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Review

Baluchistan Insurgency: Dynamics and Implications

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Baluchistan-the largest province of Pakistan has remained a bone of contention in the federation ever since the creation of Pakistan. It is argued that this Baluch insurgency is not purely a freedom struggle, though it got its birth with a disputed cession of the princely states of Baluch Sardars to Pakistan. The federation of Pakistan, instead of pacifying the defiant tribal leaders struggled with them by means of force and inculcated the seeds of distrust. The situation further worsened by rising socio-economic miseries of the Baluch people generating a sense of deprivation in the society. Adding fuel to fire was the role of regional and international actors. This paper explores this issue in detail by juxtaposing the research findings from the existing research and highlights the dynamics and implication of this insurgency for Pakistan and the region.

Keywords: Baluchistan, Insurgency, Federation of Pakistan, Great Game, Military intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of area. It has an area of 347,000 sq km that shapes 44% of the total land mass of the country (Andley, 2006). However, it hosts only around 6 percent population of the country (ICG, 2006). Baluchistan is situated in the southwest of Pakistan. It touches three countries i.e. Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. It also borders the Arabian Sea. It is a vast but thinly populated province (Grare, 2006). Ethnically Baluchistan is composed of 54.7 and 29 percent Baluch and Pashtun tribes respectively (Jabeen, 2007).

Baluchistan acquired the status of a province in 1970 as a result of the abolition of the 'One-Unit' in what was then known as West Pakistan (Gazdar, 2007). The province is rich in oil and gas and provides strategic depth to the state of Pakistan; consequently it has acquired significant geo-strategic, political and economic

status at the regional and international level (Jabeen, 2007). However, despite abundant natural resources, Baluchistan is still the poorest province in the country (Atarodi, 2011)

The relationship of the province with the federation has remained a troubled one from the very beginning (Gazdar, 2007). The Baluch insurgency is the product of both historical and as well as contemporary factors. The government of Pakistan asserts that the Baluchistan issue is the consequence of the avarice of a few corrupt tribal sardars who are antagonistic to any development in the region that would challenge their grip on the area (Grare, 2006).

The local actors in Baluchistan province were struggling for regional autonomy within the federation before the elimination of democratic institution. They strived for the establishment of a Baluch majority province and decentralization of power from the center to the provinces. The federal government, instead of resolving political issue by generating consensus, opted for military option (Shah and Khan, 2012).

Baluchistan insurgency is stimulated by a mix of social,

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political and economic factors. The situation gets further complex by foreign involvement. This paper explores the dynamics and implications of Baluchistan insurgency in the historical perspective.

BALUCHISTAN ISSUE

On the eve of British India's partition, Baluchistan comprised of four princely states i.e. Makran, Las Bela, Kharan and Kalat. The first three willingly joined Pakistan in 1947; however, the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan declared the independence of Kalat as this option was also available in the partition plan (Bennett Jones, 2003). Merger with Pakistan was unanimously refused by both the houses of parliament in Kalat (Andley, 2006). When negotiations for a peaceful solution seemed to have failed, the Pakistan Army entered Kalat, on 1 April 1948, and forced Khan of Kalat to agree to accession (Heeg, 2010).

Since partition, the Baluchs rose in revolt several times: in 1958, 1963-69, 1973-77 and 2005 to-date. Their history manifests a lasting account of treachery and discrimination by the ruling class in Islamabad (Bansal, 2006). Despite apprehensions and suspicions among the Baluch, the overall situation in the province was fairly peaceful until 1955, when Pakistan promulgated the 'One Unit Plan' (Mukand, 2008). According to this plan, the four western provinces of Pakistan, i.e. Baluchistan, Sindh, North Western Frontier Province, and Punjab were amalgamated into one. This raised concerns among Baluchs about their rights and identity which led to the rise of first insurgency (Kupecz, 2012).

The sporadic fighting in Baluchistan came to an end in 1969 with the withdrawal of the 'One Unit Plan' by General Yahya Khan and the Baluch leaders agreed to a ceasefire (Andley, 2006). The Baluch insurgency that plagued the federal government from 1973 to 1977 started with the dismissal of the Baluch provincial government, imprisonment of Baluch leaders and the banning of the ruling NAP (Dunne, 2006).

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto sacked the Baluchistan government on charges of treason against federation and imposed governor rule in the province. The removal of an elected government in Baluchistan stimulated the fourth insurgency (Andley, 2006). The federal authorities engineered a reason to send forces into Baluchistan when they raided the Embassy of Iraq in Islamabad, discovering Soviet arms and ammunition (Kupecz, 2012). This wave of insurgency lasted for almost three years and ended with the dismissal of Bhutto's Government and imposition of Martial Law by General Zia ul Haq in 1977 (Shah and Khan, 2012). General Zia at the earliest released 6,000 of Baluchis prisoners who had been allegedly tortured in various prisons at Kohlu and Loralai (Mukand, 2008).

More recently, unrest in this province regarding provincial autonomy and resources distribution has risen considerably since President Musharraf took power in October 1999 (Baluch, 2007). The 5th and contemporary wave of the conflict started when tension escalated between Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, the chief of Bugti tribe and the local and central authorities (PILDAT, 2012).

During the President Musharraf's regime, slogans of economic development and exercise of military force were the significant components of government's strategy towards Baluchistan (Iqbal, 2008). Peace and stability in Baluchistan depend on both internal and external factors, which at the moment seem to be getting uncontrollable (Jabeen, 2007). These demand for better comprehension for sorting out any peaceful solution acceptable to all stakeholders.

DYNAMICS

Over the years, Baluchistan issue has become extremely intricate. It is the result of interplay of social, political and economic factors, sometime purely internal stimulants motivate the insurgents but at times external forces also get involved.

Tribal Structures

By and large Baluchistan is a tribal society and tribal structures dominate political processes in the province as well (PILDAT, 2012). Each tribe generally has its own head called as a *Sardar*. The *Sardar* commands absolute power over his tribe and its sub-branches. The *Sardar* has a final say in all matters (Murtha, 2011). Marri, Mengal and Bugti are the three largest tribal groups. Their leaders have the capacity to raise large armies and supplies, however generally remain skeptical of each other (Kupecz, 2012). Baluchistan has always remained under the oppressive rules of these *Sardars* who have been responsible for keeping Baluch people hesitant, illiterate and underprivileged (Mazhar et al., 2012).

There are explicit structures of socio-political leadership, and well-established informal standards regarding the conduct of leadership, conflict resolution, and for handling common socio-economic resources. As tribal social setup dominates the political process, it seems difficult to cultivate political will for social reforms that challenges the conventional patriarchal associations (Gazdar, 2007). These tribal leaders, who were supposed to bring the government in touch with the needs of the tribal people, have always secured their personal interests and have neglected the real social and economic development of the province. Tribal *Sardars* can be best described as 'demigods' for their tribesmen. Their sway extends to each and every important decision

even of the personal lives of their tribesmen (Jabeen, 2007).

The 'elite' and the 'protector' mentalities still continue to exist in Baluch society (Khan, 2012). It is believed that the tribal *Sardars* hinder the socio-economic development of the province because it eventually would lead to the abolition of the *Sardari* system and their sway in the region (Shah and Khan, 2012). Moreover, the situation further gets complex because of the conflicts and rivalries among different tribes (HRCP, 2012).

Social injustices

Disparate economic, social and political development in Pakistan has boost to the feelings of deprivation in the Baluch people because Baluchistan is considered as the most underdeveloped province of the country (Atarodi, 2011). Almost fifty percent of the population of Baluchistan lives below poverty line which is much higher in comparison with other provinces of Pakistan (Mukand, 2008).

Unemployment is prevalent across the province. This is particularly true of the educated youth which gives birth to feelings of frustration and deprivation (Shah, 2007). Residents of this province have very limited access to basic health and education services; on the contrary they have the highest infant mortality rate in South Asia. All of these facts hint towards the prevalent social injustices which motivates defiance among common Baluch residents of the area towards Islamabad. As the federal governments only satisfy the tribal leaders and forget the Baluch citizens, leaving them at the mercy of these tribal leaders who want to maintain status quo (HRCP, 2012).

Baluch intelligentsia blames the federal government for the low literacy rate in the province. They believe that federation fears that an educated and politically aware Baluch population will never allow the plundering of Baluch resources. They believe that Islamabad has always worked upon apartheid policies (Baluch, 2007). They feel being discriminated and marginalized in their own country at the hands of their own government (Atarodi, 2011).

Poor Leadership

There has been dearth of powerful leaders in Baluchistan. Because of being tribal society, leadership is mostly hereditary. Tribal princes hold their tribes in their serfdom with the help of their private armies' generation after generation (Haq and Anwar, 2012).

Some scholars as well as politician believe that Baluch separatist leaders themselves are responsible for all the issues faced by the people of Baluchistan. Mengals, Maris and Bugti *Sardars* are seen as the one who instead

of winning any favor for their tribes actually exploited their people (Shah, 2008). Moreover, as Baluchistan is ethnically divided into Pashtoon and Baluch zones, therefore, the emergence of such a leadership that can win the trust in both zones seems very challenging (Haq and Anwar, 2012)

Within Baluchs', each tribal entity of the ethnic group has its own hierarchy which is headed by a *Nawab* or *Sardar* (Heeg, 2010). This facilitates political fragmentation along tribal structures which can produce powerful leaders at the level of the tribe, however, it results in weak leadership at the cross-tribal or provincial level (Gazdar, 2007). The available political leadership relied on rhetoric of backwardness of the province and tacitly sowed the seeds of animosity in the younger generation against the center (Haq and Anwar, 2012).

Somehow similar is the case with national leadership. For example, after giving Pakistan a democratic constitution, then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto failed to respect democratic principles and the norms of representative rule and dismissed the Baluchistan government (ICG, 2006), hence the poor leadership in the province and the center instead of pacifying the situation further aggravated it due to their vested interests.

The Center-Province Power Relations

Ever since the creation of Pakistan, there have remained problems of power distribution between the center and the provinces. Baluch politics, in this perspective within the province and at the national level, is centered on the demands for regional autonomy (ICG, 2006). Dearth of legislative and economic powers is the major cause of conflict between center and the province (Jabeen, 2007). Control over the natural resources and the scope of provincial autonomy have long been a contentious issues (Haq and Anwar, 2012).

Some believe that various military and democratic governments in Pakistan tried to impose an authoritative style of federalism on Baluchistan instead of depending on the cooperative federalism (Sial and Basit, 2010). However, the power puzzle does not seem so simple in this case.

The tribal chiefs resist state authority in order to safeguard their personal fiefdoms because the federal government's development plans can challenge their grip over their tribes, ultimately their control over the natural resources of their tribal lands (ICG, 2006). They resisted the government policies as they were not willing to surrender the old system of feudal over-lordship. The unwillingness of Baluch *Sardars* to forgo their local autonomy and their aspirations for enhanced control over local administration and resources has facilitated resurgence of violence (Dunne, 2006).

Conflict Over Economic Revenues

With the discovery of natural resources in the province, the issue of Baluchistan took another twist when Baluch nationalists began to demand a fair share of the revenues (Andley, 2006). The nationalists believe that the central government is exploiting their natural resources and assets without providing real benefits to the people of Baluchistan (Bansal, 2006).

For example, Pakistan consumes 1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas annually, 80 percent of which comes from Baluchistan; however, the province receives only 1/5th of the royalty from the center (Heeg, 2010). This makes the ordinary local public of Baluchistan and the nationalists leaders believe that their province has been deprived of the fair share of the benefits of their natural resources (PILDAT, 2012).

In the similar terrain, Baluch nationalists' leadership complains that the government is developing the Gwadar port without any consultation with, or benefit to the Baluch (Wirsing, 2008). The nationalists demand that provincial government should have control over Gwadar port. The role of provincial cabinet should be enhanced in Gwadar and other regional projects (ICG, 2006). They contend that the contemporary crisis in Baluchistan is an aggressive reaction to the neglect of the Baluch people and the exploitation of their mineral resources by Punjabi "colonialists" from Islamabad (Dunne, 2006). They believe since 1948, all successive civil and military regimes had relied on such policies that kept the people of Baluchistan backward and dependent upon Islamabad (Baluch, 2007).

Role of Military

Pakistan army is continuously using strong arms strategy to deal with Baluchistan conflict and insurgency with utter disregard for the options of dialogue or negotiation with the nationalist. It is generally believed that GHQ shapes center's policy towards Baluchistan in place of the federal government (Baluch, 2007). The situation in the province reflects that all authority in the province is vested in the security forces which enjoy absolute impunity (HRCP, 2012).

There is inescapable impression that Islamabad has a faith in a military solution (Burki, 2012). The military circles attribute the issue to three *Sardars*. One of them, Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed during Musharraf regime. The military generals believe the elimination of the remaining two would resolve the issue permanently (Baluch, 2007). Some apprehend that anywhere between 8,000 and 12,000 Baluch residents have "disappeared" (Kupecz, 2012). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has confirmed 169 cases of disappearances from the province between 2005 and 2011 (Ali and Ansari, 2012). ISI is generally blamed for

these disappearances (HRCP, 2011). This testifies the role of intelligence agencies which are directly under military control.

Statements of General Musharraf, warning the Baluch leaders also expresses the same message. At start of insurgency during his regime, he warned the Baluchs to stop fighting or "you won't even know what hit you" (ICG, 2006). This makes Baluch people feel that the people of Pakistan have not got a nation but the Pakistan army has got a state (ICG, 2006). The way Sir R.G. Sandeman dealt with tribals through the policy of 'peace and goodwill' has been highly appreciated by scholars and this offers the best possible method to successfully deal with the Baloch people (Tucker, 1921). However, the Pakistan army and the federal government believe otherwise, and consequently have worsened the situation.

Foreign Intervention

Owing to its geo-strategic location and wealth of natural resources, Baluchistan gets caught in power games of regional and international powers (Jabeen, 2007). Forgetful of the Great Game between British and Russian Empires, Baluchistan still attracts the attention of different powers in the twenty first century. A safe route to energy reserves of Central Asian States (CARS) and a platform to contain China have been two long term-objectives of Americans in Baluchistan (Murtha, 2011). Baluchistan tempts US also because the province itself is rich in energy resources and strategically situated along the borders to Afghanistan and Iran (Atarodi, 2011). Some also believe that because of Baluchistan's proximity to Iran, Israel is also interested in this region (Khokhar, 2011).

Similarly, Baluchistan offers the shortest route to Russia for reaching Indian Ocean. Thus, it is considered that Russians may lose their interest in Afghanistan, yet their interest in Baluchistan for reaching Indian Ocean will never decline (Mazhar et al., 2012).

The Pakistanis also apprehends that Iran is backing Baluch nationalists for countering a Pakistan-U.S. plot to make Baluchistan an effective base in a prospective attack against Iran (Grare, 2006). Pakistani media has always been extremely active in reporting rumors of Iranian, Indian, Afghan and even Russian involvement in the Baluch insurgency (Bansal, 2006). Intelligence agencies of Pakistan seem consistently blame that Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar, bordering on NWFP and Baluchistan respectively, supply arms and funds to Baluchistan Liberation Front and Baluchistan Liberation Army (ICG, 2006). Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani presented the proof of Indian involvement to his Indian counterpart at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt during a summit (Khan, 2012). The apprehensions of foreign interventions provide ample grounds to Pakistani army to

have dominant say in the affairs of Baluchistan province and this intricate the nature of insurgency.

IMPLICATIONS

The intricate nature of Baluch insurgency has profound and extensive implications for Pakistan and the region as well. The insurgency not only creates law and order crisis in the province, rather the insurgency motivated waves of violence reach the four corners of Pakistan. The insurgency threatens the stability of the federation of Pakistan on the one hand, and on the other it also threatens peace and stability in the region.

Law and Order

Ever since the recent insurgency started during Musharraf era, the law and order situation has further worsened in the province raising violence to an alarming extent (Kupecz, 2012). Since the start of new wave in 2005, it has claimed hundreds of lives (Iqbal, 2008). Target killings and kidnappings have become order of the day (Haq and Anwar, 2012).

Missing persons' have surfaced to become a significant issue in the province. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) verified 143 missing persons as of May 29, 2011. It also published a list of 140 persons whose dead bodies were recovered after they went missing (Kupecz, 2012). Target Killings have generally been the headlines of Baluchi newspapers for years. Members of religious minority group (*Shia*) are at risk and have been compelled to move to other parts of the country (Khan, 2012).

Insurgency

Owing to various dynamics; disputed cession, center-province power distribution, dispute over natural resource and foreign interventions, multiple waves of insurgencies spun in the history of Pakistani Baluchistan (Iqbal, 2008). The Baluch younger generation feels marginalized and helpless, so they resort to other methods, particularly violence. In 2005, tensions between the Baluch and the military once again went out of control and took the shape of a province-wide insurgency of a lower scale. However, with the passage of time the insurgency got momentum. Baluch insurgents have persistently launched attacks on various security forces stationed in Baluchistan, state institutions, power and gas installations, and also on non-Baluch individuals living in the province (Sial and Basit, 2010).

According to the various reports, 2009 was the

deadliest year ever since the start of the current wave of insurgency. The violence peaked in Baluchistan with 792 attacks from Baluch insurgents that took the lives of 386 people and injured over one thousand. In the first two months of 2013, over 250 people have been killed in Quetta city. Baluchistan Peoples' Liberation Front (BPLF) and Baluchistan Students organization (BSO) has been at the forefront of the current insurgency (Shah and Khan, 2012).

Economic and Infrastructure Loss

Generally insurgents target state-properties. Sui-gas pipelines, bridges, railway tracks, power station and transmission lines, telephone exchanges, military and government installations have been regularly targeted by the insurgents (Bansal, 2006). The contemporary insurgency has drastically damaged the economy, development projects and infrastructure of the province (Iqbal, 2008). For example, there had been 626 rocket attacks in 2004, of which 379 rockets targeted the Sui gas installations while others targeted the railway tracks in the province (Mukand, 2008).

Regional Impacts

The prolonged insurgency can have multiple impacts on political and economic developments in the region. For example, as long as the insurgency persists, it would be extremely difficult to materialize regional projects like the Central Asian pipeline or Iran-Pak-India pipeline (Bansal, 2006). There can be no disagreement that a conflict-driven, politically unstable, and breaking Pakistan would create serious security threats for the entire region (Bansal, 2006). There are rising apprehensions among scholars and politicians that Baluch insurgency could have drastic impacts on the neighboring countries and on war on terror in Afghanistan. The neighboring countries that also host Baluch minorities have profound interests in Baluchistan as the Baluch insurgents have also demanded at times the reunification of the scattered Baluch tribes living in neighboring countries like Iran and Afghanistan (Atarodi, 2011).

The other significant issue is whether a separate independent Baluchistan can become a stable state or it would turn out to be a threat to regional stability. It is apprehended that that the break up of Pakistan and the creation of an independent state of Baluchistan would give birth to a new zone of instability in the region (Grare, 2006). Pakistan's integrity is vital for the neighboring countries (Atarodi, 2011). Moreover, Baluchistan conflict could further destabilize the strained relations between India and Pakistan (Kupecz, 2012).

Threats to Federation

No one can deny the threats posed by Baluch insurgency to the integrity of the federation of Pakistan. Government of Pakistan's failure to cope with the critical economic and political problems in Baluchistan has further strengthened the nationalist sentiments in the province and with the passage of time hatred towards center has grown reasonably (Atarodi, 2011).

The Baluch people's liberation front (BPLF) did not originally strive for independence; however younger Baluch nationalists, who became disappointed from Pakistan during the 1973–1977 conflict, adopted independence as their ultimate goal (Andley, 2006). Under the present constitution of Pakistan, nationalists' demands for independence or self-rule seem unlikely to be served (Sial and Basit, 2010). The state of Pakistan needs to pacify the situation by addressing the needs of Baluch citizens as it can not afford the second dismemberment after the Bangladesh independence. A state failure to address Baluchs issue will certainly raise the prospects of Baluch insurgents getting independence (Atarodi, 2011).

DISCUSSION

Grievances of Baluchistan originated from the denial of political rights to them, the exploitation of their natural resources by the central government and the apprehensions of being swamped by the Pakistan army and the Punjabis (Andley, 2006). The Baluch today feel that owing to persistent influx of Pakhtoons, Punjabis and other Pakistanis into the province, they are being marginalized (Bansal, 2006). Historically the goals of nationalists have often changed between provincial autonomy within the federation and a demand for an independent Baluchistan (Mukand, 2012).

The democratization process in Baluchistan was disrupted unfortunately by the central government in the 1970s. The federal government labeled the autonomists as "anti-state elements" and sowed the seeds for a lasting rift between the center and the province (Shah and Khan, 2012).

The contemporary situation in Baluchistan is the product of a number of recent factors, for example, the development of Gwadar seaport, the impact of war on terror, and the contemporary politico-economic regional dynamics in South Asia (Dunne, 2006). After several years of military rule, absence of real democratic institutions and with their natural reserves being exploited by the center, Baluch dissatisfaction is at its peak (ICG, 2006). Civil society organizations and the intelligentsia blame the federal government and Pakistan military for the contemporary crisis in the province (Kupecz, 2012).

Baluch insurgency has extremely negative impact on the federation of Pakistan. Worsening condition in

Pakistan is easily reflected in Failed State Index report. On the list of failed states Pakistan has swiftly moved from 34th position in 2005 to 10th in 2010 (Atarodi, 2011). For the sake of bringing peace and stability, the federal government should have dealt with a soft hand with the nationalists and the elected representatives of the country in perspective of their legitimate demands (Shah and Khan, 2012).

Most of the important policy decisions by the federal government between 1947 and 1977, and then during Musharaf regime contributed to rising sentiments of exploitation and marginalization among Baluch people that had a profound impact on the eruption of violence (Dunne, 2006). Pakistan requires shaping processes to address the socio-economic problems of the people, provide them legitimate and fair representation in political processes and pass such legislations which facilitate reasonable autonomy and political control (Atarodi, 2011). The basic rights of common Baluchs have never been facilitated, for which central government and military is responsible along with the local leadership (Haq and Anwar, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Insurgency in Baluchistan is not purely a freedom movement, though it was primarily motivated by disputed accession of Baluchistan with Pakistan, further fueled by harsh attitude of the center towards the province coupled with disparities in socio-economic development in the country and foreign interventions. More than six decades long conflict has fostered deep feelings of mistrust in Baluch people toward the federal government. If violence increases further in Baluchistan, the Pakistani military will certainly be pulled into a war that will drastically harm the state of Pakistan. Pakistan, with colonial mindset, has historically been wrongfully relying on using brute force to quell the nationalist insurgency. It must be kept in mind that Baluchistan is purely a political issue and demands a political solution. If political leaders could not resolve the crises sagaciously, there are apprehensions that the history of 1971 could be repeated.

The people of Baluchistan feel that federal government discriminate against them. It is not possible for the state of Pakistan to indefinitely overlook the need for political and economic development in the province. The federal government negligence will continue to add to the sufferings of Baluch people. The dilemma of the Pakistani political set up is that the civil-military establishments have centralized power and by misfortune or fortune Punjabis dominate both these institutions. This generates tension between the federal government and Baluchistan.

The situation demands free, fair and credible elections. Participation of all the political parties of Baluchistan is an inevitable requirement for the future prosperity of the

province. The Baluch might be allowed to elect a government of their own choice. As one of the Baluch leaders said that the people are in need of a better Baluchistan rather than a greater Baluchistan.

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