a phone call to visit the FC camp in the Kolwah Rodkan area of district Kech on December 26, 2021. During his visit to the camp, Tariq was detained, and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Similarly, Abul Raheem, a resident of the Gwak area of Mand, district Kech, also received a phone call from the forces, who ordered him to visit an FC camp on December 2. Despite agreeing to their order over the phone, the forces did not wait and abducted him from in front of a shop right after a few moments of the phone call. The forces claimed that he had chanted slogans against them during a protest rally.

Dozens of civilians including Qadir Bakhsh, a resident of district Panjgur, Khair Bakhsh from Kech, Zarin Khan from Sibi, Rabnawaz from Quetta, Zafar and Inayatullah from Khuzdar, and 11 people from Awaran, namely, Sakhi Dad, Sana Ullah, Shahjan, Faiz Dilmurad, Bashir Ahmed, Saeed Ali Mohammad, Pir Muhammed, Badal Roshin, Ali Nawaz, Hasil Mohammad Hassan, and recently abducted Lal Jan Hakeem were summoned by the forces, and there is still no trace of their well-being.

Multiple family members summoned and disappeared:

In many cases, the military summoned several members of a family and disappeared them. Mostly the victims were tricked into believing they were going to the camps to secure the release of their missing family members who were in custody.

Hasil son of Hassan, was invited to a military camp to discuss the case of his son, who had been abducted two months before, on 19 Oct 2019. But he himself didn't return from the camp and remains missing. He is a resident of Pittok in the Dasht area of district Kech

Two brothers, Yaqoob Mureed and Ghulam Jan Mureed, were called by the security forces to visit a military camp in Mashkay, and no information has been received about them since 17 Nov 2020. The tragedy doesn't end here; within a week, on 21 November, the forces forcibly disappeared a third member of the same family, Diljan Wali Mureed, after

summoning him to a camp. He was later released, but his brothers still remain in illegal custody.

A man named Jangian along with his two sons, Waheed, and Naseeb, and son-in-law, Manzoor Dad Karim, was detained by the forces in the Gichk area of Panjgur after being summoned on February 16, 2023. On the same day, the military abducted multiple people, subjecting them to severe torture during their detention. The others were later released but Jangian and his sons remain missing. They are nomads and had previously herded livestock in the hilly region of Gedu. In 2020, they were compelled to settle near a military camp in the Kalari area.

Yusuf Badini, who sells rice near Kharan Bazar Chief Chowk, was instructed by FC officials to deliver rice parcels to their FC camp on the morning of 25 Oct 2022. He went there with a boy who was working with him, where the forces detained him. The boy was released. On the same day, the forces raided and vandalized his house in the Khan Molvi Majeed Masjid, and forcibly detained and disappeared his brother Pervez Badini. They were released in a critical condition after a month of disappearance.

In a harrowing incident on October 18, 2021, security forces stormed Darey Khan's home in Toba Gichk, district Washuk, and abducted his two young grandchildren, ten-year-old Sanam Jameel and her six-year-old brother Gazzain Jameel. Darey Khan himself was summoned to the military camp a month prior, on August 22, 2021, and abducted.

Dad Bakhsh, a resident of Shapkol, was summoned to the Tanzila army camp on 12 April 2022, after which he never returned. His father, Lal Bakhsh, was similarly detained in March of the same year but he was released after a few days. This trend continued in 2021 when Lal Bakhsh's wife, Barfi, along with Bibi Nihal, nine-year-old Shoukat, seven-year-old Muhammad, Pindal son of Dilmurad, and twelve-year-old Lal Bakhsh son of Babul were all summoned and held incommunicado for a week.

Salam Baloch, a resident of Awaran, received an invitation to visit the army camp near his residence on August 7, 2020. However, he did not return from that visit. His son, Chaker, had already been abducted by the Pakistani forces from Hub Chowki, while Salam himself was undergoing treatment there.

Summoned and disappeared multiple times

In numerous cases, civilians have been repeatedly summoned to the army's camps and subsequently disappeared. When people dare to decline the military's summons, they frequently meet dire fates, and their families bear the brunt of daily military raids, which often lead to the disappearance of other family members. People endure this torment out of fear of losing their loved ones, and often find themselves compelled to make regular visits to these camps.

Umaid son of Abdain, a resident of Elahi Baksh Goth, was summoned to the Jhao army camp on February 23, 2023. Following his visit there, his whereabouts remain unknown. According to local sources, he had previously been subjected to severe torture and was left in a near-death condition by the security forces.

Umar, son of Ghulam Qadir, was called to the Nokjo army camp on December 24, 2022. He had received similar summons before and was usually released on the same day. However, on this occasion, he was held at the camp and did not return.

Abdul Haq Jangi Khan, a resident of the Parwar area in Mashkay, was summoned by the forces to the Khandri Army Camp on January 1, 2023. He has not returned, and there is no information about his whereabouts. It's worth noting that Abdul Haq had previously experienced multiple instances of torture at the hands of the military forces.

Family members threatened to submit their loved ones to the camps

The army uses coercive tactics to compel families into delivering their loved ones to the camps. Some families accompany the summoned persons to the camps in the hope that they would be able to protect them. But they do not succeed in most cases.

Shahnawaz, a student and resident of the Ronjan area of Mashkay, became a victim of torture on December 2, 2019. The army threatened his family, demanding that they bring him to the army camp for interrogation or face the consequences. When his uncle took him to the camp, he had to return alone as Shahnawaz was held.

Abid Imam Bakhsh, a resident of district Kech, received threats from the army to pay a visit to their camps. Upon his return from Quetta, where he had been studying, his father took him to the Geshkore army camp. They released his father but subjected him to torture for many days, from December 12 to 29, 2019.

The latest incident occurred on September 28, 2023, when forces raided Khuda Rahm's house in his absence. They threatened his family to present him at the camp. The next day, when he returned home, the family took him to the camp because he was an innocent man. He has not returned.

On 1 Jan 2023, a young resident of Mashkay, Afzal Baloch son of Abdul Rahim, was summoned to the military camp for interrogation for posting pro-independence content on social media. He faced hours of interrogation and torture. Fearing for his safety, his family sent him to Quetta to work in a shop. However, the army personnel in Mashkay threatened his family to produce him at their camp, saying they would not harm him. When his family complied and took him to the camp, he was forcibly disappeared.

Succumbed to torture

During interrogations, many have either been shot dead in these camps or have died as a result of the severe torture and injuries they suffer while in custody. While there are hundreds of such heart-wrenching stories, we are highlighting just a few.

On November 22, 2021, concerning reports were coming from Toba and Solair villages in the Gichk area of Balochistan. These villages endured a more than six-month blockade imposed by the Pakistani military. The military's stringent control meant that villagers were effectively confined to their homes and denied the permission to leave or even purchase essential supplies, such as flour, without approval. Disturbing reports of human rights violations, including instances of torture and extrajudicial killings, were also documented. In one such case, a villager named Akhtar, son of Raza Mohammad, was summoned to the army camp, where he was subjected to torture which took his life. His body was found dumped near the camp. It is important to note that Gichk is one of Balochistan's most turbulent areas, where such incidents occur regularly.

Similarly, on February 12, 2022, two brothers, Mohammad Ali Dinnar and Wahid Dinnar, were taken by the forces to their area's military camp in Teertej village of district Awaran. The same night, Wahid was released in a critical condition, while the army later informed the village elders that Mohammad Ali had died in their custody and was buried outside the camp. The family protested against Ali's brutal killing and requested to unearth his body for a proper burial. After hours of refusal by the army officials, women were finally allowed to retrieve the body. Mohammad Ali's father, Dinar Baloch, appealed to human rights organizations to shed light on the long-standing atrocities inflicted upon his family. In January 2014, mass graves were discovered in the Tootak area of Balochistan, revealing 169 human remains. Dinar's nephew, Naseer Baiyan, was identified as one of them. Naseer and his brother Umer Baiyan had been taken away by the army three months before the discovery of the mass grave. Umer Baiyan's fate remains unknown. In December 2020, while

Dinar was with his family in Hajiabad area of Balgathar in district Panjgur, the army bombed the village, which resulted in the deaths of his eight family members, including a child. Dinar and several others were arrested and subjected to severe torture for a week.

In another incident, a 17-year-old named Murad Jan, son of Karim Dad, was summoned on April 9, 2020, in the Rindak area of Mashkay. The next day, his body was returned to his family. He had been subjected to severe torture, which led to his demise. Two of his uncles, Gohram and Ghazi, as well as Ghazi's son Sarwar, who were shepherds, had previously been killed by the army in 2015. Additionally, his father and grandfather have both been victims of enforced disappearance, with his father missing for three months and his grandfather for eighteen months.

Dadbaksh Miskan, a resident of Geshkore, was similarly killed on 13 Feb 2023 by the military forces after being summoned to a military camp and tortured for four consecutive days during the custody. His body was found on 17 Feb 2023.

2. Avoid calls and get arrested or killed somewhere else

People who escape military raids and refuse the calls to disappear, are often found, detained, or sadly killed at different locations. Some are threatened to appear in camps or their families may suffer repercussions.

In one case, the forces raided a house in the Jhao area of district Awaran on 8 November 2021. After failing to detain four residents, identified as Kacho and Azum sons of Karim Baksh, and Waheed and Sadiq sons of Umar, who were not there at that moment, they were later summoned to the military camp the next day. They complied and have not been heard since.

Qadir Zehri, a teacher who ran the 'Model Public High School' and established a free tuition center in Zehri, Khuzdar, was forcibly disappeared by the security forces on September 17, 2021. The incident occurred when he was on the way to his work at a dam where he served as an engineer in the Mangochar area of district Kalat. Local sources indicate that he had previously received threats from the security forces and was summoned for interrogation at the Army camp in Khuzdar. Furthermore, on the day of his disappearance, a significant number of forces surrounded his school in Zehri for hours.

In another incident, the forces summoned Majid son of Mohammad Omar, a resident of Mashkay, to the military camp, but he evaded the call out of fear of being disappeared. However, he was later detained in the Bedi area of Awaran by a death squad member named Sana, who is affiliated with the military. Sana demanded a ransom of 7 lakhs within 24 hours. Unfortunately, despite selling their possessions and seeking help from relatives, the family could not meet this demand. Majid was killed.

Similarly, the security forces summoned Saya Khan, a laborer, to the Gichk army camp in Panjgur on September 18, 2022, and disappeared him. When the family attempted to know his whereabouts, the forces demanded a ransom of 3 lakhs for his release.

3. Avoid and Seek refuge overseas or join armed resistance

Other options entail fleeing to other countries or joining armed struggle to escape the brutality of the military. Those who opt not to visit the camps often feel that seeking refuge in another country or taking up arms for self-defense against the military are their last options. This is because, as seen in the aforementioned cases, people who decided not to visit camps, were killed and disappeared after failing to remain in hiding.

These brutal practices have aggravated hatred in civilians towards the state and its forces. People feel they are left with not many options. Those who cannot afford to flee to another country, choose to take refuge in mountains and pick up arms.

Seventeen-year-old Ahmad (name has been changed to protect identity), was called to a military camp in Turbat, and subsequently disappeared in 2019. He spent nearly two years in a torture cell before being released. When the forces summoned him again, he chose not to endure further torture and instead decided to seek refuge in a Gulf country.

Civilians are forced to make extreme decisions for their survival. The army and the government have many times offered amnesty to members of nationalist armed groups who surrender to the authorities. Many of these individuals are later armed and utilized against their ex-comrades. Those who refuse to cooperate with the government often meet a tragic fate at the hands of the security forces. Those who agree to continue working for the state as proxy groups have been killed by the separatists.

Anwar Haibatan Baloch, once a nationalist fighter, gave up arms and surrendered to the forces in pursuit of a peaceful life. However, he was soon forced to work for the military, a

role he vehemently rejected. On April 7, FC soldiers launched a raid on Kundri village in Mashkay and killed Anwar and his son, Irshad, who valiantly resisted the raid. After this incident, his teenage son was summoned, but he refused to appear in the camp, and instead joined armed resistance to avoid getting abducted.

In another case from Mashkay, a separatist militant's nephew, Chakar, was routinely summoned, and subjected to prolonged interrogations and hours of torture on multiple occasions. In an effort to avoid further torment, he chose not to respond to the army's summons and opted to align with the armed groups. He was killed in a battle at the age of 22 in 2020.

Several instances of suicide have also been recorded among those who have surrendered and chose to avoid working for the armed forces.

Conclusion:

Balochistan's civilians find themselves caught in an untenable situation, forced to make life-altering choices. The military's actions have led to widespread fear, disappearances, and a palpable sense of insecurity. This report calls for urgent attention to address the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Balochistan and seeks justice for the victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.