INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS IN BALOCHISTAN CONFLICT

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Abstract

Five times since independence of Pakistan, Balochistan has caught with insurgency by nationalist forces. Some Balochs are demanding autonomy and some are raising slogans of independence. The province is in turmoil and dissenter elements are targeting non Baloch population along with governmental installations. The insurgents appear expert in military tactics as well as appear to be heavily armed. An insurgency of this magnitude cannot be continued without assistance of internal and external actors. This essay tends to explore internal and external actors in Balochistan crises.

Introduction

Balochistan, after an uneasy peace of almost three decades, is constantly witnessing the violent insurgency. The province has been in turmoil for the past several years and has conventionally been a difficult province to govern and the province seems to be on the brink as the simmering insurgency has escalated. Target killing, bomb blasts, attacks on law enforcement agencies (LEAs), acts of sabotage and kidnapping have become routine matter. Complaints relate to “self rule, ownership of resources, political participation and control over the economy”. Baloch insurgents are firing rockets, exploding bombs and even targeting common masses.
Five times since independence of Pakistan, Balochistan has caught with insurgency by the dissident Baloch, demanding “greater autonomy or even an independent state, which would reunite the Baloch population of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan under one flag”.

The central government has always used ham handed approach to curb Balochistan situation while setting aside the fact that use of force always grants most awful implications and in some cases it also paves the way of disintegration. The successor rulers of Pakistan have ignored the rights of different communities and regions, and the worst example of such discrimination is Balochistan. Although rich in mineral resources, yet the province is suffering lots of problems and the common Balochs are living in very shabby and poor conditions. The Baloch, who are by nature nationalist, started a political movement against this discrimination. But, with the passage of time, hatred emerged against central government and it changed their demands and methods. Most of political and nationalist parties, which earlier were demanding “provincial autonomy”, are now raising the slogans of “total independence”. Nationalist turned militants started an insurgency by targeting non Baloch civilian population along with attacking governmental installations. Media has reported many times that there is foreign involvement in deteriorating Balochistan situation, but no concrete steps have been taken so far. Balochistan has been simmering for years now, and it seems that successive governments’ lack of action and apathy
has pushed the situation to the tipping point. Pakistani flags are being taken down, schools are being threatened against singing the national anthem and non Baloch residents are scared for their lives. Walls of Quetta are full with anti state slogans and militants are attacking LEAs. In the wake of such bitter situation, the central government has to consider the seriousness of the issue and should take bold political, economic and social policy measures instead of only employing force. In this premise, this essay explores the major fault lines which are directly or indirectly surfacing violence in Balochistan. The paper also highlights both internal and external factors behind these fault lines along with suggesting some suitable policy measures.

**Literature Review**

Scholars interpret current violent protest mobilization by applying different academic explanations. Alok Bansal considers the Baloch movement as a result of perceived Punjabi hegemony. Adeel Khan argues that Baloch nationalism results from the struggle for power between the Pakistani state and the Baloch people. Robert G. Wirsing concludes the context of today’s Baloch insurgency in terms of energy resource developments. Frederic Grare relates the uprising to revival of nationalistic sentiments whereas Mir Ghaus Bizenjo attributes the current violent outburst as an outcome of military operations of 1973. Feyyaz defines the insurgency as greed phenomena while Surendra discusses it in terms of opportunity based motives. Notwithstanding
significance of other scholarly explanations, this paper discusses the internal factors which have given space to the external actors.

**Historical Background**

Balochistan, the largest province of the country, is sparsely populated. With an area of 347190 kilometres, it covers 43.6 percent of the total area of Pakistan. Extraordinary verities of climate can be witnessed in different parts of the province. According to 1998 census, its population was 6.51 million, but now, the estimated population is 7.914 million with 76.1 percent rural population. Strategically important Balochistan covers nearly the country’s entire coast – 756 kilometres of coastline. Balochistan is blessed with gold, copper, coal, natural gas, oil and other mineral resources and also possess underdeveloped coastline with an abundance of ocean resources. It has also been proposed as a “transit site for the natural gas pipelines that would carry gas from either Iran or Turkmenistan to Pakistan and from there, potentially, to India”. Despite of all these natural resources, the province is still less industrialized and underdeveloped. Its social system revolves around the traditional tribal system in which *Nawabs* and *Sardars* enjoy autocratic powers. Theoretically speaking, the province is Pakistani rule, but in reality the real power resides in the hands of local tribal leaders, who most often have their own laws, armies, and jails. Therefore, one can blame central government for marginalizing Balochistan, but equal responsibility lies with the *Sardars* who enjoy
immense powers in their tribes, and in central and provincial
governments. The ethnic composition of Balochistan is mixed,
with 45% Baloch, about 38% Pashtun, and 17% of the
population composed of other ethnic groups. Earlier to the
partition of British India in 1947, the region was divided into
four major states: Makran, Kharan, Lasbela, and Kalat.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Resurgence of Uprising}

The present wave of violent uprising has been surfaced
after an interval of almost three decades. Fuelled by a long list
of grievances, “it has long faced acute discrimination and
neglect at the hands of the central government”.\textsuperscript{17} Among the
grievances is the perceived exploitation of gas and mineral
resources by the central government, development of mega
projects and military presence within the province.

So far the province has witnessed five insurgencies during
1948, 1958, 1962, 1973-77 and 2002 to date.\textsuperscript{18} The current
Baloch-Islamabad conflict started during the efforts of
developing Balochistan. The Gwadar port proved as a bone of
contention between the Islamabad and the Baloch
nationalists. This upsurge intensified in March 2005 when the
then president General Pervez Musharraf declared an all-out
war on Balochistan.\textsuperscript{19} In the wake of these developments, chief
of the Bugti tribe, Nawab Akbar Bugti along with other
tribesmen led an insurgent movement against the central
government. Nawab Akbar, ex Chief Minister and ex Governor
of Balochistan, was killed on 26 August 2006 in a military
operation. Afterward, Nawabzada Balach Marri, leader of the
banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), was killed in an ambush while crossing Afghanistan to Pakistan in November 2007.

The Balochistan crises took a new shape in early 2009 when UNHCR representative, John Solecki was abducted from Quetta. Soon after, three Baloch nationalist leaders were found brutally murdered in Turbat in April 2009. Afterward, a new wave of violence touched urban areas of province. The insurgents started attacking developmental activities and hatred against non Baloch residents of province took the shape of target killings. This violent situation of target killing has taken lives of more than 200 civilians in the first half of 2009.20 Academicians are also being targeted and so far six academicians have become victims of target killings during the last couple of months. Besides targeting non Baloch population, some religious extremists are also spreading sectarian violence through target killing. The former Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) of Quetta has alleged Lashkiri-Jhangvi for sectarian target killings.21 Brutal abduction and target killings have become a routine matter and former Senator Habib Jalib Baloch, secretary general of Balochistan National Party (BNP), has also lost his life in July 2010, sparking violent protests in different parts of the volatile province.22 According to a former Senator, Sanaullah Baloch, systematic and slow motion “genocide” is taking place in the province.23
Violence has become a routine matter in Balochistan. Various groups of dissident Balochs are fighting guerrilla war against the state. Numerous groups have been surfaced in the province which claim for the attacks and blasts on the LEAs and the common masses. Among these groups, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is supposed to be the main force behind present crises in Balochistan. The name BLA first became public in summer 2000, after the organization claimed credit for a series of bomb attacks in markets and railways lines. Ex Chief Minister of Balochistan Jam Muhammad Yousaf formally accepted the existence of BLA after the bomb blast in Quetta in December 2004. Previously it was allegedly headed by late Nawabzada Balaach Marri, but now it is alleged that Nawab Brahamdagh Khan Bugti is heading it while Marri and Bugti tribesmen are believed to comprise its backbone.

Causes of Insurgency

The government of Pakistan attributes the ongoing wave of violence in Balochistan to the trepidation of the area’s feudal lords; mega developmental projects would expose the submissive local population to the outside world and would weaken their hold on them. It is also alleged that the political elites contrive to capture rents from the extraction of gold, minerals, and other developmental projects by seceding the province from Pakistan and establishing hegemony in the province. However, a careful analysis of the history of the conflict reveals that “ethnicity, intertwined with a sense of
political isolation and relative economic deprivation, has been a potent force in inducing the Baloch mobilization”. This feeling of deprivation is more intense amongst the Baloch as compared to any other ethnic group in Pakistan for various historical and economic reasons. In this premise, some major internal and external factors are appended below:

**Economic Development and Resource Exploitation**

The Balochistan province in general provides an excellent example of poor governance in almost every sphere of life. The years of internal unrest and ill-conceived development policies and priorities on the part of the federal and provincial governments have resulted in backwardness of the province. According to the Balochistan Economic Report, “Balochistan has the weakest long-term growth performance of all provinces in the country. From 1972–3 to 2005–6 the province’s economy grew by 2.7 times in Balochistan, 3.6 times in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Sindh, and 4 times in Punjab.” At present, 90% of the Baloch towns and villages are underdeveloped, where people are living in absolute poverty and experience the worst possible inequality.

Balochistan also scores lowest in the 10 key indicators for health, water, and sanitation, and education for 2007–8. The province has a maternal mortality rate as high as 600 per 100,000, compared to Pakistan’s overall maternal mortality rate of 350 per 100,000. Balochistan also has the lowest literacy rate. Seventy-six percent of primary schools in the province are without shelter, and 60% of primary schools have
only one untrained and unqualified teacher. The systematic denial of basic education and education-related facilities to the lower classes of Balochistan has caused anger and frustration among the Baloch youth. Due to a lack of basic facilities and infrastructure, the Balochistan province contributes just one-fifth to the national mining GDP and leads only in the production of coal. At present, 70% of the population of the province lives without gas facilities, 78% without electricity, and 62% without safe drinking water.

**Gwadar Deep Sea Port**

During the last decade the government of Pakistan started developing a deep sea port at the coastal town of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea with Chinese collaboration. Development of the Gwadar district will provide a port, a warehousing facility, and industry to more than 20 countries. Its completion is expected in 2011, when the port will be able to receive oil tankers of over 200,000 tones. Along with an associated industrial development and free-trade zone, Gwadar will be linked to Central Asia by a road and rail network which is currently under construction. China has also discussed with Pakistan the possibility of building an oil refinery of 60,000 barrels per day at the Gwadar port. The development of the Gwadar port has opened the possibility of an emerging free port in Balochistan, which is expected to create a massive economic windfall for the province.

The Baloch nationalists allege that the contract between the government of Pakistan and the Chinese company for the
development of the port is classic evidence of misuse of Baloch wealth. Islamabad and the Chinese company are taking 50% and 48%, respectively, leaving only 2% profit for the Balochistan province. Additionally, all construction contracts for developing the basic infrastructure have been made with non-Baloch firms. Consequently, the majority of the technical positions on the port were filled largely by Punjabis and other non-Baloch workers. In this regard no effort has been made by the central government to train the local population for jobs at the Gwadar port. The Baloch also fear that once the government’s plans for the port are complete, the population of Gwadar and the surrounding districts is expected to rise from 70,000 to approximately two million, overwhelmingly transforming the ethnic makeup of the region as more and more Punjabis, Sindhis, and other workers will move into the area. The anger of Baloch nationalists has sometimes been directed against China. A number of Chinese nationals have been the target of violent attacks in the province during the last eight years, some of which resulted in fatalities.

In essence, the following have worsened the situation in the province: displacement of a large number of poor Baloch by the construction of the Gwadar deep sea port without adequate compensation from the government; the lack of preference to the sons of the soil for work in the developmental projects; violation of the labour rights of the people employed by the Chinese construction company that is building the port; and the setting up of three new
cantonments by the army in Balochistan.\textsuperscript{32} Baloch nationalist leaders insist that they are not opposed to development but are against the exploitation of natural resources that do not benefit the local communities. They also insist that the province, not the Sardars or the centre, should be the main beneficiary of the income from Balochistan’s natural gas and oil reserves and other mineral resources.

The federal government of Pakistan, however, blames the current unrest in Balochistan on vested tribal and political interests aimed at creating instability and drawing benefits. It asserts that the Baloch nationalist Sardars and the tiny middle class of the province want to gain maximum economic benefits from the development projects, instead of losing all benefits to investors from other parts of Pakistan. Moreover, Balochis are fragmented by tribal loyalties and it cannot be assumed that they will function as a coherent identity, even if they acquire greater autonomy in controlling the resource base.

The Baloch in Gwadar fear that they will become a minority in their own land. The Sardars follow the contention that these projects will change the demography of the province\textsuperscript{33}. When Gwadar port will become full fledged functional, it will raise the population of Gwadar and it is likely to hasten the arrival of two million people\textsuperscript{34}. The Baloch are convinced that the majority will be of non Balochs and hence they will become a minority.
The Political Situation

The weak political government in Balochistan is unable to establish writ over the province due to friction between various parties included in the coalition government. The nationalists have been left out of the power game after boycotting the 2008 elections and worried about their future in politics. Hence, they are trying to portray certain issues as anti Baloch, mainly to gather public support. Absence of mature and enterprising local media also helps these nationalist forces to increase frustration and exploitation in the common masses. Moreover, absence of genuine federalism and the lack of any worthwhile decision making powers with the provincial government have also accentuated the alienation of the population.

External Factors

History reveals that an insurgency of this magnitude cannot be continued long without foreign assistance. Pakistani media has time and again reported of foreign involvement in the insurgency. Many of the Pakistani media reports have mainly accused India and Iran of being behind the violence. The reports are based on the fact that the two countries do not want Gwadar to emerge as a rival to Chabahar port, which the Indians are developing in Iran as a gateway to Central Asia. However, most of the Indian writers deny these facts and argue that Iran with a substantial Baloch population is unlikely to stroke Baloch nationalism. They also highlight that India does not have a rationale to support an insurgency in
Balochistan at a time when the relations with Pakistan are moving forward and such a support would undermine India’s interest in the gas pipeline project from Iran to India. Contrary to Indian involvement, they allegedly overemphasize US as the ‘only country with a capability and reach to influence local politics’\(^{35}\). One can question the share of India, Iran, Afghanistan, the US and Russia but, the fact is that all these foreign actors are behind the ongoing violence in Balochistan.

In fact, some of the regional countries have developed interest in Balochistan due to changing geopolitical and geo-economics environments. And a new dirty game of geopolitics has started in Balochistan. To understand the recent wave of violence in Balochistan, one must understand the vested interests of the foreign actors. The root cause of violence in Balochistan is not internal poverty or lack of development but the covert operations of foreign intelligence agencies\(^{36}\). Internal issues might act as catalysts to inflame the situation but the root cause is foreign interference in internal affairs of Balochistan. Covert operations by CIA and RAW in Balochistan began in January 2002 and the interior province was badly subverted in three years. Necessary infrastructure put in place in the form of contacts, 58 training camps, provision of all sorts of arms and ammunition, sophisticated communication system and huge funds\(^{37}\).
Recommendations

Present crises can be settled through dialogue based an open mind and heart. There must be a surety that the policy measures will be enforced honestly and completely so that lack of distrust may be removed.

➢ For Internal Issues

- Although some Balochs are waging armed struggle, yet some regional parties still seek provincial autonomy. They give little support for secession but militant sentiments could grow if Islamabad does not reverse its policies of exploitation of natural resources, construction of military garrisons and centrally controlled economic projects, such as the Gwadar deep sea port. These policies do not benefit locals but raise fears that the resulting influx of economic migrants could make the Baloch a minority in their homeland.

- The unemployment in Balochistan has taken a very horrible shape and it must be coped immediately and effectively. The federal government should treat Balochistan as 95% instead of 5% for some time. It is suggested that five hundred to one thousand Baloch youths selected on merit basis may be recruited and posted in Islamabad and Lahore. Such a step will ensure the participation of the Balochs in federation and Punjab. Due to this step, their
relatives and friends will visit them and their exposure will open up the gates for Baloch youth.

- All federal departments may be directed to provide acute representation to Baloch youth immediately. The Baloch population must be given a huge representation in Gwadar project through jobs.

- Total reliance on mega projects is not the solution. Instead of it, due attention must be paid to resolving day to day concerns of people such as their need for employment, a decent wage, facilities of safe movement, satisfaction of basic needs and guarantees of security of life and due protection of law.

- Employment in province is totally dependent on public sector and it is impossible to adjust everyone in government sector. The province is blessed with numerous mineral resources but scarcely any work has been done to use them, which can house huge masses. Hence, immediate and proper attention must be paid to create employment in these areas.

- A special emergency cell for education may be established at Federal and Provincial level for ensuring quality education. Also, there is no worth mentioning degree college in the province. Therefore, attention must be paid to degree level
education by establishing federal colleges at Tehsil level ensuring qualified faculty and full monitoring.

- The very important areas of Sibi and Naseerabad Divisions, which are abode of famous Baloch tribes Marri and Bugti, and are at present the hub of tribalism, have no college and university. This area is breeding violence against the federal government and only education can stop the youth of these area to not to go to violence. Therefore, it is need of time to establish their cadet colleges, degree colleges and a university.

- Mega projects are important for economic development but the central government should also accommodate the provincial demands. Whatever step is taken, it must be strictly in accordance with the wishes and priorities of the local people that are ultimate prospective beneficiaries.

- Successive government used to deviate from their mandate and instead of imparting the civil rights; they brutally use force to curb the Baloch demands. Hence, there is a need for partnership between the civil society and the media to grow pressure on rulers not to depart from their mandate and also to act as counter pressure to those external forces who try to influence the government policies.
• Negotiation and Reconciliation can be used as guiding principles for ending the problems of the Baloch. There must be created a conducive environment for reconciliation and after creating an enabling environment, efforts should be made to restore the confidence of the people and then we can negotiate with the local people.

• Balochistan is now facing intensive law and order situations as well as sectarian violence. Its causes may be located and very effective system may be adopted to improve this grave situation.

• Majority of the feudal chiefs of Pakistan have damaged the interests of Pakistan. Generally, they have shown little commitment or sense of nationalism with their homeland. For the said reason, Pakistan needs to immediately abolish the Sardari System in the province. The government should also register cases against terrorist tribal leaders. They should be charged for murdering the poor Pakistani citizens.

• Balochistan’s political system led by feudal politicians has been failed and the issue of Balochistan is part of this wider problem. This system needs to be changed and new system should focus on economic development and providing opportunities to the Baloch citizens.
• Pakistani politics should be localized to prevent the destabilization of state. Hence ethnic based provinces need to be abolished.

• Imparting democracy to Balochistan, which remains an alien concept there, is the only way forward that can liberate the common masses of the province from their economic miseries and help in determining their future.

• The writ of the government cannot be established with gunship helicopters when there is actually no writ of a civilian government. The former government had made a mistake by killing tribal chief Nawab Akbar Bugti. Indeed his killing and military operations in the province have widened the gap between Balochistan and the centre. Therefore, use of force is not a solution.

• All political activists who were detained by the government should be released and if there are any cases against these activists, they should be tried in a court of law. But it is very important that extra judicial arrests should be stopped.

• The construction of cantonments in Balochistan should be halted for some time and after convincing the Baloch population central government can construct it.
• The local youths should be given first priority in job opportunities in development projects. It is also important to fill the vacant seats of Balochistan’s quota in the federal services in order to eliminate the sense of deprivation among the people of this province.
• And the decision to merge the Levies force with police should be withdrawn.
• The Concurrent List from the 1973 Constitution should be abolished and there must be greater autonomy for all provinces. The matter of gas royalty is an old Baloch grievance and it should be reviewed after a debate on the matter.

➢ For External Issues
• The U.S. is undoubtedly functioning against Pakistan’s vital security and economic interests in the region. Islamabad should demand from the U.S. to cease the usage of Afghan soil to destabilize Pakistan.
• Islamabad should also face up to the Americans and the Indians with the evidence that both are exporting terrorism into Pakistan and fostering insurgencies using the Afghan soil. Pakistan should let the world know what the Americans and their Indian partners are doing in the region.
• Islamabad should contact the British government not to hold one sided cheap propaganda based seminars. An official complaint must be logged in this regard.

• Effective measures should be taken to counter RAM and RAW involvement in Balochistan.

• Media should also act as a pressure tactic to those external forces that are influencing the present crises. Media men should portray the true picture of external powers.

**Conclusion**

Insurgency in Balochistan is neither a new phenomenon nor any single central or provincial government can be blamed for creating reasons of violent uprising. Rather, it is the failure of successive political and military governments which did not respond to the real grievances of the Baloch people. This continuous process of marginalisation and under development of the province had resulted in creating internal and external fault lines which were further exploited by the dissident nationalists as well as external powers. Theoretically speaking, development can reduce the common people’s grievances, but in Balochistan the practical implications of starting mega projects is very much different. The Baloch nationalists are very much against to the development of Gwadar Sea Port which is considered as a catalyst for peace and development in the region. This negative inclination about the mega projects
reflects the mistrust between the Islamabad and the Baloch nationalists. There is an immense need to bridge this trust gap so that the fault lines of the province can be removed. Furthermore, the volatile situation of the province is being exploited by the foreign powers. But before putting blame to the other states, the Pakistani government (both provincial and central) has to think that they themselves have provided opportunities to the outsiders for exploitation. Hence, sincere and consistent efforts are needed to overcome this serious problem.

End Notes


2 Sanaullah Baloch, “A Lesson to be Learnt”, August 05, 2008.


9 Feyyaz M. Pasha, “If Greed Theory has Visited Nuclear South Asia”, unpublished, National Defence University Islamabad.


15 Ibid.


33 Sardar Akbar Khan Bughti, interview by Dr. Shahid Masood, @ ARYONE World, Islamabad, March 5, 2005.

