BALOCHISTAN – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Abstract

Since independence Pakistan’s largest province having geo-strategic importance and unlimited natural resources inducing a coastal line has remained plagued with unrest and disturbances. Decades of serious political and administrative neglect has aggravated the whole issue. Pakistan’s future and its leap forward towards prosperity is linked with Balochistan. For Pakistanis, Balochistan and its current situation and how it is handled is vital to understand. A simplistic view of addressing the problem, which has too many dimensions and fault lines could be fatal. Only an indepth understanding of its past and present can give the contours of ‘way forward’. A holistic approach encompassing Federal and Provincial governments can take the Balochistan out of current imbroglio. The current well balanced political dispersion of Balochistan has given a rare opportunity. It can be a real catalyst of change, provided the nation is serious to address this long simmering issue. This paper provides an insight into the complexities of most deprived province and will make a good reading.

Introduction

Balochistan with 44%¹ of the land mass and 5%² of Pakistan’s population is passing through an ever growing volatile situation, where gradual degeneration is taking place in all facets of public life. Repeated policy failures since creation of Pakistan have created deep seated multi-dimensional problems having serious security implications for the country. The reasons of the present crisis are not well known to the people of Pakistan and lack of wholesome comprehension at national level, coupled with least resolve has compounded the problem. There is a dire need to tackle the present imbroglio in a synergetic manner to address the issue in totality.

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Scope

In this connection, this paper aims to review Balochistan issue in the context of historical perspective, nature of repeated unrests, prevailing environment, last government’s policy initiatives including their outcome, present political landscape and suggests a way forward.

Historical Perspective

Pre-partition, this region was governed by the British. They strengthened the institution of nawabs / sardars while keeping the masses in the state of extreme deprivation. The whole system was so articulated to facilitate their management of Balochistan by exploiting the tribal system through few individuals having their vested interest.

The issue of Balochistan, started emerging when the future of Kalat State was decided by referendum in Shahi Jirga in June 1947, in favour of Pakistan and Shahzada Karim Khan, brother of Khan of Kalat reacted violently against the accession and rebelled to Afghanistan in March 1948. Establishment of One Unit, inept handling of tribal leaders in post Nawab Nauroz Khan situation and political expediencies of early 70s created deep rooted issues, where people were the ultimate victims and resultantly alienated. Deep scars of the past have seriously impacted the psyche of a common Baloch and therefore the whole provincial issue has to be seen in that context.

Eruption of Disturbances and Unrests

Balochistan has witnessed five successive insurgencies and unrests since 1947. Poor handling, coupled with non-institutionalized approach by successive governments is the main drivers of unrest. The current situation is far more complex, as the ongoing unrest in the province is aided and abetted by the international players, which should also be seen in the context of Afghanistan situation. For better
understanding, it is pertinent to scan the nature of successive insurgencies and unrests.

The first insurgency erupted in March 1948 by Prince Karim\(^5\) (younger brother of Khan of Kalat), who defected to Afghanistan along with a \textit{lashkar} and conducted anti state activities to address the issue of State of Kalat as an independent state. Geographically, it was confined to the Jhalawan area of Balochistan. It lasted for few months only.

Late fifties witnessed the eruption of second insurgency.\(^6\) It primarily stemmed from the establishment of One Unit. Commonly known as Jhalawan disturbance, the insurgency was confined to the districts of Kalat, Khuzdar and Kohlu. It terminated temporarily in March 1960 after declaration of general amnesty and surrender of Sardar Nauroz Khan. Poor handling of Sardar Nauroz Khan\(^7\) and his family by the government laid the seeds of lack of trust in Balochi people towards the Federation of Pakistan.

The uneasy peace lasted for a brief period and the decade of sixties again found Balochistan gripped into the third insurgency.\(^8\) Its causes revolved around removal and arrest of tribal chieftans, Nawab Akbar Bugti, Khair Bakhsh Marri, Atta Ullah Mengal and Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo on the charges of supporting Sardar Nauroz Khan. Geographically, the area engulfed by the insurgency included Districts of Kalat, Khuzdar, Kohlu and Dera Bugti. Dissolution of One Unit and general amnesty, again gave Balochistan a brief spell of peace with the formation of Baloch Government in 1972.

The state’s inability to find lasting solution to the provincial problems, took Balochistan into its fourth insurgency in 1973 which lasted for four years.\(^9\) It started after the removal of National Awami Party’s (NAP) Government of Atta Ullah Mengal by Mr Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in February 1973 and encompassed general areas of Kharan, Sibi, Dera Bugti, Khuzdar and Kohlu. This insurgency could have lasted longer but the declaration of general amnesty by General Zia ul Haq
normalized the situation but without addressing the root causes.

Commencing in 2005, today the unfortunate province is confronting fifth cycle of unrest which is now entering into its eighth year. The simmering issues of Balochistan got its spark from the unrest in Dera Bugti/Sui on conflict of locals with Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), which created misunderstandings between Federal Government and Nawab Akbar Bugti. The situation further aggravated after the development of Gwadar Port, without addressing the concerns of locals coupled with disappearance of Nawab Akbar Bugti from the provincial landscape in 2007. The spatial dimensions of current disturbances now covers vast spaces of Baloch and Brahvi areas with distinct shade of mental subversion of masses having roots in lower and middle class with educated youth joining hands. So far a coherent policy and requisite political initiatives at different tiers to address the issue through a wholesome approach have not emerged on the national scene.

What Does the Successive Disturbances and Unrests Imply?

After independence, the Government could not comprehend the complex dynamics of Balochistan and tried to resolve the issues through reactive measures which lacked a long term vision. Resultantly, the disturbances grew in quantum and space, engulfing entire Baloch/Brahvi dominated areas from its traditional base of Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Sarawan and Jhalawan. The neglect of over last sixty years is now emerging in the form of deepening fault- lines with significantly fractured society. Destroyed societal fabric will poses serious challenges for a way forward without a wholesome response.

The political leadership of the province which emerged after successive disturbances was a classical product of political expediencies and did not reflect the will of the people as well as true representation of society. Continuous policy
failures since 1950’s have created state/non-state stake holders who are thriving on ever deteriorating situation in the province.

The tribal system, despite being a reality has invariably been either undermined or misused by the political elites. Short term gains through this faulty policy, has further strengthen the stranglehold of tribal leaders. Resultantly today, tribal system has become more strong than it was in 1947.

No wholesome policy was ever formulated by the successive governments at federal and provincial level to address the issue in totality with its focus on the masses in post disturbance periods. Political structure of the province is greatly influenced by groups having vested interests thus no developments have taken place in social and other sectors. Fruits of Eighteenth Amendment and National Finance Commission (NFC) Award have been lost in the black hole of corruption and other governance related issues.

**Prevailing Environment of the Province**

Balochistan occupies a strategic location in the regional context with a long coast line having Gwadar Port and sharing of 1160 km border with Afghanistan.\(^{10}\) It dominates the sea lines of communication which are vital for free flow of 40% of world’s oil\(^ {11}\) and can also serve as a strategic corridor for Central Asian Republics. Its huge land mass gifted with a wide variety of natural resources offers opportunities and challenges. In the regional context, regional and extra regional powers have converging and diverging interests.

Its ethnic landscape is characterized by Baloch, Pashtoons and Brahvis.\(^{12}\) Tribal system is fully intact mostly due to vested interests. The tribal leaders are aware that their survival lies in maintaining strong control over poor/deprived masses and weak writ of the government. Ignorance and intra-province conflict suits their interests. They control the destiny
of common people and hence jealously guard their traditions/culture for furthering their personal agendas.

Political dynamic of the province has remained uncertain. Politics in Balochistan generally revolve around pro and anti federation elements wherein nawabs and sardars have acted as good tools for political expediencies for short term solutions, but having long term serious consequences. Mainstream political parties have less influence in interior Balochistan and remain dependent on tribal hierarchy for their political ambitions. The present political dispersion has two distinct shades i.e in Baloch and Brahvi Areas, middle class leadership has emerged which can be an excellent catalyst for change of political dynamic in Balochistan. Similarly in Pashtun area, the representatives of the people can address most of the problems by virtue of their stance on various provincial issues including terrorism.

The tribal system thrives on poverty, illiteracy and backwardness of people and is averse to all such policy initiatives which lead to empowerment of people. The issues of Balochistan become more complex when the internal deteriorating security environment is exploited by regional and extra regional powers, state and non state actors who exploit the weak political and governance structure of the province for patronage for all facets of their anti state and anti social activities.

The complexity of Balochistan problems are also exacerbated due to the porous and harsh nature of terrain. There are numerous divided tribes and villages along the border with several frequented and unfrequented routes thus facilitating illegal movement across the border. It has a negative impact on security situation of the province. Till today, Balochistan continues to house approximately 345,100 (20.3%) of Afghan refugees. Large refugee camps particularly close to the border are ideal hideouts and breeding grounds for terrorists and militant organizations. No elaborate mechanism exists to monitor their activities in a cohesive manner at provincial level. These refugees are not
keen to go back due to law and order situation in Afghanistan and better economic opportunities inside Pakistan. Their presence has seriously complicated the security environment in Balochistan.

**Inferences Drawn from Prevailing Environment of Balochistan**

The socio-cultural spectrum characterized by tribal system does not let positive influences to permeate into its folds. Resultantly, mainstream political parties have not been able to develop in-roads in the interior parts of province. Due to poor governance, lack of government writ; the tribal system continues to be the practicable mechanism. Political parties still rely on tribal chieftains for accomplishment of their political agenda. Since tribal system is a reality and cannot be whisked away. How it has to be exploited/utilized for empowering the masses and at the same time weakening the stranglehold of sardars is the key question, which needs to be strategized.

The existing administrative mechanisms of the province does not represent a common man, is inept, having rampant corruption. It is therefore part of the problem and not part of the solution.

Its strategic location, enormous amount of natural resources and internal conflict provides an ideal opportunity for exploitation by inimical forces. Separatist tendencies in the province now have trans-frontier linkages. In the regional context, it is Pakistan’s soft belly, vulnerable to exploitation by global powers.

Prevailing situation in the province provide vast spaces for terrorist organizations which keep transiting from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and cross border movement from Afghanistan. Similarly the inhospitable terrain of Pak-Afghan border has facilitated inflow of arms and ammunition and illegal immigrants thus adding new dimensions to this complex issue. Afghan refugee camps continue to contribute
negatively towards the fragile security situation of Balochistan.

Disillusionment of youth led by the middle class educated leadership of militant organizations is now injecting loss of hope in sizeable population—a serious challenge indeed. Finally the nature of present unrest has changed radically with its expansion from traditional Marri, Bugti and Mengal areas. Today the spatial dimensions of challenging the state have expanded, compounded by mental subversion which needs to be comprehended for its serious and far reaching implications.

**Review of Government’s Policy Initiatives in the Past**

Unfortunately despite successive unrests no government has learnt from the history of Balochistan. Instead of adopting a wholesome approach, the issue was taken lightly as a law and order situation at best and hence dealt mainly with purely reactive measures. Severity of the situation has always been half heartedly appreciated in the past and some political initiatives were taken by the previous regimes with least positive results.

Government constituted two parliamentary committees in September 2004. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed’s Committee was mandated to assess the overall situation of Balochistan for making suitable recommendations. Senator Wasim Sajjad led the other committee to suggest policy measures “to promote inter-provincial harmony and protect rights of provinces with a view to strengthen the Federation”. Recommendations formulated by these committees were comprehensive and encompassed all major concerns of Balochistan. Unfortunately, these recommendations were never implemented - a classical example of policy failure. Remoteness of Balochistan and lack of ability to comprehend the erupting crises lay at the foundation of ongoing unrest in Balochistan.

**Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan:** A very well thought-out initiative ever taken by the past government is Aghaz-e-
Haqooq Balochistan. \(^{17}\) Ironically, due to lack of sincere efforts including political will, it has least impact on the people of Balochistan.

**18th Amendment and NFC Award:**\(^{18}\) It has provided enormous capacity to Balochistan, with a net increase of Rs 83 billion.\(^{19}\) Similarly greater provincial autonomy has not been aptly managed for addressing the grievances of the masses by the provincial leadership.

### Failure of Past Policy Initiatives – A Re-Appraisal

Other than Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan package, no significant policy was ever devised which could claim to be in-line with the aspirations of the people. Serious governance issues, enormous corruption in Provincial machinery, lack of resolve to address the real issues confronted by the people have resulted in unsuccessful implementation of this excellent package. 18th Amendment/NFC Award, though has been widely appreciated, but the administrative structures of the province have neither the capacity, nor sincerity and resolve to capitalize on the enormous benefits. Unfortunately these weaknesses are further widening the already existing fault-lines. The disillusionment of people of Balochistan is gradually increasing with serious repercussions for the security of Pakistan.

### Balochistan – An Overall Brief Reappraisal

Since independence, a critical look at past and present unrests amply indicates a classical policy failure, where federation and the provincial political and administrative structures have failed to grasp the complexity of the whole issue. Finding short term solutions by all successive federal and provincial governments has alienated the masses. Resultantly unrest has grown now encompassing vast spaces of Baloch and Brahvi areas. Mental subversion of the youth and their taking up of arms in some parts of province has seriously eroded the social fabric of the Province. Deep vested interest of political elites, some tribal leaders and non state
actors have significantly eroded the resolve to stem the tide in positive direction.

As a State, if issues confronted by Balochistan are not handled appropriately with total resolve and clarity, the situation can aggravate further, with long term negative implications for Pakistan. As a whole, Balochistan has negative social and security indicator, requiring the wholesome review.

Way Forward

Provincial political landscape today has all the ingredients of giving hope to the people of Balochistan. With a leadership which reflects the aspirations of a common Baloch no well seated in the corridors of power, if aptly utilize the lexers of power and state and provincial institutions, with any biases, the nation can pin all their hopes. It can be a catalyst of positive change. History has once again given the opportunity to turn the tide. Some plausible thoughts are discussed as under:

- The tribal character, ethnic composition, vast natural resources, history of unrest and serious governance issues demands concerted and dedicated efforts at national and provincial level. The policy and strategy for handling Balochistan should have four thrust lines as under:
  - Political initiative focusing on broad base reconciliation bringing all stakeholders on negotiation table. Selective application should be avoided. A high powered body with a balanced composition duly authorized for all encompassing negotiations by the federal and provincial governments needs to be constituted at priority. Historical apprehensions make proud Baloch very sensitive and thus they doubt sincerity of various political initiatives.
• Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan, 18 Amendment and NFC Award have totally failed to deliver, primarily because of very serious governance issues. A solid, fool proof mechanism needs to be developed to address governance related issues of Balochistan.

• Balochistan issue has been aggravated due to absolute absence of good governance. Without working out a policy by federal and provincial governments for posting of competent, efficient and honest officers de-linked from political expediencies in provincial machinery, no initiative will ever succeed.

• Armed struggle by some Baloch elements, at its root is now characterized by loss of hope and loss of trust in federation to address their concerns as citizens of Pakistan stemming from disillusionment and also perceived sense of deprivation. Revival of this hope is the key to moving forward. Mental subversion of Baloch needs re-addressal by devising an imaginative and credible policy, which is strategized with sincerity and credibility.

• Supporting guidelines should include:
  o Tendency of labelling Baloch in general as anti state should be avoided and all separatist elements should be brought into the main stream. ‘Rhetoric only’ will never pay. Actionable measures needs to be initiated at priority.
  o Develop fool proof institutionalize mechanisms at federal and provincial levels for socio-economic developments for bridging the gap between sardars and the masses thus providing conducive environment to heal the simmering feedings of deprivation.
  o Equal and balanced representation of ethnic groups in administrative setups at national and provincial level. No ethnic group should be neglected due to its peaceful nature.
Holding of census to crystallize the actual demographic profile of the province, which can ensure balanced policies in various spheres of governance and politics. It is a very serious issue, which at present may look ordinary but may lead to serious ethnic conflict in future.

- Repatriation of Afghan refugees needs to be tackled vigorously as it is contributing negatively toward the security canvas of the province.
- Need to develop effective mechanisms for border control, restricting free cross border movement which presently contributes to law and order situation in the Province.
- Appropriate measures need to be put in place to check the inflow of funding to non state actors and separatists elements.
- Nexus between various militant groups operating in Balochistan should be broken. Lack of national policy on terrorism is a major contributory factor towards security situation which is fully exploited by terrorist and other groups with vested interest.

**Parting Shot**

Balochistan is passing through turmoil, due to its geo-strategic importance, tribal dynamics, successive policy failures, beneficiaries of the prevalent situation and non-state actors. Since the independence, unfortunately due to narrow vision of national security, Balochistan is gradually sinking into a quagmire with serious and long lasting implications for Pakistan. The nation should rise to the occasion. Despite all the internal and external threats, the situation can still be managed, provided the nation has competency, sincerity and honesty to address these challenges. It can be done, provided there is a will. The current political dispersion in Balochistan is well balanced and reflects the aspiration of people. An all out support can change the internal dynamics of Balochistan in the positive direction.
Author

The author is a serving Lieutenant General and M. Phil scholar at Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) Department in National Defence University and has interest in peace and conflict issues especially related to insurgency and terrorism.

Notes


2. Ibid, p-320.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


8. Ibid,p-xx.


