

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE					Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)		2. REPORT TYPE			3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
				5b. GRANT NUMBER		
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
				5e. TASK NUMBER		
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)					8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)					10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
					11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT						
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES						
14. ABSTRACT						
15. SUBJECT TERMS						
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)	

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:
BALOCHISTAN: THE INSURGENCY THAT ISN'T

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Balochistan: The insurgency that isn't

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Thesis: While there are legitimate grievances against the Federal Government of Pakistan, the violence perpetrated by Baloch separatists is not a popularly supported movement but a foreign funded attempt by a few Sardars (tribal leaders) to maintain relevance and personally benefit from their position of power.

Discussion: Balochistan has witnessed five violent phases in its history since 1947. The first four have been relatively minor affairs with a small following. The fifth phase of violence started in 2004-5 and has received not only international attention but also international sponsorship. No violent phase has been able to garner public support and have essentially been elitist Baloch Sardars coercing the government for power and money. Balochistan's fractured tribal political structure makes democratic dispensation difficult enabling Sardars to exploit their tribesmen because of deep rooted tribal customs. Grievances exacerbated by Sardars for personal gains and blamed on the Federal government have created an impression of Baloch victimization and are utilized by Sardars as justification for inciting violence. Several regional countries and the United States have interests in Balochistan. For some an unstable Balochistan and for others a stable Balochistan serves their national interests.

Conclusion: Sandeman's formula has bestowed Sardars with immense wealth and unlimited authority, and power is addictive. It is this addiction that has made these Sardars oppose Islamabad's plans of major development. They realize and resent the fact that their superior status will be abolished. The situation in the province is far from being unmanageable, but with continual disregard to Baloch sentiments which have been aggravated by Sardars, the problem has all the ingredients to spiral out of control. Pakistan does not have to look anywhere else or too far back in history to learn what a disenfranchised people can do even in the face of a strong military. Islamabad should do all it can to avoid another East Pakistan (an erstwhile part of Pakistan which gained independence as Bangladesh in 1971). The portrayal of the Baloch people rising against Pakistani federation is a calculated manoeuvre to stigmatize Balochistan, and Pakistan at large, for foreign investment. Where Balochistan's potential has till now sparked interminable feuds; the same potential can spread peace & prosperity and dramatically alter balances of geo-strategic power. Balochistan holds the fate of not just Pakistan but the entire region.

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BALUCHISTAN: THE INSURGENCY THAT ISN'T

*Let the world witness another clash, of the spirit and flesh,
Civilization has once again loosened the reins of its beasts.¹*
(Dr. Sir Allama Mohammad Iqbal)

INTRODUCTION

Balochistan² –the home of the Baloch is the Western most province of present-day Pakistan. It is uniquely the largest and smallest province of the Pakistani Federation. Largest in area and smallest in population. Lying astride three of the world's most important regions – oil-rich Middle-East, resource-endowed Central-Asia, and population dense South-Asia; Balochistan has a uniquely strategic location. Balochistan itself is endowed with vast resources, naturally increasing the significance of this land. The shared border with Iran and having the closest coastal outlet for Afghanistan and Western China only further enhance the geopolitical and geo-economic importance of this province as a transnational trade and energy conduit. See Map-1 for reference.



Map-1: Balochistan Province on regional map³

The geopolitical importance of this province has brought Balochistan to the international stage. Exploiting decades old fissures within the Pakistani federation and grievances (some legitimate, some imagined), external powers have funded a few anti-state Sardars (tribal leaders) to wage a separatist campaign to smear Pakistan's image as a prospective market for investment. These Sardars themselves have a personal stake in opposing Islamabad; they view modernity in the province as a ploy of Islamabad to undermine the traditional power structure. The death of a prominent Sardar in 2006 aggravated the situation and the resistance which was, in essence, an extortion racket led by a few influential Sardars, began to pose as a separatist movement based on a narrative of oppression and deprivation. While there are legitimate grievances against the Federal Government of Pakistan, the violence perpetrated by Baloch separatists is not a popularly supported movement but a foreign funded attempt by a few Sardars to maintain relevance and personally benefit from their position of power.

This research reviews the Balochistan issue and grievances, the significance of Balochistan in the regional and international geopolitical landscape to bring out the role of external factors, to help formulate a comprehensive strategy to deal with the issue. It will delve into the history of the Baloch land and people; the grievances, both real and imagined, that fuel the separatist agenda and the interests of foreign actors will also be discussed followed by proposals to combat the instability and counter external involvement.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE ISSUE

Although Baloch national identity can be said to pre-date history, Baloch national cohesion is altogether a separate matter. The term "Baloch" is used to identify a confederation of five hundred or so tribes that share a common culture and language. The origin of the Baloch people is debated. Baloch are either considered Arab (Semitic), Aryan, aboriginal people of the

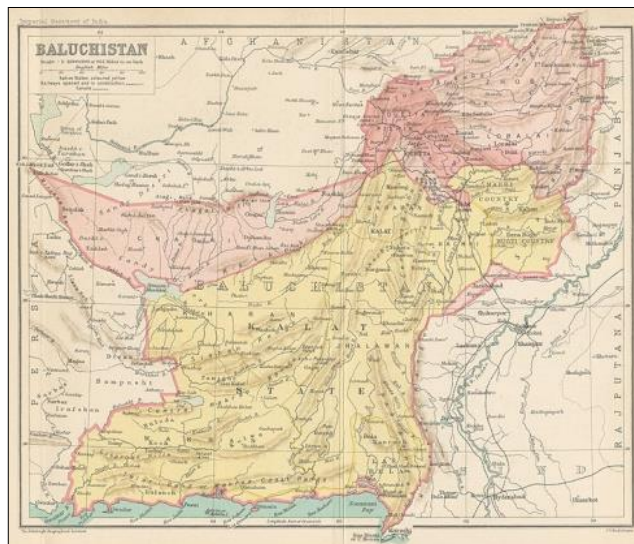
area, or descendants of a mixture of people that have crossed through the region.⁴ Anatol Lieven writes, “Baloch legends say that they originally moved into their present territories from the Middle East. Modern Nationalism by contrast has sought to claim that they have lived where they are now for thousands of years.”⁵ This same sentiment of being aboriginal is echoed in the words of Akbar Bugti, “I have been a Baloch for several centuries. I have been a Muslim for 1400 years. I have been a Pakistani for just over fifty.”⁶ Irrespective of the actual origins, the image of a wronged aboriginal people is undoubtedly a compelling narrative.

The ancestors of present-day Baloch began to settle along the areas east of the Zagros Mountains range in Iran from the sixth to the fourth century BCE. Eventually, they spread to the Indus River in Pakistan. Kalat became the capital of the Baloch confederacy after the ouster of the Hindu rulers. As the Baloch were fiercely independent, bitter rivalries among the tribes resulted in fractured political and military institutions. This weakness was exploited throughout history by the Greek, Afghan, Persian, Sikh and Mughal Empires. It was not until the mid-18th century that all Baloch tribes became a single unit and that too ended with the death of Nasir Khan. Under the Khan, only the ruling tribe had political authority, while the remaining tribes only provided manpower for the army. Thus, the natural aversion to central authority was exacerbated, and the political unity of the tribes fell apart.⁷ By this time, the British had established themselves as the dominant military and political authority on the Indian Subcontinent. In 1839 the Baloch State came to an end and accepted the sovereignty of the British Raj.⁸

The rivalry between the British and Russian Empires in Central Asia during the 19th century is referred to as "The Great Game." The British were worried that the Russians wanted to incorporate India into its empire, while Russians saw the British presence to its South as

worrisome.⁹ To create a buffer, the Khan of Kalat was first made a vassal of the King of Kabul and then in 1845 became subordinate to the British Government. The British maintained that they would not interfere in the affairs of Kalat, and the Khan would ensure that British army caravans would be able to traverse Balochistan without fear of attack. However, the Khan of Kalat, who was more accepted by the British than by his own Sardars and was unable to keep his end of the bargain. His subordinate tribal chiefs often revolted and attacked British convoys from 1854 till 1872, creating an environment which the British considered was conducive to Russian interference.¹⁰

Therefore, in 1872, the British introduced reforms for the province under Major Robert Groves Sandeman. He took advantage of the existing tribal divisions and weaknesses. Through financial incentives, Sandeman enhanced the position of compliant tribal leaders in the tribal hierarchy, in effect strengthening British influence without increasing military presence in the province. The tribal leaders were made responsible for ensuring that their respective tribes did not interfere with British caravans. Sandeman's policies were so productive that by 1876, Balochistan was firmly under the control of the British.¹¹



Map-2: Balochistan showing Chief Commissioner's Province and Princely states¹²

In 1877, the British divided Balochistan (see Map-2) for better administrative control. Some areas were merged with the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, whereas the areas bordering the strategically important buffer of Afghanistan were brought under direct control of the British by the formation of the Balochistan Agency or Chief Commissioner's Province. The remaining portions of Balochistan, i.e., Kalat, Makran, Lasbela, and Kharan became princely states. The authority of the Khan of Kalat, who had once been the ruler of the entire Balochistan, was significantly reduced.¹³

These actions produced a politically fragmented province, with several different centers of power and constant petty feuds.¹⁴ Eventually, Quetta became the province's center with the tribes being semi-autonomous. When the remainder of India was being introduced to technical innovations, Balochistan was being propped up as a bulwark against the Russian threat. Thus, Balochistan was not treated as a province, but rather a military necessity and deliberately kept underdeveloped.¹⁵

On 18 July 1947, British Balochistan (Chief Commissioner's Province) accepted becoming a province of Pakistan. Shortly afterward Kharan, Makran, and Lasbela also acceded to join Pakistan. Only the State of Kalat took its time to decide. During this time Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (founder of Pakistan), met the Khan of Kalat and convinced him to accede to Pakistan and on his advice, the Khan of Kalat agreed. Later, the Khan invited Jinnah and Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah (sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, dubbed the mother of the Pakistani nation) to his palace. There, both were weighed in gold that was given to the government of Pakistan as a gesture of goodwill.¹⁶

However, the Khan's younger brother, Prince Karim, felt robbed of his status and life of privilege. The Khan tried to dissuade the rebel prince who was adamant about fighting a guerilla

war against Pakistan and fled to Afghanistan. In response, the Khan issued a decree against his brother, it stated:

I am disappointed to find that in spite of my proclamation of March 27th 1948, some people of Kalat and Pakistan continue to misrepresent the wishes of my people and the policy of my Government. After consulting my Sardars and my Government, I wish to make the position clear once and for all. I am Muslim and my people are [mostly] Muslims. Both before and after the departure of the British Government we have prayed and worked for Pakistan. Kalat's accession was delayed for some special difficulties of form, not because we desired any other friendship than Pakistan....There is a small negligible element in the state who [has] opposed my Government in this policy. These persons have seduced my younger brother Agha Abdul Karim Jan to leave the state and settle with a few followers on the border of Afghanistan. He has taken this action without my knowledge and without my approval....I have called upon the Government of Pakistan who [is] responsible for the foreign affairs and the defence of the state to take strong steps in cooperation with my administration to see that no attack upon the state is possible....To those of my people who are with Agha Abdul Karim Jan and have not already returned I say that there are/is still time to return to their homes, while they have committed no crimes. I give them extended time till August 1st [1948] to return and lenient treatment will be given to those who have committed no offense in the Kalat State. But if they do not return before that date, they will forfeit the right be citizens of Kalat and to hold property in the state.¹⁷

The prince's short-lived rebellion received no support from his kin or any foreign power and quickly withered away. He was later arrested along with his 126 followers and sentenced to

10 years imprisonment by a Baloch jirga.¹⁸ This rebellion motivated by greed and lust for power is mythologized by separatists as the first Baloch insurgency.¹⁹

The second so-called insurgency too was enacted by one individual – tribal chief Nauroz Khan. Of its scope and support, Siddiqui says, “In 1959, when Nauroz Khan took up arms against the state, he too, was fighting a lone battle. There was no support coming from the Marris or Bugtis or for that matter from the rest of Balochistan.”²⁰ The resistance lasted for about a year, after which Nauroz Khan was arrested, tried for treason and imprisoned till his death in 1964.²¹

While the genesis of the first two armed struggles can be attributed to the self-preservation of Baloch aristocrats, the next two were the result of self-interests of Pakistani leaders in Islamabad. Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Bhutto utilized the Sandeman formula and strengthened Pro-Pakistan tribal leaders. Ayub Khan – Pakistan’s first Martial Law administrator and second president, viewed the Baloch leadership with suspicion. He arrested prominent tribal chieftains, Nawab Akbar Bugti, Khair Bakhsh Marri, Atta Ullah Mengal and Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo on trumped-up charges of supporting Sardar Nauroz Khan. Eventually, the recognition of Balochistan as a separate province and general amnesty for the Sardars subdued the third wave of violence in Balochistan.²²

In 1971, after a bloody civil war, East Pakistan declared itself a sovereign state (it is now Bangladesh). It was in this same decade that the fourth round between the Baloch Rebels and the Pakistani State was fought. This was the first time that foreign elements became involved in Balochistan. According to Laurie Mylorie, “Baghdad supported Baluch (sic) rebellion ...from 1969 to 1973.”²³ In 1973, a cache of arms destined for Baloch separatists was discovered in the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad.²⁴ The tip regarding the arms cache was given by a pro-Islamabad Baloch Sardar to Pakistani authorities, a rival of the Sardar that had made the deal with

Baghdad.²⁵ Shortly afterward, the Baloch provincial assembly was dissolved, and Baloch Sardars were again arrested. The violence ended in 1979 when all Sardars were released, and Martial Law was again imposed in Pakistan by General Zia-ul-Haq.

For the next two and a half decades Baloch separatism was virtually absent from the national political discourse, and Balochistan remained relatively peaceful.²⁶ However, petty feuds and internal tribal conflict continued unabated. This period saw the authority of the Sardar increase enormously over his tribe. While Zia-ul-Haq remained busy in the Afghan Jihad, the behavior of the Sardars was largely ignored. Sardars extorted money from businesses and established modern slavery in Baloch society where the tribal chief became the ultimate arbiter of life, death and everything in between. Recourse to any constitutional rights by an average Baloch became unthinkable. Tribal chiefs could kill people for minor infractions without consequence.²⁷ A perpetual cycle was created where backwardness further fueled the power of the tribal chiefs, who to this day remain adamantly against any form of modernity.

The final phase of violence too has its roots in personal grudges. In an endeavor to bring prosperity to the province, mega projects were launched by the government of General Pervaiz Musharaf. However, separatists saw these projects as a scheme by Islamabad to attract non-Baloch people from other provinces, thus making the indigenous Baloch a minority in their own province. Islamabad, on the other hand, said that its refusal to pay extortion to the Sardars was the real reason for their violent agenda. The most vocal opposition was from Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti. Both President Musharaf and Nawab Bugti were head-strong and overbearing. Before a compromise could be reached, Nawab Bugti's violent death due to an explosion inside a cave during a negotiation ended all chances of a settlement. The separatists blamed the government, while the government blamed the separatists for the explosion.²⁸ The Baloch nationalist parties boycotted

the general elections of 2008 as a sign of protest and many nationalist leaders went abroad in self-imposed exile. The exile was short lived as these Sardars realized that without government largesse, their life of luxury would not be possible. Therefore, many returned to contest the elections of 2013. Zahid Hussain sums up these five years of violence, “Although the military has managed to contain the rebellion through brute force, it has not mitigated the alienation of the ethnic Baloch population.”²⁹

This brief history provides context for the problems plaguing Balochistan. Vendettas between myopic politicians and Sardars, and between pro-Pakistan and anti-Pakistan Sardars are masqueraded as a struggle for the emancipation of the Baloch people. The motives behind the violence are much less righteous, and compromises have been brokered ultimately through monetary incentives to the violent Sardars. Inducements may include a personal share of Rs 50 million (US \$ 452,000) from Balochistan’s annual development budget.³⁰ Islamabad too has used the Sandeman formula of buying loyalties and creating fissures among the separatist Sardars. Lieven writes, “It is above all thanks to Pakistani state’s ability... that as of 2009 all but three of the eighty-odd tribal Sardars or claimants in Balochistan were ranged with the government, even members of Nawab Bugti’s own Jamhoori Watan Party continued to sit in the provincial assembly!”³¹

CONTEMPORARY GRIEVANCES

Historical grievances of Balochistan have been largely due to their fractured tribal political structure and magnification of economic disparity and exploitation (first in British Raj and then in Pakistan). These historical grievances have created an impression of Baloch victimization. It is through this lens of political and economic subjugation that contemporary grievances are portrayed by Baloch nationalists. The narrative has been persuasive to an extent,

“While no Baloch rebellion has extended to the entire province, or succeeded in mobilizing more than a handful of the Baloch tribes that dwell there, distrust of the Punjab-dominated central government and festering discontent with the political order fostered over the years by that government are very widely shared among the Baloch.”³²

The modern Baloch problem has many facets, one of which revolves distinctly around resources and their royalties. Natural gas was discovered in Sui, Balochistan in 1952. However, as of August 2017, 23 of the 33 districts of Balochistan are not supplied gas,³³ even though article-158 of the constitution of Pakistan gives the first right to the province in which a natural gas well is discovered. As egregious as it may seem on the part of Islamabad to be plundering resources from Balochistan, it is seldom pointed out that 12.5% in royalty in addition to the excise tax and development charges have been regularly paid to the province since the commencement of the project.³⁴ Unfortunately, this amount has never been used for gas distribution or the benefit of the local populace; instead the resentment is misdirected towards Islamabad. Apart from these constitutionally mandated payments, local people and tribal leaders have also been paid for the use of land and in some cases illegal gratification of the Sardars.³⁵ The gas wells at Sui are just an example of local Sardars minting money and not spending a Paisa (1/100th of a Pakistani Rupee) on the development of their areas or welfare of their people. This, of course, does not absolve Islamabad of the responsibility to its citizens. Islamabad encourages companies to undertake philanthropic works in undeveloped areas. Though there is no established law which obligates Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), companies have been investing in local communities through corporate philanthropy for decades.³⁶

Balochistan has been blessed (and cursed) with enormous wealth in natural resources.³⁷ It is ironic how much wealth an average Baloch has under his feet, yet living in abject poverty.

Natural gas wells at Sui are just one example of Machiavellian Sardars manipulating tribal customs to line their pockets at the expense of their tribesmen.

As far back as 1958, when Gwadar was purchased from Oman, Pakistani strategists saw the potential to change Pakistan's fortunes. In this regard, Robert D. Kaplan says, "One key to its fate is the future of Gwadar, a strategic port whose development will either unlock the riches of Central Asia, or plunge Pakistan into a savage, and potentially terminal civil war."³⁸ Very few Pakistanis would argue the optimism in the first half of Kaplan's statement but fewer still would agree with the second. The reality is that so far neither extreme has proven to be true. Gwadar port is on track to become South-Asia's largest within 5-years and by 2030, its annual handling capacity is projected to increase to 400 million tons making it one of the world's ten largest ports.³⁹

A covetous project by any standard, but the Baloch see this project not as an economic boon. They feel that the project will attract people from other provinces and politically disenfranchise the Baloch even more. Additionally, as Balochistan's socio-economic indicators already make the province one of the least developed in Pakistan, the Baloch feel that they will be further marginalized when competing in an industrial market.

According to the provisional result of the 2017 Census of Pakistan, Balochistan's population is 12.4 million or 5.94% of Pakistan's 207.8 million total⁴⁰ While official results regarding census statistics of mother languages (an indication of ethnicity) have been withheld, some privy to the data say that the largest ethnicity in Balochistan is no longer Baloch but rather Pashtun.⁴¹

While separatist narratives point to a conspiracy by Islamabad to gradually displace Baloch by Punjabis in Balochistan, the reality points to something less provocative. Robert

Wirsing points out that the four decades of warfare in neighboring Afghanistan have resulted in several thousand refugees to settle down in Pashtun majority areas of Balochistan.⁴² These refugees (themselves mostly Pashtun) have assimilated to their new adopted surroundings and have thus already altered the demography of the province. There is recognition in Islamabad that the rights of the indigenous Baloch will be compromised as a result of internal migration due to the Gwadar project. But to attract investment and generate economic activity, land purchasing rights and settling of outsiders in and around Gwadar is inevitable. This, however, does not mean that any one's political rights should be compromised. Nawab Aslam Raisani, the Chief Minister of Balochistan, proposed that settlers from other provinces be permitted to purchase land and invest in Balochistan, but they may only practice the right of franchise in their home provinces, thus maintaining Baloch primacy in terms of political clout in Balochistan.⁴³ The Federal Government cognizant of the apprehension has assured that the social, economic and legal rights of the local people will be protected. The Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Reform said in this regard, "The people of Balochistan have the right on their resources and the government will protect all rights of the people of the province."⁴⁴

Gwadar port is the centerpiece of the \$62-Billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC),⁴⁵ itself the pilot project of the six planned economic corridors of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.⁴⁶ While the port is the largest project in the CPEC, it is not the only project. The key cooperation areas according to the 'Long Term Plan for CPEC' are: Connectivity, Information network infrastructure, Energy, Trade & Industrial Parks, Agriculture, Tourism, and Finance.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is not just Gwadar or Balochistan, but the entire breadth of Pakistan which will require skilled manpower for the various projects. In anticipation of the requirement of skillfully capable personnel, Pakistan has created the National Vocational & Technical

Training Commission (NAVTTTC) whose mandate is to create a skilled labor force based on market demands. It has over 3,500 affiliated training centers across Pakistan of which 125 are in Balochistan.⁴⁸ Though marginally less than the proportion of Balochistan's population, the number of training centers will increase as industrial infrastructure in the province expands. As all NAVTTTC affiliates follow a uniform syllabus, Baloch workmen will be at par with workers from any other province.

A thorny issue that Baloch leaders have been arguing over for years is the distribution of tax revenues among the provinces.⁴⁹ For a very long time – up until 2010, all tax revenues collected by Pakistan were distributed among the provinces through the National Finance Commission (NFC) award based exclusively on population.⁵⁰ Till then, the smaller provinces having much larger populations did not want to cede any portion of the NFC award to any other province. Thus, since independence, the resentment towards the other provinces (especially Punjab province – the most populous) continued to grow. The narrative, unsurprisingly, spun a tale of Punjab and Punjabis hoarding the resources of the entire country and treating the people of the other provinces as inferior Pakistanis. Alok Bansal of the India Foundation declares Punjabi hegemony the reason for Baloch grievances and says, “For the Baloch nationalists it proves their point that their resources are exploited by Punjabis.”⁵¹

This separatist narrative paints a picture of Balochistan being underdeveloped because of the non-interest of other provinces in its prosperity. Again, there is more at play. The funds provided to the province have rarely been judiciously utilized. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Pakistan's anti-corruption watchdog, arrested Balochistan's Finance Secretary in 2016 for embezzlement. During the investigation, “Rs347,077,400 in cash and Rs53,320,000 worth of prize bonds were recovered, including foreign currency that included \$2,367,543,

£15000, 16,010 Saudi Riyal and jewelry weighing 489.136 kg including 2718.413kg pure gold were recovered.”⁵² Earlier in 2015, NAB also initiated an investigation of the Balochistan education department keeping ghost employees on its payroll.⁵³

In early 2018, the Chief Minister’s Secretary was arrested on corruption charges.⁵⁴ The Chief Minister of the Province in 2014 himself had to make a plea bargain deal with NAB to escape prosecution over corruption. Pakistan ranks 117th out of 180 on Transparency International’s 2017 Corruptions Perception Index,⁵⁵ signifying that corruption is a very serious problem in Pakistan. Yet the extent of misappropriation of assets and embezzlement of public funds by public representatives and their cronies particularly in Balochistan province is unmatched. While separatists conveniently blame other provinces and Islamabad for the dire lack of development in Balochistan,⁵⁶ the malfeasance lies squarely on the shoulder of Sardars who run for public office with the sole intention of siphoning funds intended for public projects.

Of all the grievances, the issue of ‘missing persons’ has received the most media attention and notoriety. ‘Missing persons’ is the term applied to enforced disappearances allegedly by government agencies. In 2014, the parliament passed a bill which provided security agencies with additional powers, which human rights organizations considered contrary to internationally recognized human rights and constitutionally protected liberties.⁵⁷ The law provided law enforcement agencies extensive powers of search, arrest and detention for the purpose of speedy trials of terrorism suspects.⁵⁸ But instead of providing the law enforcement agencies a powerful tool to combat terrorism, it has resulted in the agencies being accused of human rights violations.

Mama Qadeer, a Baloch rights activist, gained national and international prominence for a false claim that the Pakistan government had abducted 25,000 people from Balochistan.⁵⁹

Because of public interest, the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) directed the Federal Government to establish a commission to locate the allegedly missing persons. This commission was formed for a period of six months. Today the commission is one of Pakistan's longest-serving public inquiry commissions in history.⁶⁰ As per the figures of the commission's chairman, there are 1,386 pending cases of enforced disappearances in Pakistan.⁶¹ Of these only 96 are from Balochistan, a number which includes Pashtun and other non-Baloch people arrested for terrorism in the province.⁶² Therefore, the argument of separatists that Baloch are specifically being targeted by state functionaries is statistically incorrect.

The extension in the mandate of the commission would indicate that the commission has been a resounding success; unfortunately, that is not the case. Reema Omer, an investigative journalist and a legal adviser for the International Commission of Jurists says, "While the commission has done well to document cases of enforced disappearances and 'trace the whereabouts' of a number of disappeared people, it has completely failed in holding perpetrators accountable".⁶³ Whereas the inability to provide security to its citizens rests squarely on Islamabad, this does not absolve the separatists from aggravating the situation. The government accuses the separatists of carrying out staged abductions to malign Islamabad and the military. In one such incident in 2013, terrorists of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) wearing Para-military uniforms murdered Punjabi workers.⁶⁴ These abductions are usually of people having humble backgrounds and carried out in broad daylight and in busy areas. The mutilated bodies of these abductees are later 'found' and duly publicized by Separatists.⁶⁵ In the midst of allegations and counter-allegations, determining the veracity of any claim is difficult. However, the rationale for the state to abduct people in broad daylight by uniformed personnel who are obviously

recognizable as state functionaries is preposterous, unless the sole purpose of those behind the act is to implicate state functionaries.

INTERESTS OF EXTERNAL PLAYERS IN BALOCHISTAN

In September 2016, an Indian journalist asked US State Department spokesman John Kirby about United States' views on Balochistan 'freedom' struggle, to which he replied, "The US government respects the unity and territorial integrity of Pakistan and we do not support independence for Balochistan."⁶⁶ The spokesman answered similarly twice afterwards, when pressed for a comment. This, however, does not mean that the US does not have interests in Balochistan. James Mattis, the US Secretary of Defense, said the Trump administration opposed the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) because it passed through disputed territory (a portion of the CPEC passes through Kashmir).⁶⁷ Pakistan, however, feels that instead of finding faults in a project which will bring regional prosperity, the US should focus on human rights abuses being carried out in Kashmir.⁶⁸

In 2001, the Battle for Tora Bora did not neutralize Osama Bin Laden, but it did have a calamitous effect on Pakistan. Speaking to General Tommy Franks, President Musharaf said, "You are flushing these guys out and... they are pouring into my country."⁶⁹ Pakistan has since then been fighting a war for survival. Similarly, in 2016 when the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JUA, responsible for the 2010 Times Square bombing) was declared a terrorist organization and targeted by US drones, the group moved away from Pakistan's tribal areas into Balochistan.⁷⁰ Until 2016 no US drone strike had taken place in Balochistan, which had been conveyed as a "Red Line" by the Government of Pakistan to the US.⁷¹ After entering Balochistan the group increased their activities and destabilized the province. Ian Price a Tel Aviv based security

analyst says that whether intentional or not, US counter terrorism operations are pushing militants into Balochistan and thus undermining the CPEC.⁷²

In November 2017, the US Congress was told that according to DOD judgments, “China most likely will seek to establish additional military bases in countries with which it has a longstanding friendly relationship and similar strategic interests, such as Pakistan”⁷³ and “Chinese investments in port infrastructure associated with OBOR potentially could pave the way for Chinese naval access to the (Indian Ocean) region.”⁷⁴ However, both Chinese and Pakistani Foreign Offices have denied any prospects of stationing PLA forces on Pakistani soil in the future.⁷⁵

Pakistan’s political, population, industrial and agriculture cores are concentrated along the Indus River and its tributaries. These areas are close to both the Afghanistan-Pakistan and India-Pakistan borders. Thus, a conventional two-front war could theoretically overwhelm Pakistan’s defenses. Therefore, a friendly (and possibly compliant) Afghan government has always been a strategic compulsion for Pakistan. Since 2001, Pakistan’s two-front nightmare has begun to turn in to a reality when a Pro-India administration established itself in Kabul. The Delhi-Kabul nexus against Pakistan has been attested by the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel when he said, “India for some time has always used Afghanistan as a second front, and India has over the years financed problems for Pakistan on that side of the border”.⁷⁶ The same sentiment was echoed in 2009 by Christine Fair of RAND Corporation when she said that, “Indian officials have told me privately that they are pumping money into Balochistan”⁷⁷ But it is the revelations of the Indian spy captured in Balochistan which lay open Indian plans to foment problems in Balochistan.

According to Commander Kulbhushan Yadav's confession, he is a serving Indian Navy officer and was inducted into India's foreign intelligence agency the Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) in 2003. He established a cover in Chabahar, Iran as a businessman Hussein Mubarik Patel. Over the past 14 years he entered Pakistan several times and financed terrorist activities in Karachi and subversive activities in Balochistan and to target Gwadar port in particular.⁷⁸ Delhi has denied that the apprehended individual is a serving naval officer, saying that he had retired prematurely and no longer has any links with the Indian government.⁷⁹ However, Praveen Swami, an Indian journalist and author specializing in international strategic and security issues wrote an expose in January 2018 contradicting Delhi's claims. Swami writes:

*Since 2013, India has secretly built up a covert action programme against Pakistan, seeking to retaliate against jihadists (sic) and deter their sponsors in the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate. Led by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and now by Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) Anil Dhasmana... But the story of the man on death row illustrates that this secret war is not risk-free. Lapses in tradecraft and judgment, inevitable parts of any human enterprise, can inflict harm far greater than the good they seek to secure.*⁸⁰

A compliant or at least a manageable Pakistan would serve India's interests in attaining regional ascendancy. However, a stable and economically prosperous Pakistan having deep economic and security relations with China is a security concern for India. Indian support to separatists in Balochistan achieves a two-fold purpose of instability in Pakistan and simultaneously discourages Chinese investment in the country. The instability imperils Gwadar port which is seen as an impediment for Indian naval ambitions.⁸¹

In 2007-8 it was reported that the US was arming and funding Jundallah (a Pakistan based Baloch separatist group active in Iran) that has been assassinating Iranian officials and killing innocent civilians.⁸² Tehran accused Pakistan of complicity with US and Pakistan-Iran relations suffered a major setback. Pakistan-US relations also became strained as a result. US blamed Israel of carrying out false flag operations against Iran and eventually assisted in apprehending Jundallah head Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010.⁸³ Both Pakistan and Iran have similar concerns regarding Baloch separatism in their respective countries. The separatist movements in both countries are different in character. While the separatists in Pakistan profess a secular outlook, Iranian separatists have a Sunni character. While both profess an anti-colonial attitude and lambast exploitation by outsiders, neither has any hesitation in inviting forces of third-parties.

The rebellion of Prince Karim withered away because Afghanistan did not support him in 1948. Several years later Afghanistan has had a change of heart. According to a WikiLeaks cable, Afghan Minister of Interior admitted to the US Deputy Ambassador in 2009 that Afghanistan was hosting 400-500 separatists from Pakistan.⁸⁴ One influential leader of the Baloch Separatists, Brahamdag Bugti, had been provided sanctuary in Kabul as admitted by President Karzai according to another WikiLeaks cable.⁸⁵ The cable confirms the Pakistan's concerns that Afghanistan's intelligence service the NDS had provided Bugti a safe house in Kabul.⁸⁶

Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's Opium generating an estimated \$68 billion in annual revenue.⁸⁷ 40% of Afghanistan's drug trafficking utilizes drug trade routes passing through Pakistan.⁸⁸ Alfred McCoy, author of 'Politics of Heroin in South-East Asia' indicates that, "The drug trade accounted for most of its (Afghanistan's) tax revenues, much of its export

income, and a significant share of its employment.”⁸⁹ Therefore, the trade which funds every level of Afghan society all the way to the very top would have a direct interest in keeping Balochistan destabilized to permit trafficking.

According to Centre for Strategic Assessment and Forecasts, a Russian think-tank, Gwadar port threatens the strategic influence of Dubai in the region.⁹⁰ This has caused a silent economic war and a fraying of relations between UAE and Pakistan. Gwadar is compared to Dubai because both port cities are located at the junction of international shipping and energy trade routes. In terms of access to the Indian Ocean, Gwadar takes a distinct geographical advantage (See map-3) as UAE’s increasing rivalry with Iran makes access to Dubai through the narrow Hormuz Strait a potential risk.



Map-3: Access to Indian Ocean from Gwadar and Dubai⁹¹

Gwadar also gives China and Central Asian states access to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East. While there are plenty speculative claims of UAE’s involvement in funding Baloch separatists,⁹² the Government of Pakistan has never accused UAE of involvement. This could possibly mean three things; first - UAE is not involved at all, second - Pakistan does not have proof

of UAE's involvement, or three – UAE is involved and Pakistan does have proof but because of larger political issues does not want to openly blame UAE. Irrespective of the politics involved UAE does consider Gwadar a strategic threat. It is because of this recognition, Qatar (UAE's regional nemesis) has decided to heavily invest in the CPEC.⁹³

Of all foreign countries, China has the biggest stake in maintaining stability in Balochistan. Shipping goods to western China through Pakistan is faster than moving it across China. (See Map-4). China has therefore invested a massive \$62 billion in CPEC with several mega projects in Balochistan.⁹⁴ In pursuit of stability in Balochistan, China has reportedly made overtures to Baloch dissidents.⁹⁵ However, China denies that any dialogue with Baloch separatists has ever taken place.⁹⁶ Irrespective of claims and counter claims, stability in Balochistan is a common interest between China and Pakistan.



Map-4: Cargo routes to Kashgar through Gwadar and through Shanghai⁹⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to its geo-strategic location, Balochistan will remain under international focus for the foreseeable future. A combination of perceived political injustices, socio-economic disparities and the lure of ethno-identity are a recipe for instability for any country. In the absence of a sincere effort to redress Baloch grievances, anti-Islamabad propaganda will remain prevalent.

Tribal life in modern psyche is characterized as a benign, humble and wise system of governance. This blissful ignorance is at complete odds with the cruel reality of what tribal life really is and many people, even in Pakistan, are unaware of the atrocities that tribesmen suffer at the hands of their Sardars. The Sardari system of governance is deeply rooted in Baloch society and the state must gradually wean the Baloch people away from dependence on the Sardar.

The solution lies in strengthening democracy through an all inclusive political process and a people-centric approach driven by an institutionalized mechanism for good governance. Under this overarching framework nationalist political parties of Balochistan willing to work within the constitution of Pakistan should be engaged and facilitated politically at all levels to participate in free and fair elections. A reconciliatory general amnesty should be announced and separatist elements encouraged to participate in the democratic process. Political consensus should be developed within the province to evolve a mechanism for effective governance. Islamabad should implement confidence building measures over contentious issues such as Gwadar port and perceived marginalization of Baloch people. Islamabad should concentrate resources for socio-economic development of common Baloch citizens, thus providing a conducive environment for political dispensation which will subdue Sardari system in due course of time. Policies related to economic activities in the Province should reflect true aspirations of the masses, so that perception about exploitation of Balochistan's resources can be countered. Perception of neglect and outside interference can be countered by capacity building of provincial institutions especially law enforcement agencies.

Pakistan's foreign policy has largely been India centric, With the gradual establishment of CPEC Islamabad needs to shift its focus and evolve a strong regional foreign policy which should focus on improving relations with neighbours and greater economic interaction with

regional countries. Concurrently, evidence of foreign interference in internal security matters should be publically exposed. The Foreign Office should take up rendition cases with those countries where Baloch fugitives have taken shelter.

A great disservice being done to the nation is the harassment and even killing of journalists in Balochistan. The state should ensure appropriate security to the media so that they are well placed to bring objectivity and balance in their reporting. While the media should remain free from the coercive approach of the government, it is equally important that media should not be allowed to promote any foreign agenda. Criticism of government and dissenting views should be tolerated but rebellion should not. A strong media strategy that publicizes state narrative and counters separatist narrative overcoming tribalism and building a cohesive and inclusive Pakistani national identity needs to be formulated.

Several deliberated studies have been carried out for socio-economic and infrastructural development of Balochistan including education and health. The Government of Balochistan should finalize a long term development strategy in the light of such studies and prioritize its spending accordingly. However, no amount of financial prudence can develop Balochistan until corruption is eliminated at least significantly reduced. The rampant corruption has devoured Balochistan's public wealth. While corruption is a problem for all provinces, it should not be used as an excuse to tolerate it. One failure should never be used to justify another. Corruption at all levels must be earnestly rooted out. Young Pakistanis can lead this change, by not being entrenched in patronage networks and being able to question existing practices, the youth of Pakistan can play a significant role in rooting out corruption. Financial management, auditing reforms and transparency can also curb corruption. This anti-corruption formula should be applied not just in Balochistan but country wide without impunity.

The Baloch people in Pakistan have historically displayed secularist trends and have shunned religious extremism. However, the Baloch across the border in Iran primarily identify themselves as a Sunni group; therefore, creeping in from the west, a new found religiosity has the potential to morph in to Islamist violence. The government should strengthen border control on the Iran-Pakistan border and monitor the activities of domestic madrassas (seminaries) and their funding sources. Accessibility to public schooling can significantly reduce the risk of extremist indoctrination.

The separatist narrative of exploitation needs to be countered. The best way to do this is to ensure that natural resources are equitably distributed among the provinces. Historical injustices by successive governments should not now give way to historical amnesia. Gwadar port offers a unique opportunity to Islamabad to atone for both real and perceived injustices. A large proportion of employment dedicated for skilled Baloch people in the project would not only counter separatist narrative but would generate genuine loyalty to the federation.

CONCLUSION

Sandeman's formula has bestowed Sardars with immense wealth and unlimited authority, and power is addictive. It is this addiction that has made these Sardars oppose Islamabad's plans of major development. They realize and resent the fact that their superior status will be abolished. The situation in the province is far from being unmanageable, but with continual disregard to Baloch sentiments which have been aggravated by Sardars, the problem has all the ingredients to spiral out of control. Pakistan does not have to look anywhere else or too far back in history to learn what a disenfranchised people can do even in the face of a strong military. Islamabad should do all it can to avoid another East Pakistan (an erstwhile part of Pakistan which gained independence as Bangladesh in 1971). The portrayal of the Baloch people rising against

Pakistani federation is a calculated maneuver to stigmatize Balochistan, and Pakistan at large, for foreign investment. Where Balochistan's potential has till now sparked interminable feuds; the same potential can spread peace & prosperity and dramatically alter balances of geo-strategic power. Balochistan holds the fate of not just Pakistan but the entire region.

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