

**Concerns of Balochistan:
Effects and Implications on Federation of Pakistan**

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Abstract

One of the most serious threats to the federation of Pakistan is the rising insurgency in Balochistan. Although, geographically this is the largest province, demographically it is the smallest and the most under-developed federating unit. An overview of under-development in Balochistan reveals the alarming situation which needs to be tackled by the government on top priority basis. Over the years, the deprivation amongst Balochis has caused a number of uprisings against the federal government. Resultantly, time to time various governments have carried out military operations to curtail these insurgent movements. Unfortunately, being kept away from the mainstream politics of Pakistan, the Balochis have a number of serious grievances, which over the time have developed into nationalistic feelings posing threats to the federation of Pakistan. The growing resentment among the local population calls for greater control over its own resources, more autonomy, role in mega projects, issues of outside settlers, missing persons and extremism. This paper is an attempt to analyze these issues. It also suggests some measures for improvement.

Key Words: Balochistan, federation, nationalistic, development, military forces.

Introduction

Pakistan is a federation and in a federation there is always an intricate balance between the aspirations of the constituent units for autonomy and on one hand while on the other the wish for more national unity. Since its inception, all constitutions formulated have shown a tendency towards a stronger federal government at the cost of provincial autonomy. 'The question of provincial autonomy has been a catchword in Pakistan politics since its inception and a central issue in case of the small provinces at present'.¹

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The federation of Pakistan is again experiencing a surge in the activities of Baloch nationalists. From the point of view of a federation, this is an extremely disturbing development. The main cause of concern is the transformation of their struggle, from a purely political effort to an armed uprising. There is no doubt that these revolts have a long tradition amongst the Baloch and Pushtun tribes of Pakistan. During the colonial period, such uprisings were suppressed either by initiating a change of tribal leadership, or by offering some incentives in exchange for accepting government's writ. On a number of occasions military campaigns were also undertaken against these tribes. In 1947, the scenario changed and these tribes became a part of the independent state of Pakistan. Yet, colonial policies for controlling these tribes continued. The policy of offering incentives to tribal chiefs at the cost of common man has alienated Balochistan with the rest of the federation. The sardars have raised their private armies by using government incentives. While military campaigns are effective in short-term, their achievements have been short-lived. Today everyone in Pakistan feels a sense of urgency to resolve Balochistan issue before it becomes the concern of interested foreign players. Therefore, in order to pacify armed uprising in Balochistan, there is a need to adopt a systematized strategy.

Background of the Issue

'Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, thinly populated, occupies much significance not only in the geo-politics of Pakistan, rather it enjoys much strategic importance in this part of the globe'.² 'Balochistan also shares borders of about 625 miles with Afghanistan to its northwest and of about 475 miles with Iran to its west. Some 562 miles of the Persian Gulf's Makran Coast are in Balochistan'.³ 'The strategic position of the Balochistan is unique in the world. It is a gateway to South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia. It is rich with mineral and natural resources, which are a bone of contention and rivalry between Centre and nationalism forces'.⁴ 'After the collapse of the Soviet Union, landlocked Central Asian Republics merged, which are rich in energy resources and need a route for export of energy resources and international trade. Balochistan can be of great importance in this regard due to its potential to become an international energy corridor and transit route for trade and commerce'.⁵ 'The Baloch are only 3.57% of Pakistan's 165.8 million people'.⁶

Baloch nationalism straddles across borders of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It also harbors the ambition of amalgamation of Brauhi Balochs and Sulemani Balochs who speak different languages and a varied set of social customs and norms. The political leadership of Balochistan argue that British government always treated them differently and they enjoyed special status and relationship with British Indian government. Their earlier attempts for independent state were tactfully thwarted by the political leadership of

Pakistan. They accepted the amalgamation with the state of Pakistan but got apprehensive about the fact that Baloch population was only a small fraction of the total population of Pakistan and hence in a serious danger of loss of identity if not duly protected. The later events like establishment of the One Unit further fortified these apprehensions.

Later on, the political arrangements under long military rules further added to the seriousness of this challenge as Balochis who had a scant representation in military and civil services of Pakistan developed a serious sense of alienation and deprivation. This forced them to rally under the banner ship of nationalism. 'The Baloch had voiced strong grievances about their lack of proportional representation in the Pakistani bureaucracy and armed forces or in the provincial administration of Balochistan'.⁷ 'The grievances of the Baloch are due to the dominance of Punjabis in administration'.⁸ 'This migration created a huge burden on limited resources of these provinces. In Balochistan the case of Gawadar and the making of cantonments become a sensitive issue, because it will change the demographic balance of this province'.⁹ The development flurry of the first decade of the new millennium added yet another discussion on the local leadership felt threatened by the onslaught of investors from other provinces and strongly resisted the influx of population from other provinces as that would change the demographic mix and in case of development of one or more mega city in the developmental process may totally submerge the local population in the flood of immigrants like in the case of Karachi.

'The situation in Balochistan during last year evoked concern, with a deteriorating law and order situation and strident political demands that threatened the destabilization of Balochistan with a growing sense of deprivation in that province'.¹⁰ The Baloch nationalism which to a large extent is within the precincts of constitution of Pakistan, is trying to retain the Baloch identity while safeguarding the rights of common man in making the developmental efforts of the provinces and the country. It is the time to address this issue seriously which otherwise may foster into separation given the increasing pressure from the sentimental youth of Balochistan. Nationalist terrorism has mainly been witnessed in province of Balochistan at regular intervals and mainly revolves around the issues of exploitation of resources and threat to the political identity and culture of minorities sub-nationalities. In Pakistan, minority and separatist movements are common in other parts of the country also.

In the south east of Pakistan the province of Balochistan which is mostly a tribal area, over there, intermittent guerrilla war has been a feature since last two decades. This is another major form of terrorist threat to Pakistan which is of the separatist nature. The largest but the most underdeveloped area of Balochistan currently is the centre of this threat. It is the ethno-nationalist

conflict between the government and the separatists for long indulged in violent acts for more political and economic authority in Balochistan. In Balochistan, various insurgents have adopted a variety of violent tactics to sabotage the system. This problem if not resolved in time has the potential to challenge the national integrity of the state. When it comes to their particular separate ethnic identity, the Balochis seem to be quite nationalistic. Some of them even aim at establishing a separate state, for this purpose Balochistan Liberation Army was created. 'Since the early 2000, a new militant group, calling itself the 'Baloch Liberation Army' (BLA) has been claiming responsibility for a series of blasts and rocket firings on government installations'.¹¹

National and International significance of Balochistan

Balochistan no doubt occupies a great strategic importance not only for Pakistan but also for the whole region especially for the neighboring countries, i.e., Iran, Afghanistan as well as China, India, USA and Central Asia. Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Iran, which are no doubt highly significant strategic countries not only regionally but also internationally. This aspect becomes even more important with the fact that Balochis reside in Iran and Afghanistan as well. Any insurgency in Balochistan would lead to regional instability effecting the neighboring countries and resultantly the Balochistan issue may not only be limited to a domestic one but may become a regional dispute engulfing the region that is already a sensitive and volatile. If things go unchecked in Balochistan, it may also lead to domestic as well as regional explosion. Balochistan's nationalism may lead to problems in Iran and Afghanistan, by making the demand stronger for 'greater Balochistan' that comprises of Balochistan areas of Iran and Afghanistan.

Secondly, there in Gwadar port which is a newly built sea port in Balochistan. Taking into consideration of the highly strategic location of Balochistan, the Gwadar port carries lot of importance today and even more tomorrow. Gwadar port that was recently inaugurated has been completed with the help of China. This port will provide commercial shipping port facilities and warehouses. It will have the capacity to cater to more than twenty countries. Gwadar is positioned at a very strategic location which has led it to be a very important project not only for Pakistan but also for other countries Gwadar port where on one side gives further importance to Pakistan has also led to more discontent amongst the Balochis, who feel being alienated in the project and show concerns over the influx of outsiders on their land.

Thirdly Balochistan is laden with mineral resources comprising of huge quantities of uranium, coal, copper, platinum, aluminum and gold. Large

portion of Pakistan's energy requirement of gas is being fulfilled by Balochistan which is approximately thirty six percent of Pakistan total gas production. Furthermore Balochistan will be providing the transit facilities over its area to the future gas pipe line between India, Iran and Central Asia. Thus, Balochistan will become a corridor towards the energy rich areas of Iran and Central Asia.

Another significance is that it was Balochistan where Pakistan carried its nuclear tests in 1998 at Chaghai, the tests were conducted over the Ras Koh Mountains.

The Prevailing Situation of the Province

It appears that the present phase of nationalistic uprising in Balochistan was initiated by a rape incident in Sui apparently at the hands of a Defense Security Guard (DSG) in January 2005. This incident was followed by efforts to cover-up the crime. Tribal feelings were hurt to an extent that DSG and Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were soon facing sporadic attacks by the tribals. As the tension mounted, a parliamentary delegation including members from the opposition visited Dera Bugti to talk to Nawab Akbar Bugti the chief of the Bugti tribe. This visit helped in lowering the level of tension and was followed by a visit by Shujaat Hussain and Mushahid Hussain, the leaders of Muslim League (Q). The idea was to try and reach some compromise. Apart from a demand for a fair trial in the above mentioned case, the complaints included lack or violations of provincial autonomy, economic and social neglect including non-provision of mineral energy to the province from where the same were extracted, rates of gas and mineral revenue etc.

Unfortunately, 'Balochistan remained the poorest province, with lowest per capita income, as compared to other provinces in Pakistan and this is the main factor for the resentment of the people'.¹² The Baloch leadership is also unhappy over the planned construction of new cantonments. 'A rocket attack on General Musahrraf during this visit to Kohlu town in December 2005 elicited a severe response from the military government. A full fledged military operation, which is still going on, was launched in Dera Bugti and Kohlu'.¹³ The armed tribal resistance in Balochistan continues. Nawab Bugti was killed in 2006 but his legacy remains and he is even today taken as a popular leader amongst the masses. This killing of Bugti has led to great resentment in Balochistan towards security forces. A number of military operations in Balochistan have further aggravated the problem of nationalistic tendencies. Having lost faith in the political system and power sharing, the Balochis show strong resentments towards the Punjabis and the military. 'The Baloch nationalism has steadily developed. Every time, after being crushed, the national movement arose more forcefully than before'.¹⁴

'Infested with a number of insurgent, religious extremist and sectarian groups, the security landscape of Balochistan has become exceedingly complex over the last few years'.¹⁵ Last few decades of Balochistan and specially the present picture shows a highly volatile situation which requires serious and drastic steps by the federal government. There is a dire need to bring Balochis into the main stream of Pakistan politics. The present situation is alarming and this should be taken as a serious issue towards the integration of Pakistan. Lately, the governments have been accepting the deteriorating conditions in Balochistan but practically have failed to implement steps as to lessen the grievances of Balochistan. The government will have to go for concrete steps which will lessen the growing nationalistic tendencies in Balochistan. The present Balochistan package by the Peoples Party's Government is quite comprehensive and positive but its effects will only be felt when implemented with spirit. The earlier Balochistan package by the Musharraf government was also a good step but was never fully implemented. As to lessen the mistrust of Balochis especially towards the federal government, confidence building measures need to be carried out, which should also fully involve the masses of this province.

Sadly, the law and order situation in Balochistan is alarming and require serious steps. Target killing has become common, this further fuels hatred among various ethnic and linguistic groups, leading to violence and disruption, as result lot of professionals from various fields have started migrating from Balochistan to other parts of Pakistan. This has badly affected the already meager organizations. A large number of teachers and doctors have left Balochistan. Due to security threats the officials from other provinces and federal government are reluctant to serve there. This has also adversely affected the administrative machinery of the provincial government. This wave of target killing needs to be curtailed in a very tough manner.

Unfortunately, now the rising religious extremism in this province is another major challenge. This critical issue began during the Afghan war in the 1980s when Jihad was initiated against the Soviet troops. A large numbers of Pushtun population residing in Balochistan were in the forefront of carrying out Jihad, thus sowing seeds of militarism and extremism in to the province. The close proximity of Balochistan towards Afghanistan and Iran has further aggravated this problem, the Taliban having easy excess entered into Afghanistan from Balochistan. The province also borders Iran and this became highly strategic especially after the Iranian revolution of 1979 which created strong reaction in the Sunni segment of Balochistan. This factor also caused flourishing of madrassas near the border. 'A 30% growth of the religious schools has been recorded in Balochistan during the term of office of the MMA and Musharraf led PML coalition'.¹⁶ The majority of these

madrasas are Deobandi which have played a major role in introducing sectarianism in Balochistan, thus further complicating the issue of religious militancy which has traditionally never been known in Balochistan.¹⁷ The present day crisis in Balochistan is also marred by the issue of missing persons. There is a large number of missing people who have not yet been recovered, and this has led to discontent amongst the masses and protests by their relatives and human rights activists. This has also become a serious grudge towards the agencies and federal government.

Balochistan has always been comprised of various tribes, some of which have been and are still very powerful and influential. The feuds between various tribes have also played a negative role in the integration and development of Balochistan. The tribal sardars have their own vested interests which have hindered the development in the region. But still they are playing an important role in the politics and current situation of Balochistan. 'Anti-state elements have tried to exploit the innocent Bloch people on the basis of economic under-development, and the prevalent poverty in the province for which the federal government and dwellers of Punjab are held responsible. In actual fact, however, the shoe is on the other foot. The local tribal sardars who have exercised a non-questioned-asked say over their tribes for years cannot withstand any measure of the government that could bring prosperity in the region and develop awakening among the masses that would lead to erosion of their draconian authority'.¹⁸

The killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti in his hiding cave by the security forces has led to increased unrest and protests in the province. This situation caused a lot of resentment amongst the masses in Balochistan towards security forces and the former President General Pervaiz Musharraf, who is commonly blamed for the killing of the Nawab. This incident has added to another grievance of Balochis towards the federal government and especially the armed forces. In fact, the way in which he was killed has made him a hero and a martyr for the nationalists. Not only in Balochistan but his killing was condemned by nearly all political leaders of the country. Unlike earlier, the Nawab now has great sympathies from the masses of Balochistan and a general feeling of hatred has emerged amongst them, making the whole situation more critical. The death of Nawab Bugti has added fuel to the already explosive law and order condition in Balochistan.

Another concern is the large presence of military forces in Balochistan. 'Islamabad should need its reliance on military withdraw from province'.¹⁹ Former President General Pervaiz Musharraf had decided to establish three new army cantonments in Balochistan, towards this decision there has been very strong resentment from all sections in Balochistan. One of the major demands of the Balochis is not to build these new cantonments, at Dera Bugti, Kohlu and Gwadar. 'The military cantonments planned Gawadar, Dera

Bugti and Kohlu are viewed as outposts of repression and control, not development'.²⁰ Due to the strong demand, the Peoples Party Government has withdrawn the decision of building of these three cantonments in Balochistan.

The crisis in Balochistan has become even worse with the formation of Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) which is a militant organization comprising of some tribals and others. The major target of BLA militant activities is the security forces in Balochistan. The armed forces have become the main target of the militants of BLA. Even though BLA is not a very large or organized set up, it has the tendency to disrupt the law and order of the province. At many times they are also involved in blowing up the major gas pipeline from Sui to other parts of Pakistan. The major concern of Balochis regarding economic deprivation is the issue of gas royalty share, they claim that this gas is utilized by the rest of Pakistan but its due share is not given to Balochistan. Large reservoirs of natural gas were discovered in Sui, Balochistan in 1950s, this facility of gas was given to other parts of Pakistan with no gas for Balochistan until 1980s.

Balochistan Package: Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan

Although, geographically Balochistan is the largest province and the richest of all regarding its mineral resources, it is still the least developed region of the country. There have been efforts by various governments in varying degrees and commitment. The Musharraf government gave number of recommendations for Balochistan but were never implemented. Interestingly, amongst other issues, the Musharraf era will be remembered for its deep involvement both in negative and positive aspects towards Balochistan. 'General Musahrraf adopted the "carrot and stick" policy to augment the military presence in the province and at the same time increased the pace of development to weaken the resistance in the province'.²¹

In 2008, i.e., after Musharraf, Pakistan Peoples Party formed the government which is now working under President Zardari. The Peoples Party's government has shown commitment towards the Balochistan issue and has given a package for this province. If implemented in true spirit, this package can be helpful for the welfare of this province. At present, the law and order situation in Balochistan is poor, as there are continuous attacks on power supply lines, gas pipelines, security personnel's and target killings of non-Baluchis in Balochistan. President Zardari has promised to seriously take into account the prevalent situation in Balochistan and also to take concrete steps towards resolving the issue. The government further declared that the best method for this would be negotiations. Therefore, after a series of negotiations, the government constituted a parliamentary committee comprising of all parties to consider Balochistan's issue. The

parliamentary committee looked into the grievances of Balochis, held talks with various stake holders and finally give suggestions. The proposals made by the committee were named as the 'Agaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan', which was presented in the Parliament on 24th November 2009. This is a comprehensive package which covers mainly following four areas:

1. Constitutional issues,
2. Economic matters and natural resources
3. Political issues
4. Administrative issues

Prime Minister, Gillani termed the package as a major step towards the settling of Balochistan problem. However certain nationalist parties and leaders rejected this package but generally it received positive response from all sections of the society. To ensure the implementation of the package, senator Raza Rabbani was made the head of a cabinet committee. From time to time, meetings are held by this committee to review the progress towards implementation. Due to the strict monitoring of the implementation and commitment of government there have been major achievements. The seventh NFC award gave increased share to Baluchistan from 5.1% to 9.09%. The royalty and distribution formula for gas has been revised. The federal government has also agreed to pay the arrears of gas development surcharge to Baluchistan.

The other achievements include the creation of 5000 jobs in provincial government funded by the federal government. Furthermore, approximately 15000 people will be inducted under internship program. Various mega projects in Baluchistan will only be initiated with consent of provincial government. Where ever the mega projects are under way the appointments in BS-1 to 16 shall be from the local population only. Free economic zone at Gwadar will be set up.

The construction of cantonments and Sui and Kohlu have been stopped. The critical issue of missing persons is being dealt by a judicial commission headed by Justice Mansoor Alam Khan. But the most major and real achievement from this package has come through the constitutional amendments and provincial autonomy, as in this regard the parliament passed the 18th amendment which has deleted the concurrent list, thus giving more autonomy to the provinces.

Review and Reflections

The trust deficit has to be overcome by confidence building measures aimed at winning the hearts of the people of Balochistan. 'Settlement of present crisis through negotiations based on open mind and heart with a surety that

it will be enforced honestly and completely so that lack of distrust may be removed'.²² The government must take steps to abolish the repressive and exploitative 'Sardari' system. The private armies of local warlords and sardars must be banned. This ground-breaking step, however, has to be taken cautiously. For this, the government first must win the trust of the local people by making genuine and sincere efforts for the promotion of education, eradication of poverty and unemployment. For this purpose, the recommendations put forth by the parliamentary committee for Balochistan headed by Mushahid Hussain and Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan package must be fully implemented.

Counter measures to make foreign interference quite costly for the perpetrator needs to be worked out at the strategic level. Restoration and acceleration of work on development projects and co-operation with international stake-holders in this regard can help bring investment which gradually will improve the local economy. The situation of women also needs to be uplifted in Balochistan. They need to be empowered as to play a more productive role. 'Their low visibility, negligible educational attainments and virtual lack of any voice in decision making of Balochistan are serious hurdles in the development of the province'.²³

It is the people's involvement in the development project that will eventually bring positive results. There should be the involvement of locals in mega projects and other developmental projects rather than giving jobs to outsiders.

As to lessen nationalistic tendencies and anti federal sentiments, the top priority of the government should be to grant provincial autonomy according to the 1973 Constitution as all parties and sections agree upon that. A committee comprising of seasoned politicians of all major parties of Balochistan be formed as to form a consensus regarding the strategy to bring about prosperity, peace and progress in the province. Around 85% of the population of this province lives in scattered rural areas.²⁴ Therefore, more attention and efforts are required for the Balochis living in rural areas as to bring them in the mainstream and provide them an effective role in the overall development as 'the rate of urbanization is still not very high'.²⁵

The law and order situation of the province should be the first priority of the government, by improving the situation, there can be secure and conducive environment for people, investors and especially for the foreign investors. The grievances of the locals need to be heard and removed through negotiations rather than use of force to settle issues. The agencies responsible for maintenance of law and order should be given special training and incentives so that they are able to improve the security condition of the Balochistan.

The tribal leaders are part of Balochistan politics. Therefore, while making decisions regarding Balochistan, the central government should also go for consultations with the tribal leaders. Government must make the best and positive use of their wisdom, experience and influence. If applied and employed correctly, their collective strength can become a big source of strength for the government. There should be negotiations and consultations all around and at all levels.

There is need for reforming the religious madrasas spread all over the province as to control and lessen the growing extremism in Balochistan. As to provide more employment opportunities to the people of Balochistan, more industries and export promotion processing zones should be established.

Gwadar port is economically and strategically a very important project of Pakistan. A highly vigilant security should be ensured regarding the port. As to produce more skilled labor and manpower, there is a need to established number of vocational training schools and institutes in Gwadar as well as in other part of the province. Needless to say that the promotion of education that too of quality education is the recommended course both for the short and the long run. That would be extremely essential to improve governance, politics, work ethics and social environment of the province.

Resolution of the issue of missing persons is of prime importance. 'This issue has remained at the heart of the Baluchistan conflict. The intelligence agencies have allegedly been picking up people and holding them in custody ad infinitum in order to subdue the insurgency in the province'.²⁶ In the same token, to win the hearts and minds, the mainstreaming of the nationalist parties as was successfully done in 1990's is the need of the hour. All those who boycotted the general elections of 2008 may be taken on board especially when the 18th Amendment has been passed and a good measure of provincial autonomy has been granted. Restoring true representation in Balochistan would be extremely essential to win the confidence of the people and to give a direction and sense of purpose to the gigantic developmental effort being made by the federal government in this province.

'Since independence in 1947, there have been intermittent disturbances in Balochistan. These are being variously referred to as deteriorating law and order situation, 'militancy', 'insurgency', and 'uprising' or 'resurgent nationalism'. Whatever the nature of the trouble, Pakistan Government is confronted with a challenge how to deal with the prevalent situation'.²⁷ The underdevelopment and discontent in Balochistan is no doubt a result of negligence and exploitation by various governments over the years. The government should make an all out effort to complete the mega projects of

road connectivity in the province. Opening up of new areas is like opening up blocked minds and hearts as has been promised time and again in Balochistan.

The government should aim at development and employment for the common man, engagement of the political sardars, consultative and role for tribal elders, mainstreaming and ousting of the nationalists, fighting the separatist and blocking the foreign interference.

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