

Balochistan: the forgotten frontier

Mahrukh Khan*

Introduction

*“Also from Pahlav and Pars and Koch o Baloch,
From the warriors of Gilan and Dasht-e-Soroch”*

(Shahname III: 42, Dastan-e Siyavas 616)¹

Today the term ‘Balochistan’ means more than geography the term. Balochistan refers to the Baloch culture and the people’s social concepts and traditions; the land is considered to be the cradle of the Baloch ethno linguistic identity.²

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, comprising 44 per cent of the total land mass. It has a coastline which stretches 770 km, and shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan. The province is sparsely populated, the enormity of its size contrasts remarkably with its low population. Economically, Balochistan offers some of the best assets for development.

The province is immensely rich with minerals of diversity, gas deposits as well as a gifted geography. The geostrategic importance of Balochistan is irrefutable. Its enduring importance lies in the fact that it offers easy access routes to land-locked Afghanistan and Central Asia, has an entrée to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and South Asia.

Balochistan has always been at the centre-stage of conflict. Its geography influences its security environment. There is a growing sense of frustration among the Baloch who believe that Balochistan is part of the federation but only on paper and is at the mercy of the State, which continues to exploit its natural wealth³. Current Baloch resistance has been building up for quite some time, especially since the federal authorities in Pakistan started developing Gwadar Port and road and rail links to it as part of an ambitious project to provide a surface trade link with Central Asia through Chaman, Kandahar across Afghanistan into Central Asia, akin to the Silk Route.⁴.

The tension between the centre and Balochistan can be traced back to the early years of Pakistan’s independence. Many believe that the current tension

* The writer is Research Fellow, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

between the people of Balochistan and the rest of Pakistan is caused by growing socio-economic insecurities and by the systemic discrimination and oppression of the local people by the centre dominated by the country's most populous province.⁵

Origin, rise and geography of the Baloch race

The historical record of the origin of the Baloch race is vague. It is uncertain whether they were native to their land or they arrived during one of the many waves of migration that swept the ancient Middle East.⁶ The word 'Balochistan' in its very literal sense means the land of the Baloch. There exist diverging opinions and historical accounts about the origin and evolution of the Baloch race; however, none is conclusive.

Historical evidence, although spasmodic and scanty, does also suggest that the original homeland of Baloch had been the regions of ancient Nawah and Babylon on river Tigris stretching eastward to Susa and Fars province up to Kirman hills.

The earliest extant source (*Šahristānīhā ī Ērān-šahr, a Pahlavi*) text written in the 2nd/8th century, though probably representing a pre-Islamic compilation; lists the Balōč as one of seven autonomous mountain communities (*kōfyār*). Arabic writers in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries (especially Ebn Kordābeh, Mas'ūdī, Estakrī, Moqaddasī) mention them, usually as Balūc, in association with other tribal populations in the area between Kermān, Khorasan, Sīstān, and Makrān.⁷

Historical evidence, although spasmodic and scanty, does also suggest that the original homeland of Baloch had been the regions of ancient Nawah and Babylon on river Tigris stretching eastward to Susa and Fars province up to Kirman hills.⁸ Many of other historical records state the earliest known mention of part of Balochistan is in the *Avesta*, the *Vara Pishin-anha* which undoubtedly is identifiable with the valley of Pishin. The *Shahnama* also contains scant records of the conquest of Makran by Kai Khusru (Cyrus), and the Achaemenian Empire which reached its farthest limits under Darius Hystaspes included the whole of the country.⁹

Bresee in his book describes the evolution and origin of Baloch in two competing theories: the first states that the Baloch are native people who have been described as the Oritans, the Jatts, the Medes, etc., in ancient records; the

second states that the Baloch migrated into the area some 2000 years ago.¹⁰ On the other hand, Justice Mir Khuda Bakhsh Bijrani explains about the arrival of the Baloch race in the Subcontinent; by arguing that the Baloch first entered the region during the Mongol invasion of the 13th century.¹¹

The history of settlement in Balochistan is reflected in its topography. Place names fall into three categories: names that are of Baloch origin, or have been ‘Baluchized’, are used for most minor natural features like rivers, streams, rocks, mountains; old settlements and major natural features tend to have pre-Baluch names; and new settlements, dating from the middle of the 19th century in Iran, and the middle of the 20th century in Pakistan generally have Persian or Urdu names.¹²

The territory of Balochistan has been divided historically into a number of areas, among which Makrān (in the south), Sarhadd (in the northwest), and the area known earlier as Tūrān that includes the modern towns of Kalat and Khuzdar (Qosdār/Qozdār; in the east), have been the most significant, Iranian and Indian political centres to the west, north, and east (particularly, Kermān, Sīstān, Qandahār, Delhi, Karachi), and even the sultan of Oman to the south.¹³

A troubled history

Balochistan’s geography influences the power politics of the regional and world powers, their spheres of influence, efforts at territorial expansion, and propagation of ideologies, military intervention, coercion, and application of economic aid to create dependency, confusion and instability,¹⁴. From 1839 till the independence of Pakistan, the greater part of Balchistan was—formally or informally—under the British Empire, whose interest was essentially in securing and protecting its North-West Frontier Province from both Afghanistan and Iran. At a particular stage in this endeavour, the British negotiated formal international borders through the territories of Baloch tribes with both Iran and Afghanistan, roughly according to the effective sphere of influence of the khan of Kalat, but with some attention to the interests of local leaders.¹⁵

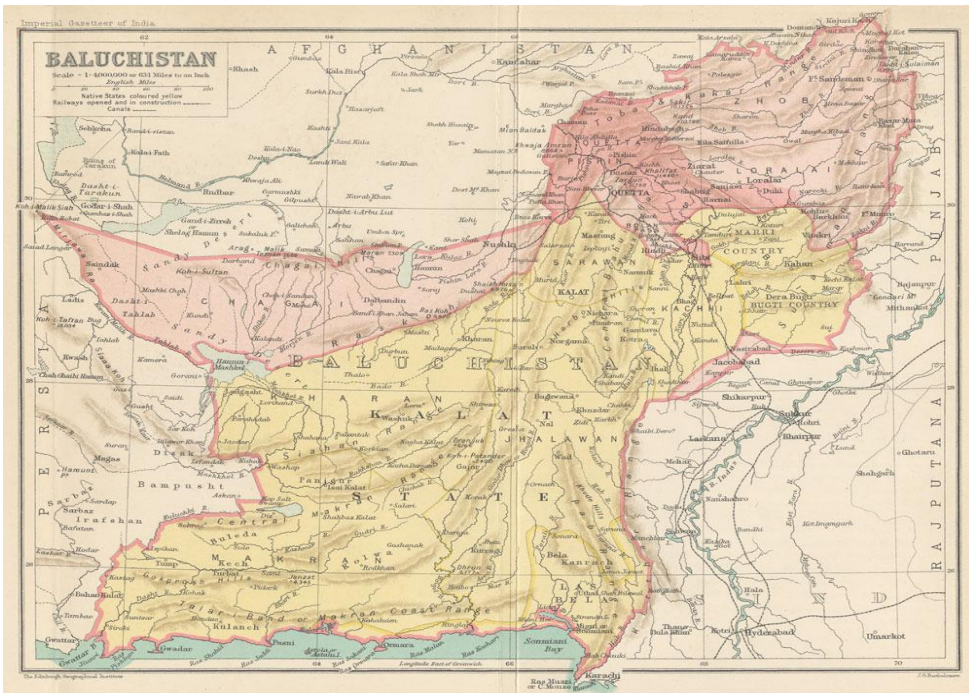
Balochistan came to the attention of British Indian Empire after the first Anglo-Afghan War¹⁶ when the British got defeated. It was then that the British Empire realized the strategic importance of Balochistan and saw it as an entry point for Russia in the Indian Subcontinent; thereafter, Balochistan was considered an important strategic ground for the British army. In 1838, the British anticipated to establish relations with the state of Kalat in Balochistan. Since Balochistan provided easy access to Qandahar and Herat, developments in

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Afghanistan and Central Asia shaped the British policy towards Baluchistan.¹⁷ As a result, in 1839, an agreement was signed between the British and the Khan of Kalat, Mehrab Khan, which allowed British-Indian forces to pass through Baluchistan without any obstruction.

In 1871, the Gold Smith line was drawn and demarcated in 1896 which gave western Baluchistan to Persia while retaining the larger eastern part for the British. The Durand Line, drawn by the British in 1984, further divided Baluchistan between British Baluchistan and Afghanistan.¹⁸

Later, in 1870 the British Empire came to an understanding with Iran to demarcate Baluchistan; under the agreement, many of the villages under Khan's control were given to Iran. In 1896 and again in 1905, Anglo-Persian Joint Boundary Commissions were appointed to divide Baluchistan between Iran and Britain.¹⁹ Learning from the first and second Anglo-Afghan wars, the British and Russia entered into an understanding to mutually demarcate boundary of Afghanistan. As a result, the 'Durand Line' was drawn under a treaty signed in 1893.



Note: Map of British administered Baluchistan.²⁰

Balochistan was divided into British Balochistan, and the leased areas under British control, and the Khanate of Kalat, de jure being ruled under the control of the Khan²¹. The rulers of Kalat were never fully independent. There was always a paramount power to which they were subject.²² Balochistan under the British was divided into three parts: British Balochistan, Balochistan states – Kalat, Kharan Makran and Lasbela – and the tribal areas.²³

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British Empire came up with two core policies framework for Balochistan; firstly, ‘close border policy’ and; second, ‘forward policy’. These policies were primarily framed to establish strong foothold in the areas joining Afghanistan and Iran, starting from the North West Frontier to Balochistan.

Close border policy

Under the close border policy, the British government in India exercised direct control over the tribesmen of the province. The policy led to a complete failure in terms of administration in the province and resulted in absolute resistance and four armed revolts by the Baloch. The policy was later eased because it could not produce a proper balance in the province. As a result, Balochistan was theoretically divided into two parts for better management by the British Indian Empire; as ‘Area A’ and ‘Area B’.

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Forward policy

The forward policy was established by the British Indian Empire in order to pursue its larger strategic goals in the region. Its basic goal was to push forward and expand the frontiers of British India. After the first Anglo-Afghan war,

Balochistan was considered as a major buffer zone and its geostrategic location became known. The policy initially aimed at subjugation of the Baloch and other native tribes to the British will. For this purpose, they established a string of garrisons deep in Baloch and Pathan territories.²⁶

As a result, a major infrastructure build-up started to take shape; resulting in some of the major strategic railway lines and roads for the purpose of military logistics at that time. The apprehension of the advancing Czarist influence from the north compelled British policymakers to formulate and implement the 'Forward Policy' aimed at checking the inflow of Russian influence into India from the north.²⁷ Later, this policy was established as the 'Sandeman System'.

The first regular census in the province of Balochistan was carried out in 1901. In the midst of British rule in early 1920s, a movement started to take shape which united all the loose confederacies and tribal areas of Balochistan and the idea of 'Greater Balochistan' emerged. The movement was shortly established as the Anjuman-e-Ittehad-e-Balochistan and later, to give it a more political motive along with an ideological background, its name was changed to Kalat State National Party. In the middle of 1933, the first map of Greater Balochistan was introduced by Mir Abdul Aziz Khan²⁸ as his opposition to the political division of Balochistan by the British Empire. The opposition came against the violation of the treaty that the British had signed with the Khan of Balochistan in 1934 which granted the Baloch the right to defend their territories against any foreign invasion from Central Asia as well as Iran.

Independence of Pakistan and Balochistan

"Balochistan is the land of brave independent people and to you; therefore, national freedom, honour, and strength should have a special meaning. These whispering of 'mulki' and 'non-mulki' are neither profitable for the land nor worthy of it. We are now all Pakistanis – not Baluchis, Pathans, Sindhis, Bengalis, and Punjabis and so on and as Pakistanis we must feel, behave and act and we should be proud to be known as Pakistanis and nothing else."

Quaid-e-Azam's speech in reply to the Civic Address presented by the Quetta Municipality²⁹

Mir Ahmed Yar Khan Baluch, in his autobiography³⁰ recalls that in August 1947, a Round Table Conference was held in which Quaid-e-Azam, Liaquat Ali Khan, Lord Mountbatten, Sir Sultan Ahmed and other important position holders of the State of Kalat participated. As a result, an agreement was agreed which

stated that August 5th of 1947 will be declared as an independent day for the state of Kalat; it will act as an independent country with cordial relations with its neighbours. It was agreed that Kalat will enjoy the status it had in 1838 which allowed it to exercise its right to self-determination and to choose what is best for its country and its people. After the independence of Pakistan, the state of Kalat also announced its independence.

Baloch nationalism turned militant soon after that. During the movement against the One Unit of west Pakistan “it almost appeared as if Balochistan had seceded de facto if not de jure so far as could be judged by the open defiance of authority which prevailed there”.³¹

Military Operations in Balochistan

Pakistan launched its first military operation in the state of Kalat in April 1948; the elected Baloch parliament was dissolved, and the Khan of Kalat was arrested. On May 16, 1948, Prince Karim, the younger brother of Khan of Kalat, resisted the occupation and seizing of Balochistan and started the first Baloch national resistance movement. He was later arrested with his 142 followers and sent to prison.

In 1955, the One Unit Plan was introduced by the then government. Under this scheme, the four provinces of Pakistan; Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and N.W.F.P [now known as Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa] were amalgamated into one unit.³² The idea badly backfired and was strongly condemned and thrown away by the Baloch leaders and was considered as a breach into the Baloch nation. The One Unit system and the Parity formula invoked a sharp reaction among the Baloch, and the demand for its dissolution took a violent turn in Balochistan.³³

The second Baloch resistance took place in the early years of Ayub Khan’s regime. Nawab Nowroz Khan led the second Baloch national resistance. He was arrested when he came for negotiations with Pakistan’s Army, who assured him that he will not be harmed and that the Baloch issues and problems will be addressed. Nawab Nowroz, along with his sons and a nephew, were arrested and later executed. From this point onwards, Baloch ethnicity became the major driving force in the nationalist fight.

Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dissolved the elected Baloch Nationalist Government of Ghaus Bux Bizenjo, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, Khair Bux Marri and Nawab Akbar khan Bugti in Balochistan and launched the longest and massive military operation in Balochistan, which lasted for five years. Khair

Bakhsh Marri formed the Balochistan People's Liberation Front which led large numbers of Marri and Mengal tribesmen into guerrilla warfare against the central government.

Evolution of issue and challenges

The nature of the Balochistan problem is essentially linked with two vital factors³⁴:

1. The absence of democracy in Pakistan; and
2. Inherent and growing economic disparity in the country.

The problem of Balochistan for long has been a low simmering conflict. Under the rule of President Musharraf, military operations continued in Balochistan and the issue of Balochistan rose to its utmost height. Dera Bugti and Kohlu were considered to be the main hotbeds of Baloch insurgency. Military operations were carried out to overcome and destroy insurgency; however, they backfired and resulted in more grave consequences for the country.

Akbar Bugti killing case

For Baloch nationalists, the death of Akbar Bugti became the rallying point in their cause. Nawab Bugti's killing, however, was relatively a late entrant to the Baloch cause. Nevertheless, that resulted in making him the pantheon of Baloch heroes that provided sustenance to political identity that produces rebellion with remarkable regularity.³⁵ The Chief Justice of Pakistan has termed Nawab Akbar Bugti's killing "the biggest mistake" and said that there could be no peace until the Dera Bugti matter was resolved.³⁶ Akbar Bugti's son, after his assassination, filed an FIR against the then President Pervez Musharraf, the then Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, the then Balochistan Governor Owais Ghani, the then interior minister Aftab Sherpao, the then Balochistan chief minister Jam Yousuf and the then provincial home minister Shoaib Nausherwan.³⁷

Missing persons

The issue of missing persons in Balochistan is among the most alarming challenges in the province. The subject is becoming a major irritant in resolving the crisis in the country and in the province. According to the Government of Balochistan, there have been 103 missing persons reported in the Supreme Court

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cases.³⁸ However, the figures vary from report to report; Baloch nationalists claim that the figure in reality is much more than what the government data shows. Forced disappearances and kidnapping is a common norm in the province either by the security officials or by the nationalist groups in the province.

In May 2010, the Supreme Court formed the Commission of Inquiry for Missing Persons, with a mandate to investigate enforced disappearances and provide recommendations for eliminating this practice. A new Commission of Inquiry for Missing Persons was established by the federal Ministry of Interior on March 1, 2011.³⁹

Human rights violations

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented a rising number of abuses by the Pakistani security forces in Balochistan. Amnesty International describes the use of “kill and dump” tactics, under which activists, teachers, journalists and lawyers, even teenagers, have been detained and their bullet-ridden bodies dumped on roadsides at a rate of about 20 a month in the recent past.⁴⁰

Human Rights Watch says hundreds of people have disappeared since 2005 in Balochistan, and it has documented 45 cases of enforced disappearances and torture by Pakistani security forces in the province in 2009 and 2010. It has also reported a growing trend of retaliation by armed rebels on non-Baloch settlers, including the targeted killing of 22 teachers.⁴¹

The insurgency evidently continues to simmer and result in constant attacks on gas pipelines, railway lines, bridges, communication network areas, power stations as well as military areas and military check-post. The new act of terrorism introduced is the use of hand grenades in various terrorist attacks in Quetta and other cities of the province.

Annual Fatalities in Balochistan, 2006-2011

Years	Civilians	SF Personnel	Militants	Total
2006	226	82	142	450
2007	124	27	94	245
2008	130	111	107	348
2009	152	88	37	277
2010	274	59	14	347
2011*	542	122	47	711

Source: SATP, Data till December 31, 2011⁴²

Main actors and nationalist political parties of Balochistan

Three main actors:

1. Bugti Tribe, formerly led by Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti.
2. Marri Tribe, led by Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri.
3. Mengal Tribe, led by Sardar Attaullah Mengal.

The main nationalist political parties of the Balochistan are as follows:

1. Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP): it was formed in 1990 and was headed by [Late] Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti. Although the party had a political motivation, it, to a very large extent, supported the Bugti Tribe.
2. Baloch Haq Talwar (BHT): Baloch Haq Talwar is headed by Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri. Its main objective is to condemn military rule.
3. National Party (NP): it is headed by Dr. Abdul Hayee. It opposes governmental projects like the Gwadar Port and demands Baloch rights to control their own province.
4. Baloch Students Organization (BSO): it represents the Baloch middle-class students who oppose military rule and demands jobs for the youth of Balochistan. BSO, formerly known as Baloch Educational Student Organisation, was formed in 1965.
5. Pushtun-Khwa-Mili-Awami Party (PKMAP): it was formed by the Pushtuns of Balochistan and N.W.F.P. They favour democratic parliamentary system.

Government-claimed insurgent organisations in Balochistan

1. Baloch Liberation Army [BRA]: it is headed by Harbiyar Marri; its main areas of influence include Kohlu, Jafarabad, and Nasirabad in Balochistan. Harbiyar Marri is in exile in London and operates from there. The main demand of the group is independence from Pakistan. It is the most extensive party of the Baloch resistance organisation with its influence not only in Balochistan but also in parts of Afghanistan, Iran and other parts of the world.
2. Baloch Republican Army [BRA]: it is headed Braham Dagh Bugti; its areas of influence include Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Barkhan. Currently, the leader of the group is residing in Switzerland and demands independence.
3. Baloch Liberation United Front [BLUF]: it is headed by Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch. His area of influence is in South Balochistan, mainly the cities of Mastung, Turbat, and Kharan.

4. Baloch Liberation National Front [BLNF]: it is largely headed by Baloch students in Quetta city and parts of Southern Balochistan. BLNF is believed to be actively involved in killings of Punjabi settlers in Balochistan.
5. Balochistan National Party (BNP): formed by Sardar Attaullah Mengal, it was the result of the merger of Mengal's Balochistan National Movement and Ghouse Baksh Bizenjo's Pakistan National Party. Its basic demands are of provincial autonomy, limiting federal government authority to defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications.⁴³

War on terror and security situation in Balochistan

The new growing religious group calling itself Tehrik-e-Taliban Balochistan (TTB), similar to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan in Waziristan, is an emerging threat in Balochistan. There has been no substantive data to determine whether this group is working under Baithullah Mehsud or it is an independent organization. The self-proclaimed spokes-person Engineer Asad of TTB disassociates TTB from

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Baithullah Mehsud's Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP); describes suicide bombing as un-Islamic and rules out any vendetta with the Sherani faction, led by Maulana Sherani of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI). The TTP members are almost all Paktuns, but it is possible that it would also have some Baloch activists.⁴⁴

The TTB is believed to be an active arm of the Quetta Shura; it recruits its manpower from the different madrassas located in the surrounding areas of Quetta. It consists of indigenous fighting units, facilitators and foreign fighters.⁴⁵ However, the more important ones with the major Afghan / Pushtun composition come from madrassas in Chaman, Pishin and Qila Abdullah. They are believed to be Afghan refugees as also Pakistanis.

These recruits are thoroughly trained as Taliban fighters and to believe in the war against the West and eventually die a martyr's death. In the Soviet Afghan war, the madrassas in Chaman contributed to the Mujahedeen movement. Several Afghans who were studying in these camps participated in the war in 1980s. There is considerable concern among people in the Zhob-Qilla Saifullah region following the influx of militants and media reports that the drones may target locations in Balochistan as well.⁴⁶

It is believed that the Taliban militants plan to establish a regional alliance in Balochistan with Iranian Jundullah organization, an insurgent Sunni Islamic organization which has support in both the Pakistani Balochistan and Iranian Balochistan. It was reported that there is a linkage between Pakistani Baloch and Jundullah and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The general impression is that this cooperation will lay the foundation for joint regional operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India.

Taliban and al-Qaeda had suspected Jundullah working under U.S. and Pakistani intelligence agencies to dismantle Iran. Following Abdul Malik Rigi meetings with al-Qaeda's agents, it has been established that these two organizations will go hand in glove to spread terrorism and carry operations in the border region of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. But U.S. officials acknowledge they know relatively little about the remote and arid Pakistani border region, have no capacity to strike there, and have few windows into the turbulent mix of Pashtun tribal and religious politics that has turned the area into a sanctuary for the Taliban leaders, who are known collectively as the Quetta Shura.⁴⁷

If the TTB problem is not addressed, Balochistan will separately be marred by Islamist extremism. According to a report by internal-displacement monitor 2008, "Most of the violence in Balochistan is, however, 'nationalist' and there is no cooperation between pre-dominantly Pushtun Islamist militants in the North and the Baloch nationalist insurgents." Baloch insurgents have always kept a distance from religious ideology mixing in with their nationalist motive and getting in way of their struggle with Islamabad. However, according to a claim made by TTB spokesman, Engineer Asad, the organisation is against fighting the Pakistani security forces, law-enforcement agencies and turning Pakistan into a battlefield.⁴⁸

The new Taliban phenomenon in Balochistan in general is believed to be a cover for U.S. to carry out overt operations to dismantle the ongoing projects of Gwadar, to counter China's access to the Indian Ocean and also to secure the energy route to Central Asia. It is believed that if China is able to get access to the warm waters, it might eventually raise a threat to U.S. military bases in the Gulf. Similarly, it is also said that American intelligence agency – CIA – is funding the TTB along with the Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashker-e-Jhangvi in Balochistan. Pakistan has time and again proposed to fence the Turkhum-Shorawak border to stop Taliban infiltration, but the offer has been turned down by Washington and Kabul.

The likelihood of Baloch militant leaders joining a Pushtun organization is very remote. Both of the groups have different set of ideals and different war objectives. The Baloch nationalists are waging a struggle against the ruling government of Pakistan, whereas, TTB wants no foreign boot on its soil just like its propaganda in Waziristan and other Northern areas. If Islamabad remains ignorant to it, Al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives will surely use Baloch as a hub to 'regroup and rearm'. Recently, there were reports of rift between the Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani and Mullah Omar. Later, Sarajuddin – son of Jalaluddin Haqqani – a member of the Taliban's leadership Council, has called for a change in the Quetta Shura leadership, arguing that lack of leadership has led to the killing of some of the Taliban's most senior commanders.

Pakistan's collaboration with the U.S. in its war on terror has placed the country in a situation where its internal security dynamics are being regularly challenged by the internal militants on its western borders adjoining Afghanistan both in FATA and in Balochistan. Ignoring these security challenges in Balochistan is only magnifying their volume and intensity. The province which had for long faced a burning nationalist insurgency has started to become the next big target for the United States. *The New York Times* reported that, "the support for the Taliban and other militant group is Pakistan's spy service, the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence. The Taliban's widening campaign in southern Afghanistan is made possible in part by direct support from operatives in Pakistan's military intelligence agency.⁴⁹ [The support to the Taliban U.S. believe is not just in monetary form but also in the form of weapons and military supply as well as planning and guidance towards its targets. However, Pakistan time and again has denied any such relations with Taliban or any other militant organisation.

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America believes that virtually all of the Afghan Taliban's strategic decisions are made by the Quetta Shura; decisions flow from the Shura to Taliban field commanders, who in turn make tactical decisions that support the Shura's strategic direction,⁵⁰ hence, believing that fighting the Quetta Shura will raise chances to engage more moderate Taliban and al Qaeda operatives into talks, but the Pakistani and U.S. authorities fail to understand that Taliban are not going to fight according to American principles of war and tactics. Together, U.S. and

Pakistani authorities should realize that it is first and foremost essential to bargain with the nationalist leaders and other influential parties in Balochistan and take them on board if they wish to fight Taliban. Talibanisation of Balochistan will not only jeopardize the integrity of the federation, but also cause unrest in the entire region.

There is little probability of established relations between Baloch separatists and the Taliban movement. That is because the Baloch and the Pakhtoon (the Taliban movement is essentially a Pakhtoon-led movement) have their own ethnic conflicts in Balochistan, and it is a pressing internal issue that threatens to boil over. The Baloch are of the view that Pakhtoon living in Balochistan are exploiting their resources and the quotas that the federal government has allocated for the province, as well other business opportunities. The Baloch stance is that while they fight with corresponding forces for the province's rights, the Pakhtoon in Balochistan take advantage of the shares given to the province by the Federal government. According to the Baloch, the presence of Taliban and other sectarian groups of religious parties are only likely to sabotage their insurgency. The Baloch maintain that they are fighting for a greater cause.

Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but least populated province with a troubled history is currently in the news for all the wrong reasons. Target killings, kidnappings, separatist movements, terrorism, ethnic violence, human rights violations, and a general sense of unrest have become perennial issues that are increasingly highlighted in the national media. However, there is always a disclaimer attached, i.e., Balochistan is a province with tremendous untapped economic potential, especially from mineral resources, that needs to be harnessed and utilized for the good of the people.

It has almost become rhetorical to point out the mineral and natural richness and of the profits, which if availed, could turn the country into an economically viable and self-reliant entity. Pakistan is regarded to be an agricultural country, and hence, historically, the rather barren Balochistan remained neglected. The irony now is that the mineral riches of the province and its strategic coast and trade routes make it a potential saviour.

It is important to understand hurdles to their immediate or potential success and in order to carry out a realistic assessment of their long-term progress. Thus, the Gwadar port, the Reko Diq mines, the Sui gas pipelines and some dam-based energy projects will be examined as we seek to point out the challenges and opportunities from a disgruntled region. Ironically, one primary reason for

indignation is this very use of resources since the justified claim is that they have not been used to benefit the very region they come from – the natural gas from Sui being a major case in point.

In order to understand the importance of these separate projects that can in no way be de-linked from the overall progress in Balochistan, it is necessary to see the economic situation overall in context of the recent National Financial Commission award, and the earlier much maligned Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan (AHB) package. The package aims, among other things, to delegate a range of powers to the Balochistan government, and requires federal authorities to obtain provincial government's consent with respect to major projects.⁵¹

While some recognize it as a folly to simply seek solutions from a purely economic perspective, it is clear that economic incentives are part of the problem. It is thus the NFC award that together with other 'incentives' provides a legal, sustained and organized framework for the province's long-term growth. And hence, we need to point out its importance, deficiencies and the opportunities emanating from its implementation.

The province will receive Rs12 billion in arrears, after acceptance by the federal government of its demands to raise with retrospective effect the well-head price of gas and the gas development surcharge. Federal grants on account of the NFC award and the Aghaz-i-Haqooq Balochistan (AHB) package were estimated at Rs12 billion, also regulate service of 11,500 police and Levies personnel and 8,500 new jobs.⁵²

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The AHB package has been largely derided, with one prominent Baloch leader calling it a 'joke'.⁵³ Out of 61 modest recommendations and points made in the AHB package, only 15 have been implemented so far. However, the government has claimed again and again that it will implement all points in 2013. Nevertheless, the execution of the package is nowhere in sight.

One thing remains clear. That the economic, political and social rights of the province have been, at best, compromised since independence, and in essence, the process now starts. But, while recognition is an important first step, implementation is another matter altogether. Moreover, it is a policy mistake to

simply assume that giving economic rights is the only matter of concern; when rectifying measures are meant only to foster economic integration, they miss the point of the crisis of Balochistan.⁵⁴ Non-implementation of the Balochistan package has simply highlighted the rights the people of the province do not have. The operation of the security agencies against the ‘terrorists’ is of no use if no measures are taken to improve the lives of those people who are in a state of rebellion.⁵⁵

Scores of protest in Balochistan have been due to zero achievement of the PPP government’s promises. The AHB package is stagnant and its progress in terms of resolving the crisis in Balochistan is negligible. The main challenge to Balochistan’s development comes from the institutions, social structure, political fragmentation and short-sighted policies. The government over the years has failed to produce any development, social or economic, in the region. The economic development of Balochistan has been a great challenge. It is a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structure, popular attitudes and national institutions. It has a limited labour generation, limited agriculture land, water scarcity, limited industrial development and, above all, a constant security challenge.

U.S. bill on Balochistan

On February 9, 2012, the oversight and investigations subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs convened a hearing on Balochistan; a resolution was passed in the U.S. Congress which specifically dealt with the situation in Balochistan, recommending that the province becomes a separate nation independent of Pakistan. The bill was tabled by Congressman Dana Rohrabacher and it stirred the security as well as political calculus in Pakistan.

In his opening remarks, Rep Rohrabacher said that Balochistan is a turbulent land marked by human rights violations “by regimes that are against U.S. values.”⁵⁶ America officially views the conflict in Balochistan as an internal matter of Pakistan. However, the continuance of violence and growing instability in the province and widespread presence of Taliban raises concerns for the U.S. and makes it worthy of their attention.

The issue of Balochistan has been burning in Pakistan for decades, but in the past few years it has reached a more serious edge. The international community, unwary of Pakistan largest province, has now started to take interest in the region, especially due to its geostrategic importance.

Apart from the concerns over the U.S. bill raised by the Foreign Office of Pakistan, Pakistan's Ambassador to U.S. has also raised serious concerns in U.S. regarding the issue as it will affect the already strained relations between America and Pakistan. However, in turn, U.S. State Department distanced itself from the proceedings and the Congressional hearing on Balochistan commenting that the problems of Balochistan should be resolved through peaceful and political means. At a news briefing in Washington, the department's spokesperson, Victoria Nuland, said that the U.S. administration has not changed its policy and continues to see Balochistan as part of Pakistan.⁵⁷

The bill on can be interpreted through two competing theories. Firstly, the time period in which the bill was circulated was when Pakistan had choked the NATO supply lines to Afghanistan in retaliation to the Salala incident.⁵⁸ This move can be construed as an attempt by U.S. to embarrass Islamabad and also to put pressure on Pakistan.

Secondly, in the backdrop to the Colonel Ralph Peter's map which was published in the Armed Forces Journal in June of 2006⁵⁹? Although the map doesn't reflect the policies and strategies planned by the Pentagon, it has been a topic of discussion on many occasions by different political figures in U.S.



According to Colonel Ralph Peter's article, the boundaries projected in the map redress the wrongs suffered by the most significant "cheated" population groups, such as the Kurds, Baloch and Arab Shia, but still fails to account adequately for Middle Eastern Christians, Bahais, Ismailis, Naqshbandis and many another numerically lesser minorities.

Objected and criticised by the government of Pakistan, the bill was welcomed by many Baloch nationalist leaders and was seen as a way out of the misery they are facing.

Recommendations

Three main key developing strategies which can be applied in the long term in order to systematically develop Balochistan are as under:

- Generating social awareness and services.
- Generating growth development which means reforms in the existing economic structure and policies at the provincial level in Pakistan. In the need to do so, a careful scrutiny is required to understand the resources whether mineral, industrial or agricultural in Balochistan to develop them in a way which is more favourable for the people of the province.
- Private sector should be encouraged to invest in the province. Currently the contribution of the private sector is close to nonexistent. The investments can be in infrastructure development, crop and fruit farming as well as livestock.

The following steps, on the other hand, need to be taken on a priority basis:

1. *Addressing human right issue:* Failure to overcome the human rights issue can in future make way for direct foreign intervention in the province. As a result, the province which already is under the cloud of isolation may drift away from the federation, accepting a foreign intervention.
2. *Setting the house in order:* Ensuring immediate and effective measures to overcome hostilities in the province. It is imperative to set up a short-term strategy which immediately deals with the growing frustration in the province. The initial short-term strategy can be later diversified into a long-term sustainable plan for the province.
3. *Addressing provincial inequality:* It is this provincial inequality that has fiercely triggered the sense of deprivation among Baloch masses. Even the provincial governments have been severely inhibited in their efforts

to improve conditions because of the fact that Islamabad takes direct decisions over policies governing the province.⁶⁰

4. *Improvement of law and order situation:* The higher judiciary may entrust the subordinate courts to actively pursue cases of violence. The judiciary should also be more assertive in ensuring compliance with orders.⁶¹

Conclusion

It is high time to address the economic concerns of the province with the purpose of one, understanding grievances and looking at the way they have been addressed, and two, looking at the oft-quoted potential of the province through its large energy and mineral based projects. Years of ill-conceived development policies and priorities, military operations, and poor governance have resulted in Balochistan's being the most backward province. What Balochistan needs is a good and efficient government with a review of its policies on Afghanistan as well as its status on war on terror so that it can help them resolve their differences and misperceptions that have resulted in the conflict scenario now.⁶²

There is an immediate need to rethink the national policy and identify the loopholes that are resulting in the crisis scenario. Playing the trio blames game among the tribal lord, dictatorship and democracy is not what is required. The issue, if not handled carefully, will end up putting the entire nation in grave danger. There is no doubt that Pakistan has given a lot in America's War on Terror and gained little. Conversely, Kabul and Western governments believe that Islamabad has contacts with the Taliban leadership and it has been ignoring their activities in its territory.⁶³

Throughout the period since the partition, the Baloch have had an uncomfortable relationship with the central government of Pakistan.⁶⁴ What is now important to stabilize this growing situation is to look again at the mistakes that were made in the past by the government. The period after the election and formation of the outgoing democratic government has, on the other hand, proved to be one of positive signals. Suicide bombings have become less frequent. The military is at the same time also being evacuated from many of the tribal areas.

For many analysts in Pakistan, the international community is now reflecting on the possibility of an independent Balochistan which is being sold as a complete package to the strategic community, primarily to the U.S.⁶⁵ The need of the hour is unity and not division. It is required for Balochistan as a province to prosper and for greater interest of Pakistan regionally and globally. Balochistan is

a gold mine for Pakistan, but if the current crisis is carried on, it would definitely change into a ticking time-bomb. It is in Pakistan's interest to understand and recover the situation, make way for possibilities and have a much more flexible approach in its policy.

The Taliban and al Qaeda have never been anyone's friend, and their strings are certainly not pulled in Islamabad. The dynamics in Balochistan are absolutely different and have been overlooked. Balochistan is already the victim of low-intensity conflict and recurrent insurgencies, pairing it with war in North and South Waziristan will be more catastrophic and troublesome to handle. Sooner or later, it will emerge as a fault line conflict along with an international theatre of war where bounties would be placed to hunt Taliban or al Qaeda. A tactful approach is required to fight the menace of terrorism rather than opting for abrupt moves.

To conclude, Pakistan's internal security challenges not only undermine its own national interests but also hinder the smooth drive of regional and international actors to achieve their objectives in this part of the world. Hence, it is a pre-requisite that the Pakistan should recognize that a stable Balochistan is essential for economically empowering Pakistan and for stabilizing the volatile security situation in the country at large.

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