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RESURGENCE OF THE BALUCH MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

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The Baluch movement has resurfaced after a dormant period of almost two decades, and is threatening to keep the sensitive and strategically important province of Baluchistan in prolonged instability. This paper looks at some of the factors that have created discontent among the Baluch and are helping to sustain the movement. It also discusses the role of the Pakistani state in responding to the ongoing conflict and its impact on the economic and political fabric of the country. Finally it looks at the long-term implications of Baluch insurgency on regional peace and security.

INTRODUCTION

Most states in South Asia are confronted with the problem of forging a cohesive national identity by accommodating the diverse and heterogeneous populations within their boundaries. Though not unique to South Asia, the assertion of separate identities has been the biggest challenge to the stability and integrity of states in the region which are mainly multi-ethnic plural societies. Each country has relied upon its own forms of nation-building, some more successfully than others, but the essential contradiction between the nature of the state and the multi-ethnic social system persists, in varying degrees in most of the countries. Overall, the task has not been easy for any country; it has been often made even more difficult by the ruling elite's general reluctance or failure to decentralise political and economic authority and encourage cultural plurality. This remains particularly true of some movements in South Asia, which if handled in a more accommodating manner, might not have become as militant and intractable as they are today.

Pakistan is no exception to this. In fact, ethnic conflict has presented the most formidable challenge to Pakistan since its inception and has already led to two civil wars and to the secession of the country's most populous province, East Pakistan, in 1971. Pakistan has sought to use Islam as a unifying force to bring different ethnic groups together, with few, if any, efforts on the part of the central elites to incorporate the history, language or cultural experiences of Pakistan's different ethnic groups into a modern sense of national identity. It was mistakenly assumed that different ethnic groups such as Sindhis, Baluchis and

Pushtuns would willingly surrender their rich historical and cultural tradition in return for a narrowly defined Pakistani identity. This has not happened. Failure of the state to articulate a viable national identity only on the basis of Islam, and the simultaneous politicisation of ethnic identities has only complicated matters for Pakistan.

Added to this, successive federal governments' preferential treatment of certain ethnic groups over others has worked to the disadvantage of other groups and led to a fundamental imbalance in the polity. Highly centralising policies of a predominantly Punjabi military and bureaucratic structure have only widened the cleavages between the provinces and the centre. This has engendered feelings of alienation among most other groups such as the Sindhis, Muhajirs and Baluch in terms of access to socio-economic development and adequate share of financial resources. Rectification of these grievances has become the basis of demands for greater autonomy in various provinces of Pakistan at different points of time.

RE-EMERGENCE OF THE BALUCH CRISIS

The Baluch have had strained relations with the Pakistani state since its inception. Over the years Baluch have been involved in many armed rebellions against the federal government, whether democratic or authoritarian. As Ataullah Mengal, a noted Baluch leader stated pointedly in a recent interview, for the Baluch it has always been a "Rule of Punjab, by Punjab and for Punjab. We stand nowhere. Under the military regime, we are ruled with an iron heel. And during democracy, it is more of the same, but sugar-coated. There is no substantive difference".¹

Baluchistan is witnessing a fresh wave of insurgency and remains locked in a civil war with the federal government after a lull of more than two decades. The last major insurgency was in the 1970s, which had been largely fuelled by the Baluch's perception of disenfranchisement by the federal government in terms of their economic, social and political expectations. Basically the same issues that dominated the 1970s civil war are still looming large on the Baluch scene. Underdevelopment of the province, lack of economic and political participation at the national and provincial levels, exploitation of the province and lack of trust between the Baluch and the federal government are just as potentially explosive today as they were in the 1970s.

¹ Interview with Ataullah Khan Mengal in *Himal South Asia*, Vol.20, no.5, 2007. http://www.himalmag.com/2007/may/coverfeature_interview_sardar_ataullah_khan_mengal.htm.

The insurgency began to grow noticeably from 2003-04 following the United States' declared war on terrorism, and Musharaff government's plans to establish additional army cantonments in sensitive areas such as Gwadar, Dera Bugti and Kohlu in Baluchistan in order to help the US curtail terrorist activities. Not surprisingly, these moves had a provocative effect on the Baluch nationalists, who were already resentful of the construction of the Gwadar port, a strategically important project that Pakistan has embarked on with Chinese assistance. The increased presence of the Pakistani military in the region was seen by the Baluch as a deliberate move to consolidate its presence in Baluchistan. By 2003, the Baluch insurgents had started targeting the developmental projects related to the construction of highways and cantonments around Gwadar. They were fighting mainly under the banner of the Baluch Liberation Army, a shadowy underground organization, with reportedly more than 5000 fighters, majority of whom have been trained in Afghanistan.²

Continued attacks on military and government installations all through 2004 and the retaliatory military action by President Musharraf led to further escalation of tensions in the province. In May 2004, three Chinese engineers were killed and eleven others, including nine Chinese and two Pakistanis were injured in a daring bomb blast in Gwadar creating more difficulties for Islamabad.

Yet another unfortunate incident that added fuel to the fire was a violent rape of a female doctor in January 2005 by Pakistani soldiers in a Sui hospital complex. The government's tardiness in responding to the situation sparked off widespread protests among the Baluch.³ The late Akbar Bugti's support to the movement, in whose areas the Sui gas fields are located, gave a new momentum to the movement. The BLA launched a massive attack on the government forces resulting in a pitched battle lasting for many days. Railway lines, gas supply lines and gas installations were attacked affecting gas supply to the rest of the country, including major industrial units in Punjab and Sindh. The capital city of Quetta and other areas were plunged into total darkness by the massive power failure. The Pakistani military responded with full force, killing many of the insurgents and innocent civilians.

It was just a matter of time before the Baluch retaliated in a daring rocket attack on a paramilitary camp in Kohlu that President Musharraf was scheduled to visit in December

² The BLA has been in existence in one form or the other since the 1980s when the former USSR had extended moral and material support. BLA members mainly comprise both Bugti and Marri tribes; though there have been some recruits from the Mengal tribes of late. There are also some reports of another armed group called the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) that has also been active in the ongoing Baluch insurgency

³ Even two years down the line the government has not made public the details of the investigation and revealed the name/s of the guilty.

2005. This was a turning point which brought matters almost to a breaking point. The security forces launched a full-fledged attack on Marri camps in Kohlu district which later extended to the Dera Bugti area. Intensity of the Army operation was of a magnitude which according to some analysts evoked memories of East Pakistan. There was widespread criticism of the government's heavy handedness in dealing with the Baluch and the opposition parties in parliament was quick to seize the opportunity to criticise the federal government for carrying out genocide against the innocent citizens. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) openly accused Musharraf of committing gross human rights violations.⁴

The government on its part maintained that regular armed forces were not used on Baluch rebels and described the HRCP accusations as exaggerated accounts. The US intelligence sources have, however, reported otherwise. According to one report, "six Pakistani brigades, plus paramilitary forces totalling 25, 000 men were involved in fighting the BLA guerrillas in Baluchistan".⁵ The independent Pakistan Human Rights Commission has also reported "indiscriminate bombing and strafing" by 20 US supplied Cobra helicopter gunships and four squadrons of fighter planes, including US supplied F16 fighter jets, resulting in 215 civilian dead and many more injured".⁶ According to another report, the Pakistan government had used the US helicopters, supplied to it to fight the Al-Qaeda, against the Baluch rebels.⁷

In August 2006, the Baluch nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti who was perceived by the government as the kingpin of Baluch insurgency was killed in a massive operation by the Pakistan army. Although the government maintained that the killing was accidental when army officers had gone in to negotiate with the leader, the Baluch had good reasons to call it a deliberate act of personal vendetta. Musharraf had earlier publicly vowed to take on Bugti and had said "I do not consider him Nawab (baron) any more, he and two other tribal chieftains are indulging in anti-state activities with the help of foreign money and weapons. We will soon sort them out."⁸

⁴ For details see the "Balochis of Pakistan: On the Margins of History", *The Foreign Policy Centre Report*, London, November 2006, p.41

⁵ Cited in Selig Harrison, "Pakistan's Costly 'Other War', *The Washington Post*, 15 February 2006.

⁶ Cited in Selig Harrison, "Pakistan's Costly 'Other War', op.cit., n.5.

⁷ Also, three Cessna aircrafts fitted with sophisticated surveillance equipment given to Pakistan to apprehend drug smugglers were being used against the Baluch rebels. See Tim Mcgirk, "Pakistan's Other War, *Time Magazine*, No.167, no.25, 26 July 2006, p.26

⁸ *The Hindustan Times*, 28 August 2006.

Bugti's killing and the humiliating manner⁹ in which he was buried noticeably widened the gulf between the Baluch and the Pakistani federal authorities. It has also helped to bring the Sardars together in a show of defiance against the government. For instance, the historic grand jirga was revived after nearly 130 years in September 2006 to review the 1948 pact under which Kalat acceded to Pakistan, putting the government on the defensive.¹⁰

Meanwhile a tense situation continues to prevail in Baluchistan today which is far from reassuring for Islamabad. According to U.S. Intelligence sources as many as six Pakistan army brigades or a quarter million regular troops plus paramilitary forces are deployed in Baluchistan against the BLA which is fighting the Pakistan army mainly in the Kohlu Mountains and the surrounding areas. At the same time a great deal of resentment is building up against the government for unleashing a wave of unlawful arrests, detention, and extra judicial killings in Baluchistan. The number of people who have disappeared in Baluchistan has also risen to an all-time high creating a climate of fear and terror.¹¹ The Baluch seem to be more determined than ever before to challenge the writ of the government which hardly augurs well for the return of normalcy to the province in the near future.

BALUCH: A BACKGROUND

Baluchistan is the traditional homeland of the Baluch who account for a mere 3.5 percent of the entire population. They are, however, spread across a vast area covering 222,000 square kilometres and occupying almost 43% of Pakistan's total land area. Though there are many divisions within the closed tribal structures of the Baluch, in terms of class contradictions, religious differences, linguistic variations, population dispersion and levels of socio-economic development, the Baluch are very proud of their distinct identity, and take great pride in their value systems and tribal affiliations. The Sardari system is deeply rooted in the political and social psyche of the Baluch. Despite the decline in their power following the formal abolition of the Sardari system in 1976, the sardars continue to be respected to

⁹ Bugti's coffin, according to some reports, was padlocked and sealed and no one but the 'Khateeb' was permitted to see his face creating a lot of suspicion with his family members who demanded DNA tests to verify Bugti's body.

¹⁰ The jirga was hosted by the present Khan of Kalat, Mir Suleiman Dawood (the event was last held in 1838 under Mir Khudaidad Khan, the then Khan of Kalat). It was attended by 1,500 people, including 85 sardars and 300 tribal elders. *International The News*, 16 October 2006.

¹¹ Since the army operation began in Balochistan two years ago, a large number of Baloch people have disappeared after being detained on charges of 'spying for an enemy country', or for alleged connections with the BLA. See Massoud Ansari, "Between Tribe and Country, The Crisis of Balochistan", *Himal South Asia*, Vol.20, no.5, 2007. For details on the disappearances see, Abdul Wahab, "Missing in Custody", December 2006.

(<http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsDec2006/newsbeatdec2006.htm>)

this day within their tribes and exercise *de facto* control over their respective areas. It is this fierce sense of tribal identity and loyalty which has more than anything else sustained their desire for national self-determination.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Baluchistan is also the poorest and the most underdeveloped province of Pakistan. Socio-economic growth indicators such as literacy, health facilities, civic amenities, industrial infrastructure and per capita income underline its extremely backward status. Forty five percent of the population are reported to be still living below the poverty line. More important, there is a huge gap in terms of socio-economic indicators between Baluchistan and the other provinces. In 2004-05, Baluchistan's literacy rate was the lowest (37%) as compared with other provinces (Sindh 56%, Punjab 55%, North Western Frontier Province 45%) and the national average at 53%.¹² The Human Development Index for Baluchistan in 2003 was the lowest at (0.499) as compared with other provinces; in descending order Punjab (0.557); Sindh (0.540); NWFP (0.510).¹³ Its health facilities remain minimal; the number of hospitals, dispensaries, maternity and child welfare centres is far less than other provinces. Only 20% of people in Baluchistan have access to drinking water as opposed to 86% at the national level.

Exploitation of Natural Resources

Paradoxically, Baluchistan, the most backward region of Pakistan, is a land abounding in natural resources with large reserves of gas, minerals, fisheries, and coal. The Baluch harbour deep resentment against the federal government for pursuing discriminatory and exploitative policies which have brought Baluchistan to the present state of affairs. As the Baluch nationalist leader Sardar Ataullah Mengal observed recently "Balochistan has been turned into a colony, all its resources have been usurped and the Baloch are being treated as slaves in their own land".¹⁴

The Baluch have blamed successive governments in Islamabad for cornering the lion's share of profits from the state's resources without diverting any of the benefits to the province itself. Baluchistan presently accounts for 36% of Pakistan's total gas production but only 17% is consumed by the province itself whilst the remaining 83% is piped off to other

¹² Economic Survey of Pakistan (2005-06). See Chapter 11 on Education http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/sur_chap_05-06/11-education.PDF

¹³ Pakistan National Human Development Report 2003, UNDP, Pakistan. Estimation by Wasay majid and Akmal Hussain http://www.un.org.pk/nhdr/htm_pages/cp_1.htm

¹⁴ Dawn, 27 March 2007.

provinces. Natural gas was discovered in the Sui fields in the province in 1953. By 1964, the gas was being piped to cities such as Multan and Rawalpindi in Punjab but Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan, remained bereft of it until 1986. Even now only four out of 28 districts in Baluchistan have access to piped gas; only 5-6% of the population have a gas connection, and there is a total absence of CNG stations in the province.¹⁵

Baluchistan has also not had a fair deal in terms of the royalties from the gas it produces and has received only 12% of the royalties due. The natural gas reserves from the province generate revenue of \$ 1.4 billion annually, but the Baluch receive only \$116 million as royalty.¹⁶ Their long standing Baluch demand for a revision of royalties on Sui gas has fallen so far on deaf ears. To make matters worse, the federal government has under-priced Baluch gas, as compared with other provinces.¹⁷

Issues of Development

It is not then surprising that the level of Baluch distrust against the federal government is so high that even the efforts by the federal government to create a modern infrastructure, improve the means of communication and develop the province have not had the desired effect on the Baluch. While the government's objectives may have been well-meaning, the residual hostility and mistrust among the people totally undermines their effectiveness. Most Baluch are quick to trace the lack of any visible progress in Baluchistan to the fact that instead of promoting development, the Pakistani federal authorities have been more interested in pursuing their own socio-economic agenda and strengthening their own political base.

They claim that the federal government has either stalled or delayed many development projects because these did not serve its purpose. For instance, the copper project in Saindak remained in a limbo for almost ten years (1996-2005). It was revived only in 2005 when it was leased to the Metallurgical Construction Corporation (MCC) of China, with Chinese investment of USD 1.4 billion in the project. More important, out of the 50% of the plants total

¹⁵ Balochis of Pakistan: On the Margins of History, op. cit, no.4., p.49.

¹⁶ Cited in John CK Daly, "The Baloch Insurgency and its threat to Pakistan's Energy Sector", *Global Terrorism Analysis*, The James Town Foundation, Terrorism Focus, Vol.3, Issue 11, 21 March 2006.

¹⁷ A comparison with the prices in other provinces reveals that when the unit price in Baluchistan was 27 rupees, the price in Sindh and Punjab were respectively 170 and 190 rupees. See Frederic Grare, "Pakistan: The Resurgence of Baloch Nationalism", *Carnegie Papers* No. 65, January 2006, p.14.

profits, 48% percent was to be retained by the federal government and barely 2% was allocated for the Baluch.¹⁸

The construction of roads and highways has also come to be largely viewed as a ploy for extension of the federal machinery to exercise control over the Baluch, penetrate their strongholds and open their province to outsiders for purposes of trade, settlement and exploitation of their resources. Lamenting on the state of affairs, the Baluch leader Khair Bux Marri, had pointed out that most of the roads built in Baluchistan were

not for our benefit but to make it easier for the military to control us and for the Punjabis to rob us. The issue is not whether to develop, but whether to develop with or without autonomy. Exploitation has now adopted the name of development.¹⁹

MARGINALISATION OF BALUCH

Over the years the Baluch have also come to feel increasingly marginalised in their own land. Historically Pushtun, Sindhi, and Punjabi merchants have maintained control over the commercial life in Quetta, the only urbanised part of Baluchistan. Steady influx of Sindhis, Punjabis and, in particular, the Pushtuns, whose numbers rose considerably after the Afghan crisis, has not only disturbed the balance of the local population but generated fears of the Baluch of being turned into a minority in their own homeland. According to one source, Baluch comprise only 45 percent of the population. The rest is made up of the Pushtuns (38 percent), followed by others who comprise the remaining 17 percent.²⁰

The Baluch also feel that they are being steadily dispossessed of their land. The federal government, dominated by Punjabis, has over the years allowed many Punjabi civilian and military personnel posted to Baluchistan to buy prime land in the province. Even recently, the government has been acquiring land around the Gwadar port at below-market value and distributed much of it to navy and coastguard personnel who are largely non-Baluch. This has created a speculative market, with the cost of land soaring in Gwadar and being

¹⁸ The remaining 50% percent was going to be picked up by China. See Massoud Ansari, "Between Tribe and Country, The Crisis of Baluchistan, *Himal South Asia*, op.cit., no. 11. http://www.himalmag.com/2007/may/coverfeature_balochistan.htm

¹⁹ Selig Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow, Soviet Temptations and Baluch Nationalism*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1981, p. 47.

²⁰ Ray Fulcher, "Baluchistan: Pakistan's Internal War" *Green Left Weekly*, 8 December 2006. <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/2594.cfm>

grabbed by outsiders.²¹ According to one estimate, once the Gwadar port is completed the population of Gwadar and surrounding districts is expected to rise from 70,000 to a staggering 2 million. This would bring about a drastic change in the ethnic composition of the region to the disadvantage of the Baluch.²²

The small population size of the Baluch in their own province has made it difficult for them to achieve their rightful share of jobs and resources in their homeland. Regular entry of people from other provinces seeking employment had worked to their disadvantage in terms of employment opportunities in the development projects. The Gwadar project is a prime example of this; of the 600 people employed in the first phase of the Gwadar project, only 100 of them were Baluch, largely in the lower end jobs. Nawab Akbar Bugti, the late veteran leader of the Baluch movement, bemoaned the fact that even though “the government had promised that all jobs that the locals could do would be given to them...people are being brought in, even for unskilled labour.”²³

The Ormara Naval base, the second largest naval installation, has also failed to provide adequate employment opportunities to the Baluch. The Ormara town itself witnessed little or no progress in its development and continues to have poor infrastructure with lack of educational institutions and absence of regular power supply.²⁴

Baluch Representation at the Political Level

Fear of progressive marginalisation of the Baluch at the provincial level has been compounded by their perceived deprivation *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups in Pakistan, in particular the Punjabi ruling elites at the centre. The share of Baluch in the structures of power-sharing and decision-making has remained minimal in both the political and economic spheres. Their woeful lack of representation in the civil-military complex in Pakistan has resulted in their progressive alienation from the national mainstream.

The quota system that was introduced by Bhutto to give proportionate representation to all provinces has operated to the disadvantage of the Baluch due to the fact that the Baluchistan population only constituted a very small percentage of the national population. Further, the Pushtuns and Punjabis domiciled in Baluchistan were able to count themselves

²¹ According one report, a 500 square yard plot that used to cost US\$130 has shot up to US \$7,000. Cited in Ziad Haider, “Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan’s Gwadar Port,” *Politics and Diplomacy*, Winter/Spring 2005, p.100

²² Ray Fulcher, “Baluchistan: Pakistan’s Internal War”, op.cit., no. 20.

²³ Haroon Rashid, “At the Moment, War is Being Imposed On Us”, Interview with Akbar Khan Bugti, Newsline (Karachi) , February 2005.

²⁴ Zahid Hussain, “Gathering Storm”, Newsline, February 2005.

under the Baluchistan provincial quota, diluting ethnic Baluch representation.²⁵ According to Ataullah Mengal, “all positions in Balochistan – from officers to sepoy – in the Secretariat, the police and the Frontier Corps, are filled up by outsiders. The local Baloch people are nowhere to be seen”.²⁶ As recently as 2002, only four out of fourteen provincial government secretaries in Quetta were Baluch; even key positions of the Chief Secretary and the Inspector General of Police in the province are filled by non-Baluch.²⁷

Besides the provincial level, the Baluch also feel discriminated at the federal level aggrieved as they are by the domination of the Punjabis who constitute more than half of Pakistan's population and occupy most of the top echelons of power in the state bureaucracy. The Baluch attribute their poor representation in the federal services to a deliberate policy on the part of the government to keep them out of the key administrative positions. According to one study, from 1947 to 1977, of the 179 persons who were named to central cabinets in Pakistan, only four (2.2 percent) were Baluch tribesmen from Baluchistan and only one of them was named prior to the 1980s.²⁸ In the seniority list of federal secretaries recently issued by the Establishment division, 29 federal secretaries were from Punjab, 10 from NWFP, five from Sindh (rural), four from Sindh (urban) and one from AJK. There was no representation from Baluchistan.²⁹

In the defence forces, they are as poorly represented as in the bureaucracy. The ethnic group composition of the Pakistan military corps in the 1970s was approximately: 70 percent Punjabi, 15 percent Pushtun, 10 percent Muhajir and 5 percent Baluch and Sindhi.³⁰ By the early 1990s, the official quota for soldiers from Baluchistan and Sindh was raised to 15%, but this quota was never filled and these communities remain under-represented in the

²⁵ The quota system has operated to the disadvantage of the Baluch due to the fact that the Baluchistan population only constituted a very small percentage of the national population. Further, the Pashtuns and Punjabis domiciled in Baluchistan were able to count themselves under the Baluchistan provincial quota, further diluting ethnic Baluch representation. In the regional distribution of quotas from 1973 to 1983, for Grades 16 to 22 of Pakistan's bureaucracy, the quota earmarked for Baluchistan was only 3.5 percent while the actual strength was down to a lower figure of 3.1 percent.²⁵ The Baluch had been arguing that since their population has grown since 1972, their quota should be increased from 3.5 percent to 5.25 percent. According to one report, it is only recent years that the Baluch quota in federal jobs has since been increased from 3.5 to 5%. See The News International, 14 January 2007.

²⁶ Footnote to be inserted

²⁷ International The News, 7 September 2006.

²⁸ Shaheen Mozaffar "The Politics of Cabinet Formation in Pakistan: A study of Recruitment to the Central Cabinets, 1947-1977," (Ph.D dissertation, Miami University, Ohio, 1980). Cited in Robert G. Wirsing, *The Baluchis and Pathans*, Minority Rights Group Report no 48 (London), Minority Rights Group, 1987, p. 9.

²⁹ International The News, 7 September 2006.

³⁰ Asaf Hussain, *Elite Politics in an Ideological State* (Kent: Dawson and Sons, 1979), Table 14, p. 129.

military until today. More important, since the quota is determined on a provincial basis and most of the recruits from Baluchistan comprise Pathans and other settlers.³¹

Pakistani Perspective

On its part, the Pakistani government has always maintained that lack of development in Baluchistan only reflects the unwillingness of the Baluch themselves to break away from their tribal ways and integrate into the national mainstream. Islamabad projects the Baluch as an insular community which has remained backward not because of lack of government initiative to promote development, but because of its resistance to change in their economic and social structures. President Musharraf has in recent years openly accused the tribal chiefs of politicising development issues in order to maintain the status quo and thus preserve their power. According to government sources it is the discontented groups themselves who have a vested interest in the continuation of the conflict in order to ensure that their leadership positions as well as access to funds and support remain secure.

The late Akbar Bugti came in for open criticism from Musharraf's government for espousing the Baluchistan cause and at the same time receiving payments from the Ministry of Finance in lieu of Sui gas revenue.³² In his address to the nation on 20 July 2006, President Musharraf described Marri, Bugti and Mengal tribal chiefs as being 'anti-democracy, anti-development, anti-government and anti-Pakistan' putting their people 'under subjugation of the worst kind'.³³

As for lack of development in Baluchistan, the federal government has been quick to point out that extensive economic concessions have been given to the Baluch to spur development and improve their socio-economic profile. Vast amounts of money, totally disproportionate to the size of their population, which stands at a mere 4.9%, have been pumped into the province in the past few decades. For example, during the Bhutto period, for example, there was a visible increase in federal funds for Baluchistan which rose from Pakistan Rupees 120 million in 1972-73 to Pakistan Rupees 210 million in 1974. Vast amounts of money were invested in building roads; opening schools, colleges and technical institutions; extending credit and banking facilities; electrification; harnessing groundwater resources; and installing tube wells for irrigation and improving the health sector.

³¹ Balochis of Pakistan: On the Margins of History, op.cit, no. 4, p.51.

³² According to one source, a deal was brokered between the Pakistani federal government and Akbar Bugti, in which the latter received 120 million rupees annually as rent for land used by Pakistani Petroleum Ltd (PPL) for extraction of natural gas in Sui territory; and an additional monthly payment of 2 million Rupees for ensuring the safety of their operations. See Amir Siddiqui, "Unholy Alliance", Newslite, February 2005.

³³ Nirupama Subramanian, "The Balochistan cause gets a martyr", *The Hindu*, 29 August 2006.

Bhutto's successor, General Zia, followed suit. From 1977 to 1984/85, a record Rs. 4,000 million was injected into Baluchistan. Among the major projects completed in this time were the extension of Sui gas to Quetta; completion of the RCD highway; the New Quetta airport, airstrips at Pasni and Turbat, a TV complex in Quetta, radio stations at Khuzdar and Turbat, and the completion of the Bolan Medical College.³⁴

Even presently, the Musharraf government continues to plough money into Baluchistan in the hope of winning over the Baluch. Recently, whilst unveiling the "Vision for Development of Balochistan; Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz announced a special package of Rs 19.5 billion for the province to expedite development in the province. He also announced the creation of 32, 124 jobs for the province for the current financial year.³⁵ Interestingly, the vision package was the first major incentive announced by the government to pacify the Baluch after Bugti's killing in August and also included financial packages for Dera Bugti and Kohlu districts which were adversely affected during the battles between the Baluch and the federal government.

On the upliftment of Baluchistan, Musharraf announced grants of 1 billion for the development of Quetta and Rs 100 million each for each of the districts of the province in December 2006. An additional grant of Rs 2.5 billion was announced for parliamentarians to launch development schemes in their respective constituencies. Other economic incentives included seven new cadet colleges, two more campuses of the Baluchistan University at Gwadar and Turbat and 1,000 scholarships for Baluch students. In addition, Musharraf assured the people of Baluchistan that the government would press ahead with a network of new roads linking Loralai with DG Khan and Zhob with DI Khan to ensure that development benefits reach all parts of the province.³⁶

The lack of any visible improvement is explained by the government as being not due to lack of effort on their part but due to rampant corruption and massive misappropriation of funds at the provincial level.³⁷

Baluch and the Federal Government Standoff

There is of course some truth in the government's assertion that the Baluch have not been able to break away from their tribal ways, and have generally shown resistance to any

³⁴ *Pakistan Opinion Trends and Analyses POT* (Pakistan series), Vol. 7, part 232, 7 December 1984, pp. 3752- 53.

³⁵ *International The News*, 14 October 2006.

³⁶ *International The News*, 8 December 2006.

³⁷ Interview with Mubashir Hassan, Minister of Finance, Planning and Development in the Bhutto government from 1971 to 1974 , New Delhi, 4 September 1996.

government efforts to integrate them in the national mainstream. There is, however, little doubt that the Baluch disenchantment with the federal government has increased over the years because of the government's apathy to their demands for greater participation in the speedy development of the province. Also, the governments' strategies for socio-economic development have not been followed by adequate power-sharing arrangements which could have redressed the long-standing Baluch grievances. This has put the two on a virtual collision course over the last few decades.

The Baluch feel a strong sense of injustice and their feelings of mistrust and relative deprivation have been the most significant factors in mobilising their demands ranging all the way from provincial autonomy to an independent Baluchistan. The present crisis is no exception.

DIFFERENCES WITH THE 1970S INSURGENCY

The last time the government was involved in a civil war with the Baluch nationalists was in the 1970s when the government was able to quell the insurgency with a mix of coercion and conciliation. The picture today is more complex and complicated for the Pakistani government. This is because there are some critical differences with the earlier situation which makes the government's task much harder now.

Presented below is a quick overview of the decline of Baluch insurgency in the 1970s. The main reasons for this decline were the weak nature of the movement; the efficacy of the strategies pursued by the central leadership, particularly Zia-ul-Haq; and, more importantly, the lack of any meaningful outside support.³⁸ With low literacy rates, and the absence of an educated middle class, the Baluch movement could not develop a mass character and remained confined to a few tribes only. Moreover, differences among the Baluch leadership on the means and ends of their struggle, fragmented character of the Baluch tribes, and competing rivalries between the Baluch and Pushtuns in the province militated against political assertion of the Baluch community. These weaknesses were cleverly exploited by General Zia to outmanoeuvre the Baluch who were by then directionless.³⁹ It was just a

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of the reasons for the decline of the Baluch movement in the 1970s see Rajshree Jetly, "Baluch Ethnicity and Nationalism (1971-1981): An Assessment", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol.5, no.1, February 2004.

³⁹ The movement got further dissipated with some tribal chiefs maintaining an ambivalent attitude towards the Zia regime: overtly, they opposed his rule, but in practice, they availed themselves of the opportunities offered by the co-optive policies of the regime. Zia's multi-pronged policy of coercion, co-option and conciliation turned the tide in Baluchistan in favour of the federal government.

matter of time before the leaders were bought or mollified by the government, rendering the Baluch cause a non-issue by the early 1980s.

Today, the situation is very different. The Baluch are no longer as fragmented and guerrilla fighting is being carried out under the aegis of the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), which comprises the influential Marri, Bugti and Mengal tribes. Although the BLA has been officially outlawed in 2006, it continues to draw support from many Baluch. Sanaullah Baluch, a Senator belonging to the Baluch National Party, admitted that the BLA is very popular among the Baluch as “they have internationalised the Balochistan cause which we (the politicians) have failed to do”.⁴⁰

Unlike the 1970s, when there was some friction and rivalry between these tribes, there is clearly much greater cooperation among them today. Indeed, when Bugti’s tribal territory came under attack by Pakistani troops, the Marris offered him sanctuary in their tribal area.⁴¹ According to some analysts, a new leadership is emerging which is moving away from the traditional feudalistic system of patronage and loyalty and for the first time, Baluch society is witnessing a process of ‘horizontalisation’ cutting across regions and classes which could have long-term implications for the traditionally closed tribal system.⁴²

The BLA has also attracted many educated Baluch from a middle class background into its fold and the leadership also appears to be more united in pursuing the goal of greater provincial autonomy. The four main Baluch political parties [Baluch National Party (Mengal), the Baluch National Party, the National Party and Nawab Akbar Bugti’s party, the Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP)] have come together for a common cause under the umbrella of Baloch Ittehad. All this could make it more difficult for President Musharraf to exploit differences between the various tribes, as General Zia was able to do successfully in the 1970s.

Furthermore, the Baluch are now better equipped with heavy weaponry and sophisticated equipment. It is reported that they are getting enough money from the Persian Gulf to buy weapons in the black market.⁴³ More importantly, today the Pakistani military is stretched to its maximum, as it is engaged on three visible fronts – the US-led global war on terrorism in the north-western frontier province and the Afghan border, the Line of Control in Kashmir and the revived Baluch insurgency. This could appreciably limit its manoeuvrability and effectiveness in Baluchistan.

⁴⁰ Naveed Ahmad, “Accept us as equal federating units or we will try to get rid of you”, *Newsline*, January 2006.

⁴¹ Shahzada Zulfiqar, “Edging Towards Anarchy?”, *Newsline*, September 2004.

The new Baluch crisis is operating in a geo-political environment that is different than in the 1970s.⁴⁴ The province covers some 562 miles of the Persian Gulf's Makran coast, which includes the Strait of Hormuz through which about 40% of the world's oil tankers pass. Given its strategic location, the area has acquired special significance for South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf in the era of global terrorism. Thus all major powers including the United States, China, Afghanistan, Iran and to a lesser degree, India, have a stake in the way the Baluch crisis unfolds in the days to come.

In recent years the importance of energy has triggered a race amongst the big powers for acquisition of gas and oil pipelines, hydropower projects in and around the region. The Gwadar port which is at the cusp of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia is particularly significant in this context.

China, for example, wants the Gwadar port facilities to import oil and gas and is negotiating with Pakistan for five oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia. In addition, it is eyeing a trans-Himalayan pipeline to carry the Middle Eastern crude to Western China through the Gwadar port which would present a shorter alternative to the Malacca straits route through which is shipped 80 percent of its present oil supply.⁴⁵ There is considerable Chinese investment in terms of both capital and labour; the first phase of the Gwadar port has been completed with the Chinese investment of 200 billion dollars. The gas pipeline will pass from there connecting Central Asia with South Asia. Many road links are also being built to make Gwadar accessible to China through overland links that will stretch to and from Karakoram highway in Pakistan's Northern areas that border the Chinese province of Xingjian. The port is being built with a view to having a modern air defence unit, a garrison, and an international airport.⁴⁶

The United States also has long-term stakes in the developments in the region. First, it remains wary of China's growing power and would like to keep a close watch on its activities in the region. Second, the region has acquired even greater significance in view of United States objective of stamping out international terrorism. Amidst growing reports of the

⁴² Balochis of Pakistan: On the Margins of History, op.cit.,no.4, p.32

⁴³ Selig, Pakistan's Costly Other war, op.cit., no.5., p. 3

⁴⁴ In the 1970s the external environment was not conducive to advance the Baluch cause. Although there were several powers involved in the Baluch crisis, none was willing to extend their wholehearted support for the secession of Baluchistan from Pakistan. Their assistance was largely confined to verbal sympathy and moral empathy. Major powers including the United States, the Soviet Union and China (which had important concerns in South Asia) remained wary of any trend towards "Balkanisation" in the region, which would have affected their long-term security interests.

⁴⁵ Syed Fazl-e-Haider, 'Gwadar and Oil Politics', Dawn Internet edition <http://www.dawn.com/2007/01/15ebrl3.htm>, 15 January 2007.

presence of Al-Qaeda in Baluchistan, United States would also like to keep its options open on collaborating with Pakistan to enter Baluchistan both to fight Al-Qaeda, and even to prepare for a potential strike against Iran, should its long-term security interests warrant it.

Iran, an important regional power, which had offered support to the Pakistani state during the 1970s, is not likely to extend such support now, in view of the fact that the Baluch current struggle seems to be more for greater provincial autonomy than an Independent or Greater Baluchistan, which could have repercussions on Iran's own Baluch minority.⁴⁷ More important, given the US-Pak strategic entente, it may be in Iran's interest to ensure that Baluchistan does not come under the full control of the Pakistani military.

India is yet another power which has long-term strategic interest in the future course of events in Pakistan. It has long been anxious about growing Sino-Pak collaboration and would be keenly watching the likely extension of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region through their involvement in the Gwadar port. India is interested in the shipping routes and energy trading related to Central Asia, as underlined by its collaboration with Iran on the Chabahar port, which is seen by some as a direct competition to the Gwadar port. It is also keen on establishing its presence in Central Asia as evidenced by its assistance in building a 200Km road that will connect Chabahar port with Afghanistan and an airbase in Tajikistan.⁴⁸

In recent months, Pakistan has repeatedly alluded to India's complicity in Baluch insurgency. Dr Sher Afgan Niazi, the Pakistan Minister for Parliamentary Affairs openly remarked in the Pakistani senate that India was supplying arms and resources to tribal insurgents to carry out acts of sabotage in Baluchistan.⁴⁹ Without naming India specifically, President Musharraf also talked about a conspiracy in which some of the neighbouring countries were involved in supplying money and weapons to the Baluch.⁵⁰ India has denied any such involvement. India would not like to destabilise Pakistan but it might not be averse to see the cauldron boiling in Baluchistan which would compel Pakistan to increase its military engagement in the area, diverting some its military resources away from its conflict with India over Kashmir.

With US, India, and China engaged in the great game, stability and peace in Baluchistan has acquired even greater significance for Pakistan than ever before. Pakistan is keen to

⁴⁶ Nafisa Shah "Balochistan Geopolitics", *International The News*, 27 September 2006.

⁴⁷ Some Baluch leaders have, however, gone on record to declare independence as their final objective.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ BBC Monitoring South Asia-Political, 14 September 2006.

⁵⁰ Massoud Ansari, "Between Tribe and Country", op.cit, no.11.

leverage on Baluchistan's strategic significance as it knows that the competition and control of energy resources will be the most important factor in determining the economic and political configurations in this region. Pakistan is therefore eager to seize the opportunities available to it through the Gwadar sea port for accessing the oil rich Central Asia and the emerging new markets in Asia Pacific. By one estimate, Baluch are sitting on 24 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 6 billion barrels of oil, besides vast reserves of copper, zinc, antimony, and chromites in the Chaghai district at Saindak. It is clear from the foregoing that prolonged destabilisation in Baluchistan will have unacceptably high costs for Pakistan.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE INSURGENCY ON PAKISTAN AND SOUTH ASIA

Although it is too early to draw any conclusions on how the Baluch movement may evolve in the days to come, one can draw some possible scenarios.

The first scenario could be that the army is able to stamp out insurgency in the province. Pakistan's economic survival depends in a large measure on a steady supply of gas for industrial and domestic use in both the urban and rural areas. Islamabad is in no mood to tolerate any further disruption of vital supply lines which could have a disastrous fallout on Pakistan's economic and social development.⁵¹ Therefore any escalation in militancy in areas which are home to the vital gas field and installations would be put down with a heavy hand. In his address to the political leaders in Baluchistan in Gwadar on 17 November 2006, the President made this quite clear when he said that 'no obstacle would be tolerated in the development of the province'.⁵² The government is set on quelling the growing tide of violence in the province, and would not hesitate to use a higher level of force to do so. According to one estimate, a total of 60, 000-80, 000 Pakistani troops are already engaged in the battles in Waziristan and Baluchistan,⁵³ and the number is slated to go up in the days to come. Since the BLA, by most accounts, is still not in a position to challenge the might of the Pakistani state, the army may be able to effectively control the situation in due course of time. However, this may not be easy to achieve for a number of reasons. First, as has been proved over and over again, it is very difficult to put an end to guerrilla movements which have proved notoriously elusive and manage to keep the state on its toes for protracted periods of time. Second, coercion may be a short term palliative but even in cases where it succeeds, the solutions are seldom lasting. Tensions tend to recur if basic grievances are not taken care of leading to spiralling instability.

⁵¹ Ikram Sehgal, 'Life after Bugti', *International The News*, 7 September 2006.

⁵² *International The News*, 20 November 2006.

⁵³ Ayesha Siddiqa, 'The Mystery that is Pakistan', *Newsline*, February 2007

The second scenario could be that the government pro-actively embarks on a policy of active economic and political engagement with the Baluch leaders. This would involve the initiation of a new dialogue with the Baluch leaders to establish more inclusive and transparent economic and political structures in the province. In recent months, efforts have been made by the federal government to win over the Baluch by offering sops and concessions. As mentioned earlier, several economic packages are in the pipeline to assuage Baluch sentiments in areas which were adversely affected during the recent hostilities. For instance, President Musharraf announced grants of 1 billion for the development of Quetta itself and announced a number of schemes for the upliftment of the province. In recent months President Musharraf has even displayed greater sympathy to the Baluch on the sensitive issue of the tardy supply of gas to the province. "It is unfortunate that the areas which are a source of natural gas remained bereft in the past. Don't blame me for past neglects...I am here to provide you all facilities".⁵⁴ Conceding that Sui gas being a genuine demand of Baluchistan, Musharraf said that his government had provided Sui gas to Kalat, Ziarat, Gwadar and Jaffarabad.⁵⁵ He announced that gas will also be supplied for Urak and Hanna in Quetta and Zhob. Such conciliatory gestures have to be followed by speedy action on the ground to effectively make a dent in Baluch resistance and stop a further downslide in the Baluch situation. Given the past track record of the federal government and its general disinclination to initiate a simultaneous political dialogue in a restructured Centre-state framework makes this scenario rather difficult to foresee in the near future.

The third scenario is that Baluchistan is set for a long-lasting confrontation which could keep the pot boiling for a while. This is because there are several indications that, notwithstanding the economic blandishments, the movement may intensify in the days to come. Issues of uneven distribution of resources and exploitation of the central government remain explosive issues for the Baluch who are reportedly in no mood to succumb to Islamabad's concessions without a substantive transfer of authority to them. The government on its part seems to be in no hurry to work out a conciliatory framework for greater dialogue with Baluch leaders. In the event insurgency would linger on with no signs of early resolution. This seems to be the scenario that will hold in the days to come.

In such an event, prolonged instability in Baluchistan could have a number of implications for Pakistan. First, economic and political viability will suffer in the long run. Pakistan is already spending a huge proportion of its finances on domestic and cross-border conflicts and can hardly afford an intractable confrontation with the Baluch without serious consequences for

⁵⁴ *International The News*, 14 October 2006

its development. More important, continued unrest could spill over to neighbouring Sindh which has been tense in the past, and trigger ethnic disturbances. These could have an adverse impact on the already fragile political climate of the country. The killing of Bugti has already provided the much needed opportunity for pro-democracy forces to get together and work against the military regime. Leaders of the main opposition parties, such as Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) and Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy have found common cause in cooperating with each other. The MMA which had had differences with Bugti and his party, JWP, in the past, have now come closer to each other in their opposition to President Musharraf's regime.⁵⁶ These developments could give a fillip to anti-Musharraf forces in the forthcoming elections of 2007 which will be a litmus test for President Musharraf and the pro-democracy forces.

Second, an unresolved crisis in Baluchistan will provide Al Qaeda with a strategic opportunity to exploit differences between the Baluch and the federal government to undermine President Musharraf. The Baluch are essentially secular in outlook and have in the past not shown an inclination to join hands with Islamic fundamentalist elements. However, with the Taliban now using Baluchistan as a base for its operations, there is a risk that the Baluch will cooperate with Al-Qaeda/Taliban forces for strategic reasons. This would enhance the internal security threat in Pakistan and President Musharraf could find himself in a difficult position as he balances the various competing interests of Pakistan's domestic politics and the United States' strategic interests in its war on terrorism.

Apart from the heavy cost to both the Baluch and the Pakistani state, the Baluch conflict can also have broader implications on the region as a whole. Any long-term instability in Pakistan will have a ripple effect on South Asian regional peace and security. Ethnicity in this region is heavily interlinked and a flare-up in Baluchistan could quite easily spread across borders. As mentioned earlier, the Taliban could use the Baluch resistance to join hands with the Baluch against Islamabad.⁵⁷ Pakistan's border with Afghanistan makes Balochistan a key player in terror and war-against-terror politics".⁵⁸ If, as indicated above, the Al-Qaeda-Baluch nexus develops, it could well be the tinderbox of fundamentalist terrorism that will engulf the region. Given the interconnectedness of oil and gas pipelines, ports and trade routes, the entire South and Central Asian regions could well end up being hostage to a continued Baluch crisis.

⁵⁵ *International The News*, 29 August 2006.

⁵⁶ *Dawn*, 29 August 2006.

⁵⁷ *International The News*, 9 September 2006.

⁵⁸ Nafisa Shah "Balochistan Geopolitics and Akbar Bugti", *International The News*, 26 September 2006.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Baluch movement may wax and wane depending on the prevalent situation but is not going to fade away by itself. The future of the Baluch insurgency would hinge to a large extent on the organisational structure and leadership of the movement. Baluch reluctance to shed their tribal affiliations, their extremely small numbers - which limits their political, social and economic participation in the federal structure - and failure to organise a coherent and well-structured political leadership would impede their efforts to achieve their objectives. More important, the strategies of the Pakistani state will be crucial in determining the course of the Baluch movement. The role that Islamabad will play in exacerbating or reducing tensions, and the nature and timeliness of its state's response will decide whether the movement is contained or assumes a more confrontational form. The interplay of all these factors has decided the fate of the Baluch movement in the past and it is suggested that similar dynamics will help to shape the course of the movement in the future. At the end of the day, perceptions are very important and unless both sides are able to arrive at a mutual understanding and demonstrate a genuine willingness to improve relations with each other, Pakistan may be saddled with the Baluch problem for some time to come.