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## Factors leading to insurgency in Balochistan

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Balochistan has been in the midst of a full fledged insurgency for over five years now. Pakistani establishment has tried to project the current insurgency as a tribal mischief being perpetrated by a few feudal lords but the widespread support that the insurgents have been enjoying and the impunity with which they have been targeting symbols of government authority not only across the entire length and breadth of Balochistan but even outside, indicate that there are deep rooted, well defined causes that have led to this insurgency. The paper attempts to analyse the factors that have led to current round of insurgency in Balochistan.

**Keywords:** Pakistan; Balochistan; Baloch; internal disorders; Gwadar; Bugti; insurgency; BLA

Balochistan, which has been relatively peaceful for three decades, is once again in the midst of a fully fledged insurgency. It has been the scene of violent protest in the form of bomb blasts, random killings and acts of sabotage at vital installations for some time. The current bout of violence in Balochistan, which was triggered in late 2003, refuses to subside and keeps resurfacing with amazing regularity. In December 2005, the government troops launched a fully fledged operation against the Baloch insurgents in Kohlu District, a region dominated by Marri tribesmen, the most belligerent of various Baloch tribes. This was the third time in 2005, when security forces confronted the Baloch nationalists in an open armed confrontation. However, the scene of action in previous instances was the contiguous Dera Bugti District dominated by the Bugti tribe – the largest Baloch tribe. Subsequent killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti the chieftain of Bugti tribe in an armed action in August 2006 further infuriated the Baloch and brought disparate tribes on to one platform. The Baloch are too miniscule a part of Pakistan's population to inflict a direct defeat on the state forces, but despite their overwhelming military superiority the state forces have not been able to establish their writ in the region. Although the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, subsequent political developments in Pakistan and the rising tide of fundamentalism have pushed the happenings in Balochistan away from the media glare, the violence has continued unabated. Even the assassination of Nawabzada Ballach Marri in November 2007, believed to be the commander of the Baloch

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Figure 1. Map depicting Balochistan in Pakistan.

Source: Indian Army's Eastern Command Website, <http://www.eastarmy.nic.in/images/pakistan-map.gif> (accessed 1 May 2008).

Liberation Army, has failed to quell the violence. The government has used helicopter gunships and artillery to target the Baloch nationalists, who are challenging the writ of the state by targeting the symbols of government authority like cantonments, police stations, railway lines, power transmission lines and telephone exchanges. The ethnic violence and the way the state is handling the issues raised by the Baloch underlines the fragility and inflexibility of the Pakistani state.<sup>1</sup>

'The ruling elites in Pakistan, in their quest for nationalism and national unity, have always tried to suppress any spirit of genuine federalism perceiving it as a prelude to separatism'.<sup>2</sup> The main challenge to Pakistan's effort to have a unitary structure can be attributed to the extreme ethnic consciousness and a sense of strong socio-cultural identity of most of the ethnic groups residing inside Pakistan. Although the Lahore Resolution had originally talked of "constituent units" that would be "autonomous and sovereign",<sup>3</sup> such ideas were viewed with enormous apprehension by the Urdu-speaking ruling elites of Pakistan who had propagated the 'Two Nation Theory' and led the movement for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, which eventually resulted in partition of India. They felt that the new state could only be united by

emphasising its religious identity to the exclusion of all other identities and feared that ethno-linguistic cleavages could lead to the disintegration of the newly established state. They therefore 'abhorred providing encouragement to sub-national identities, whether symbolically, by recognising their socio-cultural and linguistic identity, or politically, by accommodating them in the state structure on the basis of ethnicity'.<sup>4</sup> Right from inception, the centre had problems delegating powers to the provinces in accordance with the federal arrangement that had been visualised for the state, 'and it assumed powers to run the provincial governments that did not rightfully belong to it'.<sup>5</sup>

Most Baloch never wanted to join Pakistan and joined the new state quite reluctantly. The predominant Baloch princely state in Balochistan was the State of Kalat, which technically was a princely state of British Balochistan, having treaty relations with Whitehall, as against other princely states which were part of British India. Accordingly the Khan of Kalat (ruler of the princely state) had sought a status similar to that of Nepal<sup>6</sup> and claimed that his bid was supported by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General of Pakistan, who was then the legal advisor to the state. The Baloch also claim that the control over the Baloch territories which had been acquired by the British was also transferred to the State of Kalat prior to independence. After independence both the houses of parliament in Kalat unanimously rejected the proposal to merge with Pakistan. Yet, the areas of Balochistan that had been under direct British rule were merged with Pakistan and the proposal was ratified by the municipality of Quetta,<sup>7</sup> a body that was overwhelmingly dominated by non Baloch settlers. Subsequently the Khan of Kalat was forced to sign the merger document and Kalat was annexed. This led to the first armed insurgency in 1948 led by Prince Karim, the brother of the Khan.<sup>8</sup>

Since then the Baloch have risen in revolt three times and have faced the security forces in 1958, 1963–69 and 1973–77. Baloch chronicles project a continuous tale of treachery and deceit by the rulers from Islamabad. Though the insurgencies in the past have been crushed with a heavy hand, they have left scars that are yet to heal. Each insurgency has been more intense than the previous one, and the organisational capabilities and the popular support for the insurgents have increased with each insurgency. At the height of insurgency in 1973, 55,000 insurgents faced 80,000 Pakistani troops supported not only by Pakistani Air Force but also the Iranian Air Force. More than 5,000 insurgents and over 3,300 soldiers were killed in the insurgency that lingered on until 1977.<sup>9</sup> Pakistani Armed Forces used brute force to crush the insurgency, as they had to redeem their honour after their humiliating defeat in Bangladesh. The insurgents were hoping for a Soviet intervention, which did not materialise.<sup>10</sup> Zia ul Haq followed a policy of cooperation towards the Baloch leaders, granted general amnesty and rehabilitated most of the insurgents.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter a section of Baloch nationalists was always a part of the provincial government at Quetta.

Pakistani elites have rather simplistically attributed the triggering of violence to the desire of Baloch *sardars* (feudal lords) to retain their fiefdoms and their consequent opposition to development, as that would increase awareness and expose

their tribes to modern concepts of democracy, thereby posing a challenge to their leadership. They also feel that the revival of the insurgency in 2004 was because the Baloch nationalists who had retained some sort of stake in the provincial government have been out of it since the last elections. However, the fact is that despite support of the *sardars*, the Baloch insurgent movement is led by urbanised educated Baloch youth influenced by Marxist thinking, who have been receiving support across the tribal divide. It is pertinent to note that out of 250 odd Baloch *sardars*, only Bugti, Marri and Mengal *sardars* have been opposing the government in recent times.<sup>12</sup> Baloch cutting across tribal barriers have certain genuine grievances. As far as Baloch grievances are concerned, ethnicity intertwined with a sense of political marginalisation and economic exploitation continues to be a potent force in evoking Baloch mobilisation. Such a feeling is more intense amongst the Baloch as compared to other ethnic groups in Pakistan for historical and economic reasons.

### **Lack of representation in the government**

Baloch representation in the central government of Pakistan has always been marginal. Until Zafarullah Khan Jamali was made prime minister by General Musharraf, no Baloch had risen to any key position in the federal administration. In the first three decades of Pakistan's existence only 4 of the 179 persons who joined Pakistani cabinet at different points of time were ethnic Baloch. Despite having been termed a martial race, their presence in the Pakistani Army has been at best nominal and this appears to be a legacy of British Rule: of all the people recruited by the British from what came to constitute the state of Pakistan, '77 per cent [came] from Punjab, 19.5 per cent from NWFP, 2.2 per cent from Sindh and 0.6 per cent from Balochistan'.<sup>13</sup> However no efforts were made to rectify this anomaly in post independence Pakistan. In 1970, of all the military officers in Pakistan, approximately 70% were Punjabi, '15 per cent Pathan (Pakhtoon), 10 per cent Mohajir<sup>14</sup> and 5 per cent Baloch and Sindhi'. The condition was much worse in the higher echelons of the armed forces, in 'June 1959, out of 24 generals in the Pakistan army, 11 were Punjabis and 11 Pathans'.<sup>15</sup> To date, there have been hardly any Baloch in the top echelons of the armed forces. According to former Baloch chief minister Ataullah Mengal, 'There are only a few hundred Balochs in the entire Pakistani Army. The famous Baloch Regiment has no Baloch in it. The Kalat Scouts was a paramilitary force raised during the Ayub regime and had only two people from Kalat within its ranks. The same is the case with the Sibi Scouts, created to police the Marri areas. It does not have a single Baloch in its ranks. The officers are from Punjab and soldiers from the Frontier'.<sup>16</sup> Pakistan has a quota system for recruitment of soldiers and the quota from Balochistan and Sindh was raised to 15% in 1991. Simultaneously height and educational standards were relaxed for these communities, which had hitherto been largely unrepresented in the Army, to facilitate recruitment. However, in December 1998 there was still a shortfall of about 10,000 other ranks from Balochistan and interior Sindh.<sup>17</sup> As the quota is on a provincial basis, most

of the recruits to the Army from Balochistan are Pathans and other settlers rather than Balochs.<sup>18</sup>

According to one estimate, 'of 830 higher civil services posts in Balochistan, only 181 were held by the Balochs in 1979. There was only one Baloch each holding the rank of secretary, director and deputy commissioner'.<sup>19</sup> As far as the police force was concerned, Baloch constituted only 25% of its strength and its entire top hierarchy consisted of non-Baloch officers. The situation was similar for the judiciary.<sup>20</sup> In 1980 after the insurgency, Zia tried to assuage the Baloch by promising them a share in central jobs in accordance with their proportion in the population of Pakistan, and accordingly 3.9% of central jobs were earmarked for citizens from Balochistan.<sup>21</sup> However, the Baloch are even today very poorly represented in the government. Even today their representation in the government has not reached the stipulated level (3.9%). Even amongst those that have been recruited from Balochistan, the bulk of the recruits have been outsiders, mainly Pakhtoons who are in the majority in the northern districts. There are scarcely any Baloch in the Pakistani Army, civil service or diplomatic corps. In 2002 out 'of a total of fourteen provincial government secretaries in Quetta, only four were Baloch; of a total of 3,200 students at Balochistan University, fewer than five hundred were Baloch; of a total of 180 faculty members, only thirty were Baloch'.<sup>22</sup> According to Baloch MP Abdul Rauf Mengal, as of March 2005, there were very few government servants from Balochistan in Islamabad and not a single Baloch in foreign missions abroad.<sup>23</sup> Balochistan continues to be grossly underrepresented in all the organs of the Pakistani state and as a result people find it difficult to identify themselves with the government. The government and its organs are therefore perceived as aliens lording it over Baloch territory.

### **Economic exploitation**

Balochistan is the poorest province in Pakistan. Its per capita income is the lowest amongst all the four provinces of Pakistan. Not that it is devoid of natural resources, yet its natural resources, which provide sustenance for economic development in the rest of Pakistan have failed to either provide livelihood or raise living standards within the province. Though there is not much vegetation in the province, it is quite rich in natural resources and, besides vast deposits of natural gas, has large reserves of minerals like chromium, copper, iron and coal. Gas is found in commercially viable quantities in Sui and Pirkoh.<sup>24</sup> The region's gas reserves supply most of Pakistan with its energy, and its sparse population makes it a viable location for nuclear tests. Balochistan's long 'coastline with its fish wealth should have been a source of prosperity for its people. But the Baloch people complain that they do not benefit from the exploitation of the province's natural resources, especially gas'.<sup>25</sup>

The province also has plenty of marble and limestone reserves and is believed to contain around 95% of the world's asbestos. It also has significant reserves of barytes, chromites, silica, gypsum, magnesite, antimony, manganese, graphite,

sulphur, fluorite and iron ore. The region is also believed to have large petroleum deposits underground,<sup>26</sup> but exploration has not been possible due to fierce opposition from Baloch tribes. In the Marri area, the government had the economic objective of enhancing oil exploration activity with the development of road communications. But, since the profits were to go to the national government and foreign companies rather than the provincial treasury, Baloch nationalists linked it with the exploitative tendencies of Islamabad. Therefore, the Baloch Peoples Liberation Front (BPLF) delayed the construction of 57 kilometres of road, which was perceived as being built for oil exploration, for over five years and finally it could only be constructed after the Army managed to subdue the insurgents somewhat.<sup>27</sup> The situation is much the same today. One of the main reasons for starting the recent round of military operations in Kohlu district has been Pakistan's quest for oil in the region.

The Pakistani government often tends to project Balochistan as a 'wasteland of deserts and mountains' and 'an economic liability' but nothing could be further from the truth. 'Balochistan is not only self sufficient' but also supports 'the Federal Government with the resources of its own soil. On and under the land; in the sea; on the mountains; and even over and beneath the deserts', the province is flush with immense natural resources.<sup>28</sup> The Baloch 'have always been convinced that they are not being given a fair share of the wealth that the state acquires from their land'.<sup>29</sup> Concerns about 'utilisation of their natural resources pervade the Baloch nationalist discourse, and Baloch political leaders have consistently pursued the issue of the distribution of resources between the centre and the provinces'.<sup>30</sup>

The Baloch 'interpret the disparity between the value of the gas produced in Balochistan and the poverty of the province as a consequence of their exploitation by outsiders'.<sup>31</sup> The manner in which Sui's gas reserves were usurped by the federal government has long been a sour point with Baloch nationalists. Sui Gas field which currently comprises of five gas wells was discovered in 1952, and at present supplies '38 per cent of Pakistan's domestic and commercial energy needs but only six per cent of Balochistan's population has a gas connection'. Even this gas came to Balochistan only after it had been supplied to the rest of Pakistan and that too only because General Zia decided to set up a cantonment in Quetta. Even today only 6% of Baloch households have a piped gas connection. For the Baloch nationalists it proves their point that their resources are exploited by Punjabis, since the federal government controls the exploitation and distribution of gas and the federal government is 'dominated by the Punjab, and so the gas went where the Punjab wanted it to go and there are few convincing counterpoints to their argument'.<sup>32</sup>

Balochistan supplies 80% of Pakistan's gas requirements and most of its coal, thereby enabling Pakistan to save hundreds of million dollars worth of energy imports. The Baloch nationalists have always complained that their resources are siphoned off by the Punjabi-dominated centre. At 12.5% of the well-head price, the gas royalty is amongst the lowest in the world<sup>33</sup>. The royalty issue has allowed disgruntled elements in Balochistan to take up cudgels on behalf of the people. The



Baloch nationalists believe that the federal government should pay them a huge sum as royalty for gas supplied over the decades.<sup>34</sup> The late Nawab Bugti regularly complained that Pakistan Petroleum Ltd had gone back on its commitments to the local tribesmen at Sui. In response the government tried to bribe or browbeat him to keep quiet, but failed and then went on to propagate the notion that the tribal *sardars* were greedy and did not want their areas to develop. This stiffened the tribal resolve as it introduced personal acrimony into the conflict.<sup>35</sup> The coalmines are almost all owned and operated by non-Baloch. 'Balochistan's coal is sent to the Punjab, so the Baloch have to burn wood trucked in from Sindh. Its onyx and marble are shipped to Karachi for finishing, and its natural gas is piped to industrial belts in the Punjab and Sindh, returning in cylinders to Balochistan'.<sup>36</sup> All these have failed to create a sense of ownership in the people of the area.

### **Ethnic marginalisation**

Until the 1970s, the fact that Balochistan's north was ethnically Pakhtoon whereas the south was almost entirely Baloch was not perceived in conflictual terms by either community. With the abrogation of the 'One Unit Formula' and Balochistan becoming a province in 1970, the tensions became more discernible. The influx of a large number of Afghan refugees (during the war in that country) of Pakhtoon origin created an abrupt and disruptive imbalance in the numerical strength of the two communities. The Baloch are 'no longer the dominant ethnolinguistic group in large parts of the province' as Balochistan's population has considerably increased on account of the large-scale influx of Afghan refugees.<sup>37</sup> The tension between the two communities reached a high point in 1991, resulting in violent ethnic clashes. Today with a large number of Afghan refugees not having gone back, the demographic profile in Balochistan has changed. If the refugees decide to stay permanently, the traditional ethnic balance between the Baloch and Pakhtoon population would shift in favour of the Pakhtoons.<sup>38</sup> This has created a sense of identity crisis for Balochs and has 'contributed to ethnic tensions between Balochs and Pakhtoons'.<sup>39</sup> In the current stand-off with the government, Pakhtoons of the province are with the nationalists and the Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP), which represents the Pakhtoons of the province, has been collaborating with other nationalist parties.

The large-scale influx of refugees and pro-Taliban elements has also given rise to fundamentalism. In the last elections the alliance of religious parties Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) did extremely well. This also indicated the prevailing pro-Taliban and anti-American sentiment in the province, as the MMA had contested the elections on the plank of anti-Americanism. As the government of Pakistan is perceived to be kowtowing to American dictats, there has been a strong resentment against the government. However, the emergence of fundamentalism and the rise of Islamic political parties in Balochistan temporarily eclipsed the Baloch nationalist movement, which has always been associated with some sort of leftist ideology. Some in the government believe that



the main reason for the violence in Balochistan is the fact that the feudal lords who control the nationalist parties were sidelined in the last elections by the electorates and are trying to regain the centre stage through violence.

Of late there has been large-scale influx of people from Punjab and Sindh along the Makran Coast. Large swathes of land along the coastal highway have been acquired by land mafia and sold to outsiders. This, coupled with large-scale projects being undertaken within the province, has accentuated the fears of the Baloch of being ethnically marginalised in their own traditional homeland.

### **Erosion of autonomy**

The Baloch leaders feel that there has been gradual erosion of provincial autonomy as defined in the Constitution. When the 1973 Constitution was adopted with the support of the provincial government of Balochistan, it was assured that the Concurrent List<sup>40</sup> would be gradually eliminated within a decade. 'However, even after the passage of more than 30 years the list still stands and the federal government continues to interfere in subjects which should be within the domain of provinces like tourism, environmental pollution, labour welfare, transfer of property, newspapers, educational curriculum, etc, to name but a few.'<sup>41</sup> Under the current constitutional arrangement, economic resources and political power are concentrated in the hands of the federal government. The situation in Balochistan is the worst, where even law and order is the responsibility of federally controlled paramilitary troops. 'The master-servant relationship is starker there than any other province. The return of military rule further aggravated the situation. Even the present pro-military provincial government does not have any real power'.<sup>42</sup> This has led to 'the economic backwardness of Balochistan and the lack of job opportunities for the Baloch'.<sup>43</sup> The general belief among the Baloch nationalists is that the military government has either confronted the political forces in the province or tried to marginalise them.<sup>44</sup>

In this context, the 'Baloch leaders have been agitating vociferously in parliament and outside against the setting up of new cantonments in the province'.<sup>45</sup> Today provincial governments in Pakistan have no rights to levy either the entertainment tax or property tax on property located inside the cantonments, including private properties. The cantonments have 'become a sort of parallel government' by themselves 'where the writ of the provincial government does not run'.<sup>46</sup> The Baloch perceive these cantonments as nothing but grabbing of their traditional land by the army. 'Over 500 acres of land was forcibly occupied in Sui', when citizens refused to sell their land, and the same process is being repeated in Kohlu 'leading to similar resentment'.<sup>47</sup>

### **Lack of political and cultural freedom**

The Baloch inhabit a region located in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a result of the 'great game', Balochistan was divided amongst these countries in the

nineteenth century by the British. Despite the size of its territory and relatively large population, the Baloch hardly enjoy any political or cultural freedom. The Baloch have always been noted musicians and poets and have songs for virtually every occasion.<sup>48</sup> They have a rich cultural heritage and are proud of their culture. 'Concerns about political and cultural autonomy' have dominated 'the Baloch nationalists discourse'.<sup>49</sup> The governments of the countries where the Baloch live have not taken steps to allow the Baloch culture and language to develop.<sup>50</sup> In Pakistan, Balochistan despite its huge territorial expanse is the least developed province and has the lowest literacy rate within the country.<sup>51</sup> There are not adequate provisions for reading, teaching or propagating the Balochi language and the Pakistani elite considers Balochi to be a primitive and undeveloped language. As a result, the Baloch feel that they have been denied the right to be educated in their own language, or to pursue their own musical and cultural activities.<sup>52</sup>

### **Mega infrastructural projects as tools of colonisation**

The issue that has agitated the Baloch mind most in recent times is the issue of mega projects being undertaken in Balochistan, purportedly for the economic development of the province. The basic issues of underdevelopment pertaining to the Baloch and Balochistan have lost their relevance in the flux of politics comprising certain deep-rooted biases. Political forces are out to malign each other in their effort to gain power and pelf and have often worked to the detriment of the poor masses of the province. As the channelling of funds had been mainly in the hands of the non-Baloch, mostly Punjabi bureaucracy, it was alleged that the Baloch plea for control over decisions pertaining to development activities had been ignored. Added to this is the issue of colonisation. 'The Baloch complained that Punjabi settlers have been grabbing prime farmland and the Punjabi real estate speculators had been buying up property in Quetta'.<sup>53</sup>

Severe opposition to developmental projects in the province is one of the major reasons for the resurgence of insurgency in Balochistan. Gwadar port including the coastal highway, the Saindak copper project and the Mirani dam are the mega infrastructural projects being undertaken within the province and have long been overdue. They have the potential to trigger economic development in Pakistan's most backward province. 'The Mirani dam, for instance, could bring 33,000 acres of barren land under cultivation in the Turbat area. The coastal highway will lead to an increase in transportation and give a boost to tourism, while Gwadar would turn into a major port serving as an outlet for Afghanistan, China and Central Asia'.<sup>54</sup> The targeting of these projects often baffles Western analysts as well as other Pakistanis who feel that the rebels do not have the good of Balochistan in their heart. 'However, the Baloch leaders complain that the manpower for the project, which is being run by the federal government, is drawn largely from outside the province. They take the same view of the Saindak copper project and the coastal highway'.<sup>55</sup>

It is repeatedly being impressed upon the Baloch that the mega projects will provide a lot of opportunities not only of employment but business, trade and

investment for everyone. According to Abdul Hakim Baloch, a former chief secretary of Balochistan, the basic issue is not the construction or the operation of these projects but their ownership. The state land around Gwadar and the coastal highway, which belongs to the province, has been usurped by the land mafia in collaboration with the Mekrani underworld and its members who are in government and the legislative bodies. The provincial government has lost trillions of rupees because of this fraud. Moreover Gwadar is being connected to Karachi but not to Quetta through the Baloch hinterland, thereby denying the rest of the province any stake in the project. 'This is making the people restive as they feel that they are being converted into a landlocked province despite having the longest coastline in the country'.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand people from outside will not only gain economically but will also colonise the coastal regions. Baloch nationalists feel that the fruits of these developmental projects will not reach the Baloch people; on the contrary, they feel these projects will lead to a large-scale influx of outsiders into Balochistan,<sup>57</sup> making them a minority in their own province. 'There are also fears that unbridled foreign investment and development projects will bring too much foreign influence, threatening the indigenous social and cultural patterns'.<sup>58</sup> According to Ataulah Mengal, 'If there are jobs in Gwadar, people would flock there, Pakistanis and foreigners alike. With time, they would get the right to vote. The problem is that one Karachi in Gwadar is sufficient to turn the whole population of Balochistan into a minority. Gwadar will end up sending more members to the Parliament than the rest of Balochistan, We would lose our identity, our language, everything. That's why we are not willing to accept these mega projects'.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the Baloch nationalists also feel that economic development is not the primary consideration of the government while undertaking the work and the government is more interested in gaining strategic superiority over the insurgents. In the past the location of roads was decided by the army rather than by economic factors. As the sole objective was to crush insurgents, the roads were built to provide access to 'inaccessible guerrilla strongholds'.<sup>60</sup>

### **External stimulus**

An insurgency of this magnitude cannot last without a fair amount of foreign support. 'Intelligence agencies in Islamabad and government circles in Quetta estimate the monthly expenses of Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)'s operations from 40 to 90 million rupees respectively'.<sup>61</sup> According to reports in the Pakistani Urdu press, 'There is a conspiracy to make Balochistan secede from the federation. A large body of men are being trained for terrorism against the Pakistani state and the immediate motive is the huge oil reserves that are likely to be discovered in the province. External powers want this resource to be governed by an independent Balochistan rather than Pakistan'.<sup>62</sup> It is widely believed that the BLA is funded by external powers, who are keen to have a stake in the province.<sup>63</sup> The members of the BLA appear to be well trained, and their

selection of targets indicates that they understand their tactical and strategic aims quite clearly. They also appear to be everywhere and seem to have an effective communication network. All these tend to indicate that at least a core group if not a larger number of BLA members have been trained by persons who are well versed in military matters. As there are unlikely to be BLA sympathisers in the Pakistani Army, the obvious interpretation is that military training is being imparted to the BLA by foreigners. Moreover the weapons being used by the BLA are Russian in origin, which are not held by the Pakistani Army.

According to Shireen Mazari, Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, 'A pattern can be discerned which points to a deliberate targeting of communication systems and national assets, impacting the country across provincial boundaries. With more sophisticated explosives, which demonstrate a greater access to external sources of weapons and money, the BLA has moved away from targeting soft civil society targets to installations, military set-ups and communication links. The acts of sabotage are clearly not random but have careful planning behind them – as well as a certain level of technical sophistication. And of course there is the very important financial aspect. All these indicators prove the strong external linkages to what is happening in Balochistan'.<sup>64</sup> According to Ayesha Siddiqi, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre, Washington DC, 'The fire could be stoked by the Indians, possibly Iranians. There are even rumours of American intelligence operating in Balochistan'.<sup>65</sup>

If an external power is involved then who could that power be? The countries contiguous with Balochistan are Iran and Afghanistan. The BLA has never been in short supply of sophisticated arms and ammunition and possesses a large quantity of rockets and rocket launchers. More than 626 rocket attacks and 122 bomb explosions were carried out in 2004. In January 2005 in four days of fighting in Sui, insurgents fired 14,000 rounds of small arms, 436 mortar and 60 rockets,<sup>66</sup> similarly on 17 March 2005 in Dera Bugti, insurgents not only matched security forces in pounding each other's positions in day long shelling, but also refused numerous offers of cease fire, indicating a good stock of arms and ammunition. The obvious question that arises is where do they get these supplies of arms and ammunition? The most probable source appears to be Afghanistan. In the early 1970s when Bhutto was forced to launch the military operation in Balochistan, Afghanistan was the sole source of arms and ammunitions to the insurgents. However, President Hamid Karzai has neither any reason nor any resources to stir trouble in Balochistan. Secondly, the American presence in Afghanistan would not allow the government to indulge in activities opposed to its policies.<sup>67</sup> Pakistan also believes that Gwadar Deep Sea Port Project is opposed by Iran 'because this project would compete with Iran's newly built Chahbahar Port on Balochistan coast',<sup>68</sup> being built by India, to emerge as a gateway to Central Asia. 'Pakistani intelligence agencies believe the insurgents are getting financial support and arms from Iran and India, who are not happy with the construction of the Gwadar Port'.<sup>69</sup> This seems quite unlikely as Iran

also has a substantial Baloch population and their province of Seistan is primarily inhabited by Baloch. Any insurgency that espouses the cause of a Baloch homeland is bound to generate unrest in Baloch-inhabited areas in Iran. This is exactly the reason why Shah of Iran went out of his way to provide military support to Pakistan during the last insurgency in Balochistan.

Like everything else that goes wrong in Pakistan, some Pakistani politicians and journalists have blamed India as the force behind this insurgency. The Balochistan chief minister has claimed that Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was running at least 40 camps in the province. They also feel that with the 'Indian presence on Pak-Afghan border and in Zahidan, the opportunities for sponsoring Low Intensity Conflict have multiplied for India'.<sup>70</sup> Though many in India would feel inclined to fish in the troubled waters as a quid pro quo for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) activities in India and also to keep it tied down within Pakistan in order to prevent it from indulging in its nefarious designs in Indian territory, yet the timing of the insurgency makes it fairly unlikely. Moreover the fact remains that not a single Indian agent has been arrested even according to Pakistani media, which has been rather lavish in ascribing enormous capabilities to Indian intelligence agencies. Also India does not have a contiguous border with Balochistan and therefore could not supply the heavy arms that are being used by the BLA. Not a single arms consignment has ever been apprehended either at the Sindh border or at the Makaran Coast.<sup>71</sup> In the absence of contiguity with Balochistan, it is actually not feasible for India to pitch in the troubled waters all by itself even if it wanted to. It could, however, provide support in conjunction with other countries in the region. However, it does not make sense for India to stir up trouble in Balochistan at a time when Indo-Pak relations are on the upswing.

Russian-origin weapons being used by the BLA have led some media persons in Pakistan to speculate about a Russian hand in the Baloch insurgency. Their familiarity with Balochistan on account of their involvement with the previous insurgency, and the belief that they are peeved with Pakistan for humiliating them in Afghanistan and for providing widespread support to Chechen rebels, may lend some credence to this speculation. A Central Asian website has reported the presence of Soviet-era agents previously involved in Balochistan, running camps in Afghanistan and Balochistan in collusion with India and the USA.<sup>72</sup> However, Russia is too preoccupied with its own problems and problems in its own backyard to spare time and resources for stirring up trouble in remote Balochistan, which has lost its strategic significance for them with the disintegration of the USSR. It is also inconceivable that the USA would allow Russia to run such camps in Afghanistan. The involvement of certain individuals with previous experience in Balochistan, however, cannot be ruled out. But the individuals by themselves would hardly have the resources to trigger an insurgency of this magnitude.

That brings us to the possibility of the involvement of the sole superpower, which is today occupying Afghanistan and has direct access to Balochistan. On

the face of it, it would appear preposterous that the USA might stir up trouble inside Pakistan. After all, Pakistan is their prime ally in their fight against Taliban and Al Qaeda. However, according to leading Pakistani English magazine *The Herald*, the USA tops the list of possible sources of the BLA's funding as it 'may want to put a damper on growing Chinese presence in Balochistan'.<sup>73</sup> Large sums of cash are reported to be flowing into these camps, and a number of CIA agents are believed to be moving cash from Afghanistan to Balochistan.<sup>74</sup>

The USA is definitely uncomfortable with the Chinese presence at Gwadar next to their main base in the region, as it views China as its potential rival.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly Gwadar, a potential Chinese naval base and a city that has the potential to turn the Baloch into a minority in their own province, is a thorn both for the Baloch and the USA. 'It brings about a deadly convergence of interests in a delicate geopolitical era'.<sup>76</sup> 'As long as Balochistan remains unstable and the law and order situation remains uncertain, Gwadar's true potential cannot be realised and the Chinese will certainly be compelled to take a second look at their growing economic commitment in Pakistan'.<sup>77</sup> In the recent past a number of Chinese have been targeted in Balochistan probably with the intention of dissuading China from investing in the troubled province. 'The recent US-Iran dispute has further increased the geographical importance of Balochistan in the eyes of US policymakers'.<sup>78</sup> Though it is not in US interests to destabilise the present political dispensation in Pakistan, 'the Pentagon has reclassified China as a "strategic adversary" and China's strategic presence in Gwadar is reason enough for a well-calibrated, low intensity boil in Balochistan'.<sup>79</sup> In addition, as long as Balochistan remains disturbed the Iran-Pakistan-India oil pipeline cannot materialise, and the USA has not hidden its discomfort with the proposed pipeline.

There is also a need to analyse the implications of a sovereign Balochistan. It would provide the ideal gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia and preclude the requirement of depending on Pakistan or Iran for access to Central Asia. It would also cut Iran down to size without having to go to an internationally unpopular war with it. These are in US interests and, in any case, the Baloch nationalists are not Islamists, but left-leaning secularists. The Baloch in general are not very staunch in their religious practices and the resurgence of Baloch nationalists has started the marginalisation of MMA,<sup>80</sup> which is in power in Balochistan and has a significant support base amongst Pakhtoons in Balochistan. Thus the rising Baloch nationalism has started rolling back Taliban and fundamentalist influence in Balochistan, which is something the USA always wanted. This is not to suggest that the USA wants to create a sovereign Balochistan; it merely wants to keep that option open, in case any future regime in Pakistan refuses to play ball with them or in case their protégé in Islamabad is eliminated by Islamic hardliners. US Ambassador to Pakistan Ryan Crocker's meeting with Baloch nationalists on 14 February 2005 in Karachi was a pointer in this direction.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover for the USA, 'Baloch instability is far more preferable to a stable and economically booming Balochistan with its strategic location – especially since the



latter will have a positive economic fallout for neighbouring Iran'.<sup>82</sup> The USA is keen to isolate Iran in the region and would like Iran–Pakistan relations to deteriorate by planting reports about Iranian involvement in Balochistan. 'As the US rhetoric against Iran has increased in belligerency, the acts of sabotage in Balochistan have increased in frequency and intensity'.<sup>83</sup> The USA realises that sanctions are not going to work against Iran; moreover, sanctions will result in oil prices hitting the roof, which may throw the global economy into a recession. The military option is also out of the question at this stage when US forces are overstretched in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus the best course possibly available to it at this point of time is to embroil Iran in internal conflict with the ethnic minorities that inhabit Iran's periphery.<sup>84</sup> The Baloch, Ahwazi Arabs, Azheris and Kurds constitute these minorities, which are restive today. Seymour Hersh has also written about special operations being launched from Balochistan against Iranian nuclear assets.<sup>85</sup> Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has already accused the USA and its allies of trying to destabilise Iran through ethnic unrest.<sup>86</sup>

According to Shireen Mazari, 'For the US there is a much wider context to what is happening in Balochistan. Breaking up larger Muslim states, redrawing borders between some of them, creating new political entities – all these are part of the new strategic game plan. In Pakistan's context it is important to remember that the Afghan elections revealed a clear ethnic split and that targeting Iran also includes seeking opportunities to encourage old notions of Greater Balochistan'.<sup>87</sup> The new US agenda is possibly the creation of a Kurdish state. It would not come as a surprise if this were extended to the creation of a new Baloch state. An independent Baloch state would give the USA an excellent base, which could possibly replace/supplement both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It would be a clear corridor from the Indian Ocean to Central Asia for pipelines etc. with no problem clients like the Pakhtoon, Taliban or the Pakistani military junta with its very own personal power problems.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

If violence in Balochistan intensifies, the Pakistani Army will definitely be sucked into a war that could fester and bleed Pakistan. Already the rising tide of fundamentalism has spread out from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and is threatening to engulf the entire North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The fundamentalists have identified Musharraf as their prime target and the recent assassination of Benazir Bhutto clearly shows that they are willing to eliminate any obstacle from their path to power. The political turbulence and the all-pervasive violence have not only stretched the Pakistan Army but also affected its motivation and cohesiveness. The arid desert of Balochistan could bring the Pakistan Army to a hostile environment where its mechanised forces are unlikely to be useful. The latest weapon of mass destruction in the world is the suicide bomber, and Pakistan is flush with them. The Pakistani Army, despite being a professional army, does not have a good track record of dealing with internal disorders. They have used suicide bombers against others – the so-called infidels – but would find it difficult to tackle



them when they start targeting them, as is now being done since Dargai in October 2006.

Over the years, a persecution complex has taken firm root amongst most Baloch, and there is substantial evidence to prove that Balochistan has not received its due share from the federal government for the natural resources that it provides to sustain Pakistan's economy.<sup>89</sup> The state building efforts of the Pakistani leadership since independence have been counterproductive, as was amply demonstrated by the turn of events in East Pakistan during 1958–70.<sup>90</sup> The issues that plague Pakistan today are basically the same that led to the emergence of Bangladesh. Although the Baloch are relatively weaker and more fragmented, their complaint against the federation is the same as that of the Bengalis in 1971, namely, that the Punjabi army tries to run the state according to its whims and fancies. The Army's belief that it would be able to crush the Baloch 'in the absence of a hostile neighbour to provide arms and shelter' has made them complacent, but this will only aggravate the trust deficit and derail the economy.<sup>91</sup> Pakistan is playing a dangerous game in exercising power with a colonial mindset and using brute force to browbeat the Baloch into submission, while the Pakistani Army, with 70,000 troops in Waziristan and six brigades deployed in Balochistan, is already overstretched.<sup>92</sup> In addition, other ethnic minorities are coming out in support of the Baloch. The killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti has managed to unite different Baloch tribes as never before. In the aftermath of his killing a grand jirga convened by the current Khan of Kalat virtually declared the independence of Balochistan. Today, there has been a proliferation of arms in Pakistan and all Pakistanis, whether Baloch or otherwise, are better armed than ever before. If the issue is not dealt with prudently, the ethno-national fires emerging from Balochistan could sound the death knell for the state of Pakistan, and Sardar Ataulлах Mengal's words on the current conflict could possibly sum up the issue, 'This could be our last battle. At the end of it either their soldiers will be standing alive, or we will'.

## Notes

1. Bansal, 'Balochistan: Continuing Violence and Its Implications', 47.
2. Patnaik, 'Pakistan's North West Frontier: Under a New Name', 761.
3. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 206.
4. Patnaik, 'Pakistan's North West Frontier: Under a New Name', 762.
5. Rehman, 'The Rise and Fall of Democracy', 32.
6. Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan*, 131.
7. Quetta is the capital of the province of Balochistan in Pakistan and was a cantonment under the British and housed the Army Staff College. Most of the inhabitants of the city were outsiders, mainly Punjabis and Pakhtoons including a fair number of ex-servicemen.
8. Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism*, 238–40.
9. Sahadevan, *Coping with Disorder*, 38.
10. Bansal, 'The Revival of Insurgency in Balochistan', 252.
11. Amin, *Ethno National Movements of Pakistan*, 176–77.

12. There are various subdivisions of Baloch tribes. Of these Bugti, Marri and Mengal are the largest tribes and their *sardars* have been in open opposition to the government.
13. Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan*, 132–33.
14. Mohajir means refugee in Urdu. Mohajirs in Pakistan are Urdu speaking refugees who had migrated from North India after partition and have mainly settled in Karachi and other urban centres of Sindh.
15. Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan*, 132–33.
16. Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive?*, 117.
17. Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 242.
18. In Sindh to protect the interests of Sindhis there are separate quotas for non-military federal government jobs for urban and rural Sindh.
19. Phadnis, 'Ethnic Movements in Pakistan', 194–95.
20. Ibid.
21. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, 164.
22. Weaver, *Pakistan in the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan*, 105–06.
23. Mohsin, 'NA Debates Baluchistan Situation; MPs call for Political Solution'.
24. Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism*, 380.
25. 'Balochistan's Grievances'. Editorial *The Dawn*, Karachi, 9 November 2004.
26. Baluch, *Inside Balochistan*, 19–42.
27. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, 167.
28. Baluch, *Inside Balochistan*, 48.
29. Bano, 'Dialogue is the only Solution'.
30. Paul Titus in Introduction Matheson, *The Tigers of Baluchistan*, xix.
31. Ibid., xx.
32. Khan, 'Money, Money, Money', 52.
33. Duncan, *Breaking the Curfew*, 139.
34. 'Confrontation No Solution to Balochistan Imbroglio', Editorial, *The International News*, Internet Edition, 16 January 2005.
35. Sethi, 'Balochistan's Volcanic Eruption'.
36. Weaver, *Pakistan in the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan*, 105–06.
37. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 220.
38. Amin, *Ethno National Movements of Pakistan*, 65.
39. Titus in Matheson, *The Tigers of Baluchistan*, xviii.
40. The Concurrent List consists of subjects on which both the centre and the state government can make laws.
41. Babar, 'Nibbling away at autonomy'.
42. Hussain, 'Gathering Storm'.
43. 'Balochistan's Grievances'. Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, 9 November 2004.
44. Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism*, 374.
45. Babar, 'Nibbling away at autonomy'.
46. Ibid.
47. Zulfikar, 'Land-Mine', 58.
48. Matheson, *The Tigers of Balochistan*, 165.
49. Titus in Matheson, *The Tigers of Balochistan*, xix.
50. According to Baloch nationalists, in entire Iran there is not even one academic institution where Balochi can be studied. There is not even one newspaper or magazine in Balochi. Baloch children are told by their teachers that their mother tongue is Persian. Balochi music has never been heard in the Iranian capital, Teheran. In Afghanistan the situation is similar.
51. According to Pakistan Human Development Index Report 2003, Balochistan not only has the lowest literacy rate at 36% within the country, but also the lowest educational attainment index of 0.453 as well as the lowest HDI of 0.499.

52. 'Some Background Information on Baloch'. Available from the Baloch voice website [http://www.balochvoice.com/some\\_baloch\\_background.html](http://www.balochvoice.com/some_baloch_background.html) (accessed on 19 May 2005).
53. Phadnis, 'Ethnic Movements in Pakistan', 195.
54. 'Terrorism in Balochistan'. Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, 18 December 2004.
55. 'Balochistan's Grievances'. Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, 9 November 2004.
56. Baloch, 'Bringing development to Balochistan'.
57. 'Terrorism in Balochistan'. Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, 18 December 2004.
58. 'Confrontation No Solution to Balochistan Imbroglio', Editorial, *The International News* Internet Edition, 16 January 2005.
59. Bakhtiar, Idrees. 'Mega-projects are a Conspiracy to turn the Balochis into a Minority in their Homeland.' Interview with Sardar Ataullah Mengal, *The Herald*, August 2004, p 51.
60. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, 166.
61. Khan, 'Back to the Hills', 57.
62. Mahmood, 'Centre does not hold'.
63. Yusuf, 'Use of Force will Worsen the Situation in Balochistan'.
64. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
65. Siddiqua, 'The cost of Conflict in Balochistan'.
66. Raza and Sharif, 'Troops to Protect Sui Plant'.
67. Rahman, 'Balochistan in Turmoil'.
68. Khan, 'Back to the Hills', 58.
69. Hussain, 'Gathering Storm', 25.
70. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
71. Rahman, 'Balochistan in Turmoil'.
72. Saedi and Pyatakov et al., 'Pakistan: Unravelling the Mystery of Balochistan Insurgency'.
73. Khan, 'Back to the Hills', 58.
74. Saedi and Pyatakov et al. 'Pakistan: Unravelling the Mystery of Balochistan Insurgency'.
75. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
76. Amin, 'The Six Steps to Get Out of the Balochistan's Quicksand'.
77. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
78. Effendi, 'Balochistan: A Victim of its Geography'.
79. Saleem, 'Balochistan: an objective assessment'.
80. MMA is a coalition of Islamic parties which have not hidden their pro Taliban inclinations. They controlled the provincial government in North West Frontier Province and were part of the government in Balochistan.
81. 'Baloch Leaders meet US Envoy', *Dawn*, Karachi, 15 February 2005.
82. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
83. Ibid.
84. Bansal, 'Iran: America's Options'.
85. Sinha, 'Battlefield Balochistan', 16.
86. 'Ahmadi-Nejad accuses US of fomenting ethnic unrest'. Available from the News Website <http://www.thenews.com.pk/updates.asp#2598> (accessed on 25 May 2006).
87. Mazari, 'Balochistan and the "Great Power Games"'.
88. Amin, 'The Six Steps to Get Out of the Balochistan's Quicksand'.
89. Hussain, 'Out of Time, Out of Place'.
90. Amin, *Ethno National Movements of Pakistan*, 3.
91. Idris, 'Is the federation at risk?'.
92. Saleem, 'Balochistan: an objective assessment'.

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