

Fatima Riffat*

Baloch Unrest in Pakistan 1947-2016: Historical Perspective

Abstract

This study attempts to re-contextualize the causes and consequences of unrest and resistance in Balochistan. The paper focuses only on the socio-economic and political dimensions of the Balochistan. The main argument of this paper is that the federation of Pakistan did not fare well with the Baloch people who caused unrest and anxiety which provided the centrifugal forces to operate in Balochistan. Consequently, one section of the Baloch people took up arms few times to show their resentment. Therefore, it is important to explore, investigate and analyse the causes of their deprivations and role of the main players in the Balochistan politics. It is also stressed that the foreign powers also have been instigating the separatist's elements in the past and that pattern has continued to date. Increasing insurgency in Balochistan is among one of the most serious threat to federation of Pakistan. Balochistan is a huge zone of mountains & deserts, larger than France, extending for approximately nine hundred miles along the Arabian Sea. Balochistan province geographically is considered to be the biggest province of Pakistan although it is minutest demographically. Balochistan is the most under developing province in Pakistan. The Baloch people have been going through various kinds of deprivations from the year 1947. They recognized the union with the state of Pakistan but they were well aware of the fact that their thin population makes only a small part of total population of the state so the protection of their definite individuality & cultural values will be the foremost problem for their headship in coming days. Political provisions under long military rules put worries and uncertainties in the mind of Baloch community who had insufficient presence in armed & civil service areas of Pakistan. This condition turned out to be the main foundation for firming the sense of patriotism among the Balochi people. The nationalism in Balochi community spans across boundaries of Pakistan, Afghanistan & Iran. There were many nationalists who were dreaming for a separate state of Balochistan.¹

Keyword: Baloch, Resistance, Bugti, Musharrat, Pakistan Gwadar port

Introduction

The residents of Balochistan are highly sensitive regarding Gwadar deep seaport and making of cantonments as it will change the balance related to the demography of the province of Balochistan. Local leadership did not appreciate investors belonging to other provinces than Balochistan & they struggle against the arrival of populace from other provinces in case of Gwadar development project. Baloch feels they are not masters of their destiny. Since the departure of British, Baloch insurgents have waged an intermittent guerrilla struggle against the

* Dr Fatima Riffat, Lecturer Professor, GCU Lahore.

state of Pakistan. Pakistan's ruling authority either civilian or military used forcible means to suppress Baloch nationalists. The use of force left a legacy of lasting hatred and this sense of hatred exploded when a younger Baloch generation well trained, more organized and militarily well equipped, resumed the insurgency in January 2005. The situation in Balochistan is a dominant extremist danger to Pakistan which is of a nationalist kind. This is the type of ethno-nationalist conflict between central ruling authorities and separatists. The separatists demand more political and financial autonomy in Balochistan for managing their affairs according to their expectations. When Baloch remains unable to get basic facilities of life then they adopted various forms of violent strategies for damaging the state structure. It is unfortunate on the part of Balochistan that it remained an underprivileged part of the state, having lesser per individual salary, in comparison with other provinces of the country. Resultantly, it has become major reason for bitterness of persons of Balochistan. This problem has potential to become the dominant risk to the integrity of the country if not resolved on priority basis. Grievances of Baloch nationalists should be addressed because few people also hit upon the idea for founding the isolated country and Baloch nationalists to achieve the resolution have created a militant group namely, (BLA) Balochistan Liberation Army. The militant assembly is highly active since 2000 in damaging the law and order situation in Balochistan through initiating blasts & rocket firings on government installations. Pakistan armed forces have responded more forcefully than in earlier decades. Widening communication gap between the Baloch and central ruling authority has been building up misperceptions on both sides. The law and order condition is not good in the province. Target killing is common & mistrust among different communities can be observed in Balochistan. Due to these uncertain security reasons, professional capacity of the provincial government has been adversely affected as representatives belonging to other provinces & central government are unwilling to serve in this province.

Balochistan Accession to Pakistan and Causes of First Baloch Resistance

When the independence issue was in its peak in the year of 1947 and it was becoming apparent that Britain would withdraw very soon, Khan of Kalat started to communicate British Indian government that Kalat expected to reinstate its pre 1876 status by securing its sovereign right on Kalat territories, that were detained or rented by Britain. Khan of Kalat stated that British Indian government had to show respect regarding the self-governing position of Kalat in accordance with 1876 agreement. The future of Kalat state was quite different from other princely states of Sub-continent (Breseeg, 2004). Before the declaration of Kalat states' independence, the future of "British Balochistan" was declared directly through the Shahi Jirga (Royal Assembly and Quetta Municipal Committee (QMC). Khan of Kalat was not in favor of Shahi Jirga referendum. According to him, Shahi Jirga was not truly representing the leased and tribal area, particularly Marri and Bugti tribal areas. Baloch sardars of these tribal areas namely, Nawab Doda Khan & Akbar Khan Bugti wanted to join Khanate after independence. In the absence of an electoral organization in British Balochistan, Shahi Jirga was responsible for determining future of British Balochistan. In late June 1947, Shahi Jirga was formally asked to decide the future of Britain Balochistan. In 1947, on the 29th of June, Shahi Jirga was held. After the speech of agent to governor-general (AGG),

Nawab Mohammad Khan Jogazai announced that the Shahi Jirga had agreed to vote for Pakistan (Breseeg, 2004). Some Baloch scholars maintain that accession to Pakistan was secured by several unfair means because according to them, major portion of population of British Balochistan was not in favor of joining Pakistan. Even today among Baloch nationalist scholars there is a controversial point of view regarding British Balochistan's accession to Pakistan.(Dehwar, 1994).

Baloch Resistance during Musharraf Era (2005)

On 12 October 1999 General Pervez Musharraf put an end to the so-called democratic period (1988-1999) by removing Mr. Nawaz Sharif from the government. The military government decided to create stability in the country. In pursuance of the policy, General Pervez Musharraf announced 7 points agenda. Among these seven points “devolution” of power was most important point of agenda, but this plan was not much appreciated by the Baloch commanders, thinking this plan as a deviation from the actual goal that was provincial autonomy. Baloch leaders perceived this scheme of local government as a tool to impose unitary from the government with a label of centralization (Pahler, 2009). General Pervez Musharraf led Military regime did not have much trust on Baloch nationalist leaders due to that reason during general election of 2002 General Pervez Musharraf used his party PML(Q) to get the support of MMA which was a six-party religious alliance who was successful in winning the majorities during these elections in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtun Khwa. JUI-F appeared on the political scene of Balochistan to counter Baloch nationalist and moderate Pakhtuns, as an important tool in the hands of federal government. So the distrust and mistrust between people of Balochistan and central government proved to be an obstacle to develop cordial relations between Balochis and federal government. They just kept on maintaining differences in different issues. On January 2, 2005 Dr. Shazia Khalid was a victim of rape incident which took place at government owned Sui gas plant at Dera Bugti district of Balochistan. A Pakistan army officer was allegedly involved in this incident but proper interrogation was not initiated by higher authorities. As a reaction Bugti tribe resisted and Baloch nationalists got a chance to resist against the federal military government. Balochis attacked the Sui gas facility; disrupting the law and order situation they damaged the gas pipelines and electricity grids. The federal government thought JWP and its head Nawab Akbar Bugti responsible for this disturbance and bad law and order situation. The federal government tried to get into dialogue with Baloch nationalists to defuse the situation in Balochistan but their strategy was not successful because Balochis were in anger due to the announcements of government which were about to construct the Military cantonments at different places in Balochistan. General Musharraf visited Kohlu district which turned to be a flashing point in the relationship of federal government and Baloch nationalists. After that event there came a violent conflict between Baloch and Federal government. As a result, Baloch militants fired rockets at the proposed location of meeting. This was the turning point when government again started using forcible means against Baloch. The military government was in the opinion that insurgency in Balochistan was led by a group of tribal leaders who were against the economic and political development in Balochistan especially in their respective areas so they decided to put every possible source to regain the control over Balochistan.

The military government used heavy artillery in the Dera Bugti and Kohlu districts which resulted the killing of civilians and a large number of people fled from the region. Paramilitary forces (FC) used brutal means to crush insurgency. The government adopted a strategy of disappearance and torture on a large scale. The federal government arrested a large number of Baloch to pressurize the Baloch people. Especially Marri tribes were in leading columns. They started armed resistance in district of Kohlu and Dera Bugti. On the other hand, Balochistan national party mobilized public opinion against military government of General Pervez Musharraf. Here history took an abrupt change. By 2004 BLA, Balochistan liberation front and Peoples Liberation Army started guerilla operations against Pakistan armed forces. (Basu, 2011). Rocket attacks and bomb blasts became a regular practice since 2000, damaging the government establishment especially in cantonment areas in Kohlu and Sui town. Musharraf government used heavy military equipment and more repressive techniques to suppress insurgency. In 2005 Baloch nationalist leaders put forward some of their demands through government of Balochistan which were as follows

- 1) Balochistan resources should be under the Baloch control.
- 2) Protection for Baloch minority.
- 3) To address the issue of missing persons.

Balochistan liberation army started attacking gas plants, pipelines and other installation. They also attacked military and FC personnel, police barracks and communication infrastructure. FC men and 750 DSG were performing their functions on the soil of Balochistan to counter the activities of militant Baloch. In this situation federal government had to deploy regular army in Balochistan to control the destruction activities of Baloch militants and for the protection of government facilities and installations like gas fields in Sui, port in Gwadar and Dam in Mirani (Bansal, 2010). About 4,000 Rangers had to be deployed on border of Punjab and Sindh to face any incident and to control activities by militant Baloch. Meanwhile federal government thought to vacate the Sui area from the Baloch population for securing gas plants and other installations. Baloch militants warned government against exploiting resources of Balochistan and to establish military control posts in different parts of Balochistan. Law and order situation was created throughout Balochistan. Militants were destroying power grids, government buildings even the important building like Balochistan secretariat building in Quetta was also under attack. The federal government was of the opinion that restlessness in Balochistan was due to two major reasons.

1) nationalist parties in Balochistan were not able to perform better in general election of 2002 so they did not get a chance to play a significant role in Balochistan politics which ultimately gave fuel to nationalistic feelings to achieve their objectives 2) tribal heads called Sardar did not want any social development in Balochistan. Government under the guidance of Pervez Musharraf started many mega projects in Balochistan such as Gwadar port project. Sardars were of the opinion that these projects would create a link with the outside world. Political conscious will be raised in common Baloch which were not in the favor of sardars so they felt it a threat for their leading role in Baloch society of tribes. Baloch

society through dividing into tribal structure but tribesmen had certain genuine grievances such as,

- Political isolation and relative economic deprivation was one major reason to give a birth sense of alienation among Baloch.
- It was feeling among Baloch that federal government had intentionally closed the doors to administration, to Pakistan army, civil services and diplomatic posts on Baloch. Which could be justified that a very less number of Baloch can be observed on these posts

Baloch were not appointed in foreign missions by the federal government even the number of Baloch students and teachers in Balochistan University were very less. Only a few Baloch secretaries were working in Quetta. While majority of the provincial secretaries were not Baloch. Similarly, a few numbers of Baloch were working in Islamabad on federal posts. This situation ultimately gave rise to a feeling of isolation to Baloch. So under this situation a common Baloch finds it hard to generate affinity with the federal government.

It was a general conception among Baloch that federal government has been exploiting the resources of Baloch people without giving any share to the inhabitants of Balochistan. Sui gas extraction and its utilization is the most prominent example of this exploitation. As the gas extracted from Sui is being supplied for both industrial and household purposes to different regions of Pakistan but majority of the Baloch are not supplied with gas connections. So much so Quetta which is the capital city of Balochistan could hardly manage to get gas supplies during the period of General Zia that too when the government was going to establish army headquarter in Quetta.

Moreover, the arrival of Pakhtun in Balochistan during the Afghan war was not welcomed by Baloch people because it was disturbing the numerical strength of the two communities i.e. Baloch and Pakhtun. Baloch thinks they have been cornered at their own place. they were of the opinion that they are being converted into the minority to be deprived of the benefits from mega projects being launched on the territory of Balochistan. It was their perceived threat that outsiders will grab more benefits from various developmental projects in the province. Government of Pakistan is hopeful that the Gwadar port project would be able to enhance the capability and flourish their activities but Baloch think that Gwadar is being linked to Karachi but not via Turbat, Panjgur and Khuzdar to Quetta which will result that the people of other parts of Balochistan will not be able to draw any benefit from the project.

Balochistan Liberation Army was a major character behind the law and order situation in Balochistan. This organization was led by Balach Marri connected to Marri tribe. The majority of Marris were the followers of Marxism who were leading BLA. In the 1980s this militant group was favoring the soviet stands and their main aim was to get greater and independent Balochistan. BLA thought that the hard climate of Balochistan and difficult topography would be the major tools that could be used efficiently against Pakistan's security forces which were not used to such type of climate and terrain. They were of the opinion to cut off Balochistan from the rest of Pakistan would be a good strategy to paralyze security

forces. Baloch fighters started attacking communication and development activities by attacking not only the facilities but also the manpower from China that were operational/working in the Gwadar project. They also attacked electrical facilities, gas pipelines, telephone exchanges, grid stations and railway tracks. The main aim of this disruption was to break the communication links of Balochistan with other parts of Pakistan. Baloch militants fired approximately 650 rockets on different facilities during 2004 showing that they possess plenty of weapons (Bansal, 2010). BLA members also provide full support to the militants. Similar support was also there in 1973 insurgency. Baloch militants also tried to get support from Sindhi nationals from the interior Sindh.

External Involvement

The involvement of external hand in the insurgency had an effective role. Some independent sources were of the opinion that independent Balochistan would be a good option to explore natural resources of Balochistan depriving of Pakistan of the benefits of the resources. So BLA members got strong support from external forces; they were provided not only monetary and weapon support but also given proper military training. The militants were able to launch various operations at an organized level with the help of latest and effective operation techniques. BLA members are trained by foreigners (Bansal, 2010). BLA members used high-intensity explosive materials to target different military establishments, installations and communication networks that prove the involvement of external hand in their activities. As stated by Dr. Ayesha Siddiqua, a fellow of Wilson International Centre, Washington DC, the involvement of Iranians, Indians and possibly American intelligence agencies in different activities in Balochistan cannot be overlooked (Siddiqua, 2005). BLA associates possessed and used sophisticated arms, rockets, and rocket launchers in different operations against Pakistan army. As Afghan assistance was there to different groups of Baloch militants during the 1970s insurgency but at that time Afghan government lost its interests in creating trouble in Balochistan and on the other hand Americans were themselves engaged in Afghanistan as the Indian and Iranian not happy by the development projects in Balochistan like Gwadar port so they helped Baloch insurgents to produce a headache for state of Pakistan because Gwadar port was a future threat to Chabahar port in Iran just adjacent to Balochistan coast. Chabahar port is the joint venture of Indian and Iranian governments (Hussain, 2005). It is difficult to believe the Iranian government support Baloch insurgents, militarily as well as financial reason being there is a reasonable Baloch population on Iranian side of Pakistan-Iran border due to which a disturbance is likely to spread in Iranian Balochistan as well. On the other hand, Shah of Iran supported Pakistan government financially as well as militarily to crush the Baloch militants during 1970s insurgency. It's the common opinion in the public of Pakistan that Indian involvement is crucial to create law and order situation in Balochistan and India has been giving military training as well as arms to Baloch fighters to fight against Pakistan army. There was evidence of involvement of Russians as well because BLA people were using Russian-made weapons but it is hardly a fact that Russian support to Baloch insurgents was very difficult due to presence of USA in Afghanistan. USA involvement in Balochistan insurgency could be a possibility because USA presence in Afghanistan provides an easy opportunity for USA to

start any activity which could disturb the situation in Afghanistan while Pakistan being the close ally to USA in the war on terror which was in the interests of USA. But involvement of china in different development projects in Balochistan could be a reason for American involvement in Balochistan. For USA it was an easy task to provide military and financial assistance to Baloch fighters through Afghanistan because china's close access to the main US o base in the gulf through Gwadar could not be tolerated by the US. The potential benefits from Gwadar port can only be realized when the Balochistan is stable. The USA is not happy with the Iran-Pakistan-India oil pipeline. The accomplishment of this project is also linked with the stability of Balochistan because the importance of Balochistan's strategic location cannot be ignored by the rest of the world players. USA and Iranian tense relations also enhanced the importance of Balochistan for Americans. Baloch nationalist being not so much religious can fulfill the interests of America they could prove the best counter for the fundamental/religious outfits in Baloch areas because Baloch nationalist can easily be used to destabilize Iran. An independent Balochistan could be more benefiting to the interest of Americans because it could provide a safe passage from Indian Ocean to Central Asia for different pipelines. Moreover, this will decrease the reliance of Americans on Pakistan and Afghanistan for actions.

Pakistani government tried it's best to resolve the situation by dialogue but Baloch nationalist presented a long list of demands before entering into any peace negotiations. When the Pakistan government formed a parliamentary committee on Balochistan for addressing the Baloch reservations this committee engaged in deep dialogue and discussions with Baloch commanders also gave its suggestions to resolve the issue. The committee was of the opinion to grant an economic package to facilitate the Balochistan province. But Baloch nationalist were reluctant in extending cooperative hand to the Pakistan government and they put forward a demand that federal government should halt the construction of military bases in province of Balochistan and Gwadar port should be handed over to Balochistan government. As a goodwill gesture Pakistan People's Party which was in the government then agreed to give the control of Gwadar port to provincial government. Violence erupted throughout the Balochistan and BLF, BLA and BPLF were the main players in creating law and order situation in Balochistan province. Bugti tribe's men were playing very actively in creating disturbance especially in Sui and Dera Bugti areas. Three main tribe's chief namely Nawab Akbar Bugti, Nawab Khair Bakhsh and Ataullah Mengal were supporting the militant Baloch.

Post Musharraf Scenario

Pakistan people's party emerged as the ruling party through the general election held in 2008 and mr. Asif Ali Zardari was raised to the position of president of Pakistan on September 2008. He apologized from the people of Balochistan on behalf of whole Pakistani nation and promised to make some gestures to compensate the Baloch people. Although, the Baloch nationalist party did not participate in 2008 election as a response to murder of Nawab Akbar Bugti, even then PPP government was successful to win the trust of general public in Balochistan to some extent². People's party government put one step forward to grant more autonomy to all the provinces in November, 2008. In due course the

federal government presented a 39 point plan in the parliament in November 2008 to address grievances of Baloch which was labeled as “Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan”³. The main features of this package were:

- 1) withdrawal of cases against Baloch leaders
- 2) return of exiled political leaders
- 3) pulling back the armed forces from some areas
- 4) federal resource distribution criteria was changed
- 5) job facilities for Baloch youth
- 6) More control on natural resources by provinces. This bill was approved in December 2009.

Moreover, national finance commission was announced for the distribution of resources among the provinces and the federation. Before the 7th NFC, population was the only criteria for the distribution of resources but in 7th NFC award major changes were introduced. The population was considered as 82 % in weight, backwardness 10 %, revenue collection 5% and inverse population density was given 2.7% weight. As a result, share of provinces was increased on account of more divisible pool. The distribution of resources between provinces and federal government was increased from 47% to 56% for the year 2010-2011 and lifted to 57% for the next years. While horizontal distribution was also increased as a result of these changing criteria Balochistan was able to grab 9.09% share in the divisible pool. NFC award was duly signed on Tuesday March 16, 2010 by President Asif Zardari⁴. Moreover 18th amendment was introduced in the constitution to eliminate the sense of deprivation

Through this bill, more provincial autonomy was awarded and some ministries were shifted to provinces to break down the concurrent list but all these developments could not show the desired results. The nationalist factor and insurgents took all these concessions and packages as deception and continuation of General Musharraf’s policy so much so that the then provincial chief minister and other political leaders also showed negative attitude in this concern. In spite of this entire negative attitude to all these developments, all tried to build confidence with Baloch community and to peruse the insurgents for reconciliation⁵. The situation went worst after 2006. Almost 3387 militant attacks claimed 2164 lives and about 4000 were injured in Balochistan from January-December 2011⁶. The killing of three Baloch leaders added fuel to situation. The violence disturbed normal life in almost whole province. The murdered leaders were Lala Munir Baloch of BNF, Ghulam Mohammad Baloch of Balochi National Movement (BNM) and Sher Muhammad Bugti of Baloch Republican Party (BRP). The situation was so alarming that civil officers refused to discharge their duties in Balochistan on account of threat to their lives due to violent conditions in Balochistan. Abduction for ransom and target killing was a daily routine. Chief Secretary stated in the court that civil officers were denying discharging their duties in province. In reaction court ordered for taking the written refusal if they deny their duties in the province. A number of times the court issued the order that

federal and provincial governments should take solid steps against the violators for the protection of basic rights of people.

Conclusion

People of Balochistan decided through free-will to become a part of Pakistan. But misunderstandings between the princely State of Kalat and the federation of Pakistan caused unrest among some Balochis because of the way the Kalat State was merged into the federation of Pakistan. Balochistan was not granted Provincial Assembly and provincial autonomy till the Legal Framework order of 1970 which further widened gulf between the federation and the provincial leaders. The neighboring countries especially India and Afghanistan, for varied reasons, sponsored separatist elements in Balochistan. Balochistan experienced undue interference of the federation many times even during the Bhutto period 1971-1977. But the mishandling of General Musharraf of the province's affairs, especially the killing of Akbar Bugti, a veteran leader of Balochistan provided the centrifugal elements with a greater cause. Subsequent political governments tried to please the balochi masses through 18th amendment, allocation of more jobs, more financial quota from divisible pool and handing over of mega Gwadar port project to provincial government but still Baloch leaders are skeptical of federal government initiatives. They are more worried about influx of people from other areas/provinces to enjoy the perks of development schemes in Balochistan making local populace either minority in their own areas or deprived of lucrative posts being less educated/experienced. Involvement of foreign actors cannot be ruled out due to geostrategic importance of this land. Arrival of Chinese in Gwadar port and conflict with Iran may instigate US to step in and support Baloch militants to destabilize the Baloch areas both in Pakistan and Iran.

Notes and References

¹ It is stated that the article is a part of my PhD dissertation which was submitted to the History Department in 2019, PU Lahore.

² Daily Jung, September 7, 2008.

³ Daily Times, November 25, 2008.

⁴ Daily The News, March 17, 2010.

⁵ Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (2012), Conflict and Insecurity in Balochistan, Islamabad: Narratives Pvt Ltd. 13.

⁶ Ibid.