

Citation: Arif, M., Shaukat, & Khan, Y. (2022). Rise of Baloch Insurgency: Domestic and International Factors. *Global International Relations Review*, *V*(II), 59-68.
[https://doi.org/10.31703/girr.2022\(V-II\).07](https://doi.org/10.31703/girr.2022(V-II).07)



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Rise of Baloch Insurgency: Domestic and International Factors

Abstract: *The article discusses the history and highlights the events in Balochistan during the colonial time and the post-partition era. The focus is on the insurgencies of the Baloch against the state including the present one. It discusses the characteristics of the province along with the social set-up and the political and economic situation of the Baloch. It is necessary to acknowledge the perception of the Baloch regarding their 'exclusiveness'. The Baloch maintain that their culture, traditions and language are not similar to the other ethnicities in Pakistan and therefore they claim that they are entitled to a special type of treatment. The Baloch mindset also centres around their identity. The current Baloch insurgency also highlights the dynamics of the province and the factors which have forced the militants to rebel against the state. The role of the international factors behind the insurgency is also highlighted.*

Key Words: Balochistan, Insurgencies, Identity, Militants, International, Political, Economic

Balochistan Under the British

Modern Baloch nationalism has its roots in the struggle against colonialism from the mid-19th century. (Breseeg, 2004). Until the mid-19th century, Kalat which was then known generally as Balochistan comprised the contemporary Balochistan province of Iran and Pakistan including a few areas of Punjab and Sindh had an independent status. With the arrival of the British, they formed treaties with Kalat. Kalat and Nepal were never included in the Indian Empire.

Through the treaties of 1854 and 1876 Balochistan came under the influence of the British. The British concluded a treaty with Nasir Khan II, the leader of Kalat, in 1854. This was extended in an agreement in 1876, according to which the British reaffirmed the independence

of the state of Kalat, and helped the Khan in the protection of his state from external aggression. During British rule, the Baloch state was fragmented into small parts. Iran was provided with one portion, a small area was handed over to Afghanistan and the northeastern region was leased to the British. The rest of the country fell under the jurisdiction of the Kalat state.

Meanwhile the British established their rule in Eastern Balochistan and this eventually caused the building of roads, railroads and the telegraph system. The main aim of the British was to get the support of the Baloch Sardars in order to protect the movement through the essential routes, maintain indirect British control regardless of permanent military presence and have access to the strategically important areas. For this reason, Sir Robert Sandeman, the first British Chief Commissioner of Balochistan

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followed a policy of peace with the tribes, supported the tribal leaders financially, giving them essential administrative tasks and also introduced the Jirga system for the settlement of disputes. The result was that a new politically conscious Baloch segment appeared in Eastern Balochistan and was part of modern Baloch nationalism in the 1920s. (Ali, [2005](#)).

The British also kept the inter-tribal disputes alive in order to satisfy their goals without involving themselves militarily. The Sardari system was used by the British as the main tool of oppression in Balochistan. In order to oppose the British, Baloch targeted the Sardari network, which was perceived as consisting of Sardars having uncontrollable powers. Having a close alliance with the British, the Sardars were not acceptable to the young nationalists. (Lambrick, [1975](#)).

Balochistan After Independence

The Baloch instability has been present in Pakistan since 1947. Following the independence of Pakistan, the first Governor General, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, himself looked after the set-up of Balochistan, however, the centralized policies by the government in Balochistan led to a rise in the nationalistic feelings of the people of the province. The first Baloch reaction to the centralization of power was apparent in May of 1948, when after the Khan of Kalat was arrested by the Pakistani army, the Khan's brother who was Prince Abdul Karim, initiated a rebellion in opposition to the Pakistan armed forces in the Jhalawan district in order to achieve the independence of Balochistan.

The revolt of Karim is important in the history of Balochistan due to two main reasons. First of all, it showed that Baloch was not willing to join the Kalat state with Pakistan. Secondly, it demonstrated that Pakistan violated the agreement of safe conduct. This was done with the Khan of Kalat when he started the guerrilla operations against the army of Pakistan. He convinced his brother to give up with the guarantee of safe conduct and amnesty from the Army. However, the Baloch argue that the Pakistani forces had breached the agreement by arresting the Prince and hundred and two of his

followers in 1950 on their way to Kalat. (Baloch, [1987](#)).

A political movement started in Balochistan in the early 1950s, when the Pakistani government made West Pakistan into 'One Unit', by abolishing all the provinces. The aim of this was the restoration of Balochistan's status as a province and its autonomy which was guaranteed in 1948. It also caused resentment among the Balochs due to the fact that later the One Unit scheme paralleled with the imposing of military rule in Pakistan.

There was a revolt by the Khan of Kalat in 1958 when he hoisted his ancestral flag at his home instead of Pakistan's flag. There was an army operation in Kalat leading to the imprisonment of the Khan of Kalat and many of his companions. Nouroz Khan, a Baloch leader and head of the Zehri tribe initiated an attack against the army in 1959. This rebellion was subdued in 1960 through a military operation. (Twigg, [2006](#)).

Along with the Basic Democracies, there was also the construction of army cantonments in Balochistan which was viewed with resentment by the Baloch nationalists. (Hameed, [2006](#)). In the view of Justin S. Dunne, the rise in the Baloch discontent was mainly because of three reasons: the current separatist struggle in Balochistan, which led the Centre to hesitate to initiate any projects in the region; the absence of provincial autonomy during the regime of Ayub Khan; and the Sardari system forms in traditionally embedded in Balochistan which gave little support for the modernization of the province. (Dunne, [2006](#)).

With the election of 1962, several Baloch Sardars including Khair Baksh Marri, Ahmad Nawaz Bugti and Ataulah Mengal came to power for the first time. However, in the eyes of the central government, these elections were viewed as a threat to the system of Basic Democracies which aimed at minimizing the control of the Sardari system. As a consequence, the Baloch leaders who were elected were replaced by the new Sardars who were chosen from the Centre. This incident was the catalyst of another insurgency which led to the assassination of the nominated Sardars and a number of attacks on the army by the Baloch tribes. The movement

in 1962 was mainly led by “Parrari”, a guerilla group which was commanded by Sher Muhammad Marri and had socialist tendencies. This Parraris started to attack the government through guerilla warfare and covert operations. With the help of the airforce, the army retaliated and tried to subdue them. By 1968, General (retired) Musa Khan assumed the post of Governor and tried to bring the problem under control.

On 1 July 1970, Balochistan was raised to a provincial status lacking reforms in its administrative and political hierarchy. Even though there was a return to civilian rule in 1972-73, there was a gap between the state and NAP which caused the removal of the NAP government in 1973. This caused a huge insurgency and there was an influx of Afghan refugees following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan along with the lack of development, Balochistan was kept as a backward region.

From 1973 to 1977, there was the occurrence of the fourth Baloch rebellion. The insurgency started with the dissolution and arrest of the provincial government in Balochistan. The main reason behind the start of the insurgency was the dismissal of the Baloch provincial government and a ban on the NAP. After the dismissal of the government, the Baloch guerillas started to mount a rebellion. The government of Bhutto reacted by sending an army to Balochistan and putting in jail the three nationalist leaders of Balochistan. There was an armed struggle which continued for over four years.

In all the above insurgencies, the Baloch nationalists basically demanded control over their natural resources and more provincial autonomy. The contemporary insurgency is the fifth one in which the Baloch extremists have stepped ahead with the aim of independence. Some of the most troubled areas are Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Sui and Khuzdar. (Philip, [2005](#)).

Basic Features Of Balochistan and the Baloch

History

It can rightly be maintained that the historical elements have played a role in shaping Baloch

nationalism and are one of the reasons which provide a cohesive base to Baloch nationalism. A historic association with fame and pride is that the ancestors of the Baloch defeated the militia of Alexander the Great as he with fame and pride is that the ancestors of the Baloch defeated the militia of Alexander as he attempted to go back to Greece.

The Baloch argue that the “Baluch” name was taken from “Balus”, the king of Babylon, also known as Nimrood. (Baksh, [1974](#)). The disciples of Nimrood were recognized as Belsius. In the Arabs, Belsius was pronounced as Balos. According to Taj Mohammad Bressegh, the name has historically been referred to as “nomads.” (Awan, [1985](#)).

The name Balochistan basically means ‘the land of the Baloch’, which has an important national aspect linking the country with the Baloch. Dr Inayatuallah Baloch is of the view that the nation of the Baloch was known as Balochistan from the establishment of the first Baloch confederation in the 12th century.

In Baloch history, there are three leaders of importance. The first leader was Mir Chakar Rind who established the Baloch confederacy. (Harrison, [1981](#)). His kingdom comprised Mekran, southeast Persia (Mekran), contemporary Balochistan, south Afghanistan, Sindh and Punjab up to the south of Multan. (Scholz, [2002](#)). According to Imtiaz Ali, Baloch intellectuals admired Mir Chakar Rind in an attempt to unify the Baloch politically. The Baloch claim that Mir Chakra Rind is the representation of their unity.

The Khanate of Balochistan started to grow and establish itself in the mid-seventeenth century. Based in Kalat, the Khanate was the initial Baloch state to include the Baloch areas such as Makkoran, Western Balochistan, Derajat, Sistann and Lasbela and unify those in an entity in the influence of a central state. The Khanate gave a constitution which was unwritten (Rawaj or Dastur) and served as a sacred document. It also provided Baloch with a feeling of togetherness. The Ahmedzai tribe set up the Kalat confederacy in 1666. This confederacy covered a territory even larger than that of Mir Chakar Rind’s area. From the 18th century,

Abdullah Khan, known as the fourth Khan of Kalat, claimed the loyalty of the Baloch tribes from Kandahar (Afghanistan) to Bander Abbas (Iran). His rule extended until Dera Ghazi Khan (Punjab), however, he could do little to bring the territory under his military influence into a unified state and this was accomplished by Nasir Khan, who enjoyed a rule for more than half a century starting from 1741. (Breseeg, 2004). Nasir Khan fought a war with the Afghans in 1758 and enjoyed sovereignty until the advent of the British.

Language

One of the most effective tools of mobilization in an ethnic group is language. Similarly, the Baloch while claiming themselves as a distinct nation used the slogan of a different language. The Baloch's consciousness of a common language constitutes another significant foundation of their nationalism. It should be kept in mind however that Balochistan is a province of Pakistan that includes many tribes speaking different languages. The area is placed in such a region that since ancient times has been inhabited and visited by different kinds of people. Most of the nations in the subcontinent had resided there, for example, Pashtuns, Sindhis and Punjabis have been the settlers of Balochistan during various periods.

Even though the major portion of the population is of the Baloch, there is also a large number of Pashtuns, Brahvis and others residing in that part of the land. Brahvis are the ancient population of Balochistan which are considered the remnants of the Dravidian civilization. The Pashtuns have also inhabited this region for a long time. (Khalil, 2008).

A large number of communities of various sizes live in Balochistan. These ethnic diversities influence the socio-political fabric and internal dynamics of the province. The major communities are the Pathan, Baloch and Brahvis. The area towards the north comprises the Pashtoon, occupied by the Pathan tribe. In the south and west of Quetta city, the inhabitants comprise predominantly the Brahvis and Baloch.

Baloch and Brahui, are the two main languages spoken in this area. Pashto, Sindhi and Saraiki are also spoken in the province. These languages have served to play a tremendous role in the development of a feeling of ethnonationalism, but in the past years, the absence of efforts to standardize the Balochi language and the failure to portray it as the language of the people has deeply influenced the development of a feeling of unity among the Baloch at the regional level. Even though the Balochi and the Brahui languages have a long history and a rich tradition, the Baloch nationalists have been unsuccessful to inculcate it efficiently into their nationalist struggle. (Twigg, 2006). Religion.

According to the Baloch nationalists their identity, emphasizes their unique tribal features, their distinct culture and their particular territorial presence. The leaders of the contemporary Baloch movement do not take into account religion as the main factor of their identity as they identify it with how Islam is inbuilt into the nationalist identity nurtured by the state of Pakistan. The Baloch, Brahui and Pathans are Muslims, yet the Baloch have a more casual attitude towards religion than that of the Pathans.

The Baloch not only differ about the place of religion from the Pakistani elites but also have a unique view regarding religion than the other Muslim nations. They are not fundamentalists and do not believe in mixing politics with religion. A large number of the Balochs belong to the Sunni sect of the Hanafite tradition. Before embracing Islam as a religion, most of the Baloch were Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrian school of thought is still visible among some of the Baloch communities. Islam made a sterilizing impact on their identity as a nation. A major part of the community is Sunnis. A minority of Ismailis and Zikris reside in Makran while a considerable Shia Hazara community in Quetta.

Customs and Traditions

Balochis have a proud vintage of being warriors, by tradition. Regarding the structure of the Baloch society, it is traditional, feudal and tribal

in nature. The traditions pertaining to marriages, divorces, wars, blood compensation and hospitality are followed conventionally. As the profession of trade is not considered honourable by the Baloch, they have rarely engaged in it.

All of the ethnic groups that reside in Balochistan have distinct features, however, they all abide by a similar tribal value that honours loyalty and hospitality and the tradition that "he shall take who has the power, and he shall keep who can." Historically, Baloch possesses a custom of honouring autonomy, war and bravery and follows customs that include the principles of revenge, sanctuary, hospitality and distrust of outsiders. Baloch is obliged to honour their codes in the first place, even at the cost of their lives.

Hospitality is one of the major features of the Baloch and they fight for the person who has taken refuge with them. In an interview with lawyer Ali Ahmed Kurd, he states that: "One of the features of the Baloch tribe which makes them distinct is their hospitality. We treat the guests in a very cordial manner."

According to him the Baloch also have some codes of honour which have existed among the people for a long time and still have an influence on them. It is considered essential for a tribesman to avenge blood, but where there is no revenge the issue is dealt with by compensation; to avoid harming a woman or any other person who went into the shrine of a Pir and also he who pleaded for mercy while having a fight with grass in mouth and surrender; to stop the fight when a mullah, Syed, or a lady with the Quran on her head, mediated the parties and to give punishment to an adulterer through death.

The tradition of 'Hal Ehwal' in the tribe is in which a person during his travel is interrogated for the current information, in exchange for local news. This passes with the result that all types of information and intelligence are rapidly circulated in the tribes. This was efficiently employed by the Marri tribesmen during the insurgency of 1973-77.

Tribes and the Sardari System

The Sardari system has persisted for centuries in Balochistan. It is traced back to the time when the Baloch migrated from Arabia (Hatooram,

2001). The Sardari setup was a product of tribal similarities. The chief of every tribe gave loyalties to Sardar and the Khan of Kalat, the head of the Confederacy (Mir, 2006).

Kinship is regarded as an important part of the social fabric in Balochistan. Through this, every individual in the tribe has an affiliation with his tribe and ethnic community. Through centuries, this has been dominated by Sardars, who serve as heads of their small states in a large state and have a policy of maintaining their tribes away from social, political and economic development. With the increased knowledge of the masses, the strong influence of the Sardari system is slowly diminishing. The prime political set-up in Balochistan belongs to the tribe and their allegiance is to the leader. The conventional type of rule is the Sardari form of government: a century-old tradition in which the tribes owe loyalty to the Sardars and in return get justice and the continuity for the "integrity of the tribe." (Dunne, 2006). According to Faiza Mir, the Sardari system, a tradition of the past was fabricated to enhance the integrity and independence of the tribesmen and it may have brought welfare to the region in history, but events indicate that with this, grass root progress was ignored. She argues that having ruled over thousands and thousands of square kilometres, these Sardars rarely took any step for the promotion of education and other facilities while their own sons and grandsons are foreign qualified. She has a similar view that the policies of the government in Pakistan (specifically of Pervez Musharaf), the lack of true democracy and the absence of awareness of the people made the Sardars stronger politically and financially and they gained more power. She further adds that if the Center is accountable for making Balochistan poor, illiterate and backward then how many development projects like schools, hospitals and roads have been introduced by these leaders? (Mir, 2006).

Traditionally, the election of Sardars is through a Jirga, known as the council of elders existing in a tribe. The Jirgas are supposed to give justice and provide the duties of police, magistracy and justice. The inter-tribal rivalries are also one of the features of Balochistan.

Various segments of the Bugti, Raisani and Rind tribes have serious differences.

Ethnic Demography

The population of Balochistan is multi-ethnic. It comprises ten million people which make up nearly 5% of the population of Pakistan. The ethnic communities residing in Balochistan are Pathan, Brahuis and the Baloch. The Baloch and Brahui consist of 40% of the population. The Pathan form about 52% of the total population. Minorities such as Hazaras, Sindhis and Punjabis make up 8% of the population. (Ahmed, 1988). The tribes who speak Baloch are located in the northwest, west, south, east and southeast. The Brahui are in the centre and the Pashtun majority are in the north. Quetta is inhabited largely by Pathans along with significant Baloch and Hazara minorities. Near the region of Kalat and other parts of the province, there are a large number of Baloch and Brahui-speaking people. The Makrani Balochi-speaking people are dominant along the coast. The refugees from Afghanistan can also be seen in the region along with Pathans and the Tajiks. Most of the farmers from Sindh have migrated to more cultivable areas in the east. The majority of other ethnic groups including Kurds, Punjabis, Muhajirs and Iranians have migrated to Balochistan in recent decades. (Ahmed S. I., 1992).

The Pathans are basically from Afghanistan. They came with the intruders and started to settle in the nearby localities. They reside in the majority around Quetta, Zhob, Pishin and Loralai.

The Baloch and the Brahvis are further classified into sub-tribes. The Brahvis are Mengal, Zehri, Raisani, Muhammad Hasni and Bizenjo. The Mengals are divided into three distinct tribes. The first is the Mengal belonging to Jhalawan; the second is the Mengal residing in Bolan and lastly the Mengal belonging to Noshki. The second comprises the Zehris residing in the Jhalawan district. The third is the Bizenjos who are living in the district of Awaran and some areas of the Lasbela district.

There are also a few main sub-tribes of the Baloch. Some of the influential Baloch tribes include the Marri, Bugti, Magsi, Jamali, Rind and Domkis. The minor Baloch tribes include the

Rakhshani, Nausherwani, Jamot, Lasi and Jam. The Nosherrwanis reside in Makran and Kharan. The Rinds reside in Makran, Turbat and Naseerabad. The Marris live in the hilly areas, east of Sibi, while the Bugtis reside in Dera Bugti and Sui districts. The major Pashtun tribes are the Kakar, Tareen, Achakzai, Kais and Luni.

The ethnic demography of Balochistan has implications for the Baloch national movement. The Pashtun residing in areas such as Pishin, Ziarat and Quetta think of themselves as distinct ethnic entities. Armed confrontation between the two led to the imposing of a curfew in Quetta and the nearby areas in 1992. This issue, which is quite serious and related to the identity of the community of Balochistan, is still unresolved. The Hazara population regards itself as a separate ethnic group. It dominates the largest urban sector of the province, Quetta. They are not regarded as Baloch by the Balochis. Being a minor population, but still influential in Quetta and nearby areas, they have been neglected in the past and continue to be one of the underdeveloped communities.

Geography

To understand the character and culture of the Baloch, it is essential to make oneself familiar with the natural environment of the Baloch which has influenced their way of living. (Amin, 1988). The geo-strategic significance of Balochistan has always been extremely important. On the west, Balochistan is surrounded by 520 miles border with Iran and Afghanistan is located on the north. The Pakistani provinces of Punjab, Sindh and a part of KPK are located on the east. It has 470 miles of coastline passing through the warm waters of the Arabian Sea in the south. (Dunne, 2006).

The state of the Baloch, currently fragmented politically among three separate countries, is an integrated unit physically. (Awan, 1985). The Goldsmid Line, delineated in 1871 and divided in 1896, gave Persia, the area of western Balochistan while keeping the portion which was larger in the east for the British. The famous Durand Line which was drawn in 1894 by the British, fragmented Balochistan between Afghanistan and British Balochistan, giving the

latter a small area of northern Balochistan. Being a legacy of British colonial rule, these borders were inherited by Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan and have continued to divide the country from that time onwards.

Balochistan, being rugged and inhospitable has an area of over 134,000 square kilometres. The province is divided into four main parts which are the Lower Highlands, the Upper Highlands, the Deserts and the Plains.

A large part of Balochistan is mountainous, although there are some plains and deserts also. The area is mostly rugged and barren. Balochistan is abundant in natural resources. Besides gas, it has huge reserves of copper, coal, silver, gold, aluminium, platinum and uranium. It is also known to have oil in large quantities.

Being one of the driest provinces, Balochistan has very few farming and irrigation facilities. It is the poorest in terms of infrastructure and also the most backward province as compared to the others, with the lowest per capita income. This inequality in income and distribution of resources has led to repeated insurgencies in Balochistan for the last six decades in the history of Pakistan.

Balochistan has more than 470 miles of coastline but without any rivers that run around and it is subject to very less rainfall per year. The location of Balochistan and its climate affect the people to a large extent and depict their environment. According to Taj Mohammad Bressegh, the tough climate and mountainous area have led to the breeding of a self-independent community accustomed to difficulties; which result in problems in communication and thus isolation.

International Importance

Even though the province of Balochistan is sparsely populated, it is strategically and economically very important. It holds a large amount of Pakistan's mineral and energy reserves, contributing to 30% of its total gas production. The province is also rich in copper, coal, gold, silver, platinum, aluminium and uranium. (Hameed, [2006](#)). It possesses huge quantities of oil.

The coastline of Balochistan is extremely important to the world as it has an influence over the Middle East, the Persian Gulf sea and links with Africa. 70% of the world's oil passes from the Strait of Hormuz which is the choke point. China's western province is situated near the Arabian Sea in comparison to the Yellow Sea. The passage of trade is short being advantageous for the Chinese western province's economy. Russia's and Central Asian Republics' trade passage through the sea is accessible from Balochistan. Its coastline is also significant because it gives Pakistan an economic zone abundant in oil, minerals and gas spreading over 180,000 square kilometres. This also gives Balochistan immense strategic value. It is a prospective transit passage for a pipeline transferring gas from Turkmenistan and Iran to India.

The Insurgency

In the post-partition period, there were three decades of conflict between the centre and the Baloch insurgents which comprised four insurrections. Post the coup of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and nearly thirty years of peace, there was once again violence in Balochistan in January of 2005.

There was a resurgence of violence in Balochistan in 2005 which had a chance of turning into a civil war. The response of the central government towards the crisis was to introduce massive development projects and strong military operations in order to counter the Baloch nationalists. (Tahir, [2008](#)). In the contemporary insurgency, it is interesting to note that a younger generation of the Baloch is taking part in the resistance movement. It is able to deal with the problem in an unemotional and political manner. Leaders like Sanaulah Baloch, Hameed Baloch, and Amanullah Baloch, affiliated with the BSO (Baloch Student Organisation) who played a major role in the resistance of the 1970s, don't acknowledge the conventional system of Sardars of loyalty and benefits for a confirmed support base. Through this, they have managed to gather a group, which is modern and has the ability to carry the Balochi struggle for a long time. (Jamil-ur-Rehman, [2005](#)).

The movement also has the support of the BSO-Azad created in 2006, which is a sympathizer of the armed struggle in Balochistan and is the proponent of an independent Balochistan. Similarly, the BRSO also provides support to the movement. This shows that the student organizations influenced by Marxist and socialist ideologies have also started to take interest in the movement and insurgency against the government. (Pakistan: The Forgotten Conflict in Balochistan, 2007).

By targeting the leadership of the Baloch, streamlining the nationalist secular parties, keeping at the side the legislature in the province, and going ahead with the contentious plans of development, the government has displayed a disregard for the political process which is widely visible in Balochistan. Most of the youth in Balochistan have lost faith in political dialogue and turned to violence.

International Factors Behind the Insurgency

Apart from domestic, and international factors have also influenced the contemporary insurgency in Balochistan. Regarding the transnational factors, two have remained quite essential. The first is the war on terrorism and the second is the emerging potential and opportunities in the economic field in Balochistan. The movements of secession in the province have also established deeper contacts with their co-ethnics in neighbouring countries in order to procure help in fighting against the centre. Concerning the role of foreign powers, the role of Afghanistan and India is quite important. Iran and some Middle Eastern countries such as Oman and Dubai have also been involved to some extent. The involvement of the US is also somewhat expected.

Balochistan has assumed a new meaning and importance after 9/11 and the province has come under the limelight and focus of the major powers. After the US invasion of Afghanistan, the Pakistani government also began to increase its military presence in Balochistan. The northwest frontier region of Pakistan was guarded by Afghanistan and its border with Iran enabling the military of Pakistan to enable to

guard its presence with its border in the east with India. In 2001, after the downfall of the Taliban, Pakistan felt that its border in the west was vulnerable to aggressive designs. Therefore, it started to increase the presence of the military in Balochistan by establishing a number of posts throughout the province, mostly in the areas enriched with resources such as Kohlu, Dera Bugti and Khuzdar. (Niazi, 2006).

The problem of missing persons came to the forefront in Balochistan around 2002, after the US declared its war on terror. In the view of human rights campaigners, the people assumed to be involved in the terrorist activities were picked up, and either kept in local safe houses or given to the US authorities. A few of them also landed in Guantanamo Bay, a US-run military prison camp in Cuba. The post-9/11 anti-terror atmosphere was used by the security agencies in order to suppress growing opposition, mainly in Balochistan and Sindh where strong nationalist movements existed. As a result, the largest number of disappeared people could be located in Balochistan. Most of them were taken away in 2005 and 2006 amidst the fighting between the paramilitary forces and the rebels who wanted greater autonomy from the government. (Yusaf, 2009).

Due to sharing a common border with Afghanistan, the US considered Balochistan as an extremely essential region for the military operation against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The United States even established bases of military in Dalbandin and Pasni in Balochistan. (Dunne, 2006). As a result of 9/11, former President Pervez Musharaf also provided several important places from which the US could easily attack their targets in Afghanistan. A large part of these operations was carried out from the Pasni and Dalbandin bases located in Balochistan. The airfields in these areas had been used to a great extent since 2001, in order to give logistical aid for intelligence functions. The United States considered Balochistan a "jump-off point" for ventures in the future against the Iranian state and its nuclear programme.

After the US campaign in the war on terror, Balochistan turned into an essential escape passage for International Islamic Front refugees

and Al-Qaeda trying to escape from Karachi to Yemen. In the aftermath of the US ventures against Iraq which started in March 2003, Balochistan started to become an essential venue of operations by Al Qaeda and International Islamic Front guerillas to launch attacks on the economic interests of the U.S in Pakistan in response to the US operations both in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to a few scholars, the Al-Qaeda network and the Taliban used Balochistan to move between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The secular nature of the Baloch nationalists has remained an important factor for the United States. According to Selig S. Harrison, the United States had a huge strategic stake in a peaceful reconciliation between Pakistan and the Baloch rebel leaders. (Harrison, Pakistan: The State of the Union, [2009](#)). The Baloch nationalist movement undermined the US efforts to stabilize Afghanistan having immense effects on the region.

In the opinion of Frederic Grare, if the load on the Western troops in Afghanistan was to become out of control, the US would probably employ the Baloch, who are against the pressure of the religious clergy as well as the Taliban, in order to influence Pakistan as well as Iran. (Grare, [2006](#)).

The war on terror and the rise of the Taliban also raised speculations in the Indian circle. India became worried because of the ‘militant groups’ inspired by the Taliban operating in the Indian-held Kashmir. The operational bases of the Taliban in Balochistan also worried India’s friends in the region, mainly Afghanistan. (Niazi, [2006](#)).

Afghanistan also resented Pakistan’s protection of the Taliban, as it became a huge problem to its peace since its re-grouping in the year 2003. Iran was dissatisfied with Pakistan’s attitude towards the Taliban because of its anti-Shia policy and the ventures of allies of the Taliban, like Jandullah, in Iran’s Sunni-based region of Sistan-Balochistan.

India and Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for not acting appropriately in opposition to the

attacks of the militants, or even providing support to groups like the Taliban. They even accused Pakistan of giving support to the Taliban in Afghanistan and the militants rising against the Indian troops in disputed Kashmir.

Conclusion

Balochistan is a region of extreme importance. The economic and geostrategic significance of the province cannot be denied. History proves that the province has remained in limelight from ancient times to the contemporary time period. Geographically the province has remained and is important to the world powers. Economically the province is abundant with natural resources which if utilized efficiently can lead to major benefits for the people of Balochistan.

In such a scenario, the contemporary Baloch insurgency is proving a hurdle in the development path of the region. The ancient Sardari system is one in which modernization and development are viewed as detrimental to the sovereignty of the Sardars over their people. Furthermore, the Baloch nationalists view the centre’s efforts to develop the province with suspicion as they are of the view that the locals of Balochistan will be marginalized and deprived in their own province. This mindset has caused obstacles in the growth and prosperity of Balochistan making it more underdeveloped than the other provinces. The insurgency also has an important international dimension being of great concern to states like Afghanistan, India, the US and the Middle East.

The need of the time is to remove the trust deficit between the state of Pakistan and the Baloch insurgents. Recently the state decided to adopt a reconciliatory attitude towards the Baloch insurgents by offering them compensation and rewards in return for giving up arms and leading the insurgency. The Baloch nationalists should realize that the state is sincerely committed to the development of the province. On the other hand, the Centre should make it a point that the Baloch should be given maximum opportunities in their own province removing the sense of injustices and grievances present among the Baloch.

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