

Balochistan Movement: Why India's Policy Took a Shift Towards Balochistan Under Narendra Modi Government

Afroz Ahmad

Research scholar Centre for Research and Security Studies,
School of International Studies,
Central University of Gujarat, Gandhi Nagar, India. 382029

Ms. Najish

Research Scholar at Centre for Indo Pacific Studies,
School of International Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. 110067

Abstract

On the occasion of Independence Day speech on 15 August 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue of Baluchistan. From the Red Fort, he made reference to the freedom struggle of Balochistan, Gilgit and Baltistan and gross violation of human rights in these provinces of Pakistan. Indirectly, he pointed finger on Pakistan for the atrocities and chaos it created since partition through state policy against its own people in the Province of Balochistan and in Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK). First time in the history of India, Modi exposed the internal troubles of Pakistan and its ongoing resistant movement in the above mentioned provinces. Naturally this move generated anger in Pakistan while seen as positive development by Baloch resistant leaders. Modi's Baloch strategy can be seen as a shift in India's Pakistan policy. India is eager to play Balochistan as a card or pressure point against Pakistan which may be game changer in regional politics. It can also isolate Pakistan in international community for its role in violation of human rights and spreading terrorism. Pakistan has been notorious to play the blame game against India on the issue of Kashmir besides continuously supporting terrorism against India. The well prepared strategy on Balochistan under Modi administration can be seen as giving Pakistan a taste of its own medicines by countering Pakistan's Kashmir policy. This article is an attempt to understand the Baloch conflict in the light of Modi's policy shift towards Balochistan and further its impact on Balochistan freedom struggle.

Keywords: Baluchistan, Freedom struggle, Regional politics and International community.

1. Introduction

Balochistan means 'the land of the Baloch'. Situated in the rugged mountains of southwest Pakistan, Balochistan is Pakistan's largest (equal in size of France), least populated and extremely underdeveloped province. The region which known as conflict zone of Pakistan, is ridden with acute poverty, high illiteracy, limited employment and worst infrastructure.¹ Far away from the bustling cities of Karachi and Lahore, without clean drinking water and highest rate of infant & maternal mortality, the remote province has been facing an insurgency since formation of Pakistan in 1947. The distinct Baloch ethnic minority inhabit 375,000 square mile region, which include provinces of Balochistan, Sistan and the Balochistan province in south-eastern Iran and the Balochistan region of southern Afghanistan.² With thousands of internally displaced people due to the conflict and the poor GDP which dropped to 3.7 from 4.9 per cent³ (since 1970) make it the poorest region in entire south Asia contrary to the fact that it has large reserves of natural gas, gold, copper and iron. The region has been witnessing a 67 year's old prolonged struggle for independence. Without the consent of its people to join Pakistan in 1948 Balochistan was merged into Pakistan through an instrument of Accession. Baloch resistant leaders blamed Pakistan for sustained social, economic and cultural exploitation. Therefore, the denial of autonomy and the continued existence of the Sandeman system resulted in civil conflict.

During the reign of General Pervez Musharraf, the alienation of the Baloch people was increased because the then army was dominated by ethnic Punjabis who accounts for 45 percent of country's total population. Therefore, lack of representation of Baloch in army generated alienation from rest of the country. The province has become a dumping ground of nuclear hazards of Pakistan's nuclear program inflicted the region with severe

¹ Dubey, Saurabh (2016) "Pm Modi's Balochistan Strategy: A Critical Study" *The Discussant* July September 2016 Journal of Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice Vol. IV No.3

² Kupecz Mickey (2012) "Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency: History, Conflict Drivers, and Regional Implications", *International Affairs Review*, Volume Xx, Number 3 Spring 2012, available at <http://www.iar-gwu.org/sites/default/files/articlepdfs/Pakistan%27s%20Baloch%20Insurgency.pdf>

³ Jetly, Rajsree (2009) "Resurgence of the Baluch Movement in Pakistan: Emerging Perspectives and Challenges", in Jetly, Rajshree. ed. *Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics* New York: Routledge.

health issues. Also, the construction of Gwadar megaport began in 2002 and construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been strongly opposed by Baloch leaders who view this government move as to affect the demography of province by settling outsiders. Apart from this, the province is also served as dumping ground for Pakistan's nuclear hazards. Another grievance of Baloch people is the heavy presence of armed forces and atrocities done by them on local people. According to US intelligence around 25,000 army and paramilitary forces are involved in counterinsurgency operations in Balochistan, which has only amplified ethnic grievances.

The use of Aerial bombardment and poisonous gases to crush the resistant movement resulted in loss of innumerable lives and property. According to world Baloch Women Forum, between 2000 and 2016, about 20,000 people have been killed while more than 25,000 civilian had been disappeared. Sadly, the presence of secret torture cells and Mass Graves having Balochis burnt alive, has confirmed by independent human rights watch. The government of Pakistan denied question of legitimacy crisis and dubbed conflict as instilled by foreign powers in order to disturb law and order of the country. The 'Kill and dump' policy adopted by Pakistan army in order to terrorize Baloch people, resulted in gross human rights violations which is a concern for humanity. The Baloch National Movement group of North America reported that since 2003, more than 20,000 Baloch political activists have gone missing, 'illegally abducted' by the Pakistani state security forces and victims of enforced disappearances are being 'tortured and executed' in custody.¹

According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) database, in 2015 alone, 635 people was killed including 298 militants, 247 civilians and 90 Security Forces personnel. The number of fatalities in 2014 recorded as 653. The incidents of terrorism related activities such as suicide attacks, bomb blasts also disturbed the daily life of the people badly. In 2014 four suicide attacks killed 12 people, left 64 injured. In 2015, 60 bomb blasts took 80 lives while 84 incidents resulted in 132 casualties in 2014. Over all the terrorism related incidents recorded as 56 in 2014 while 74 in 2015 resulting in 415 and 397 fatalities respectively. Not only this, the provincial capital Quetta has also recorded 102 incidents in 2015 and 100 in 2014. However, attacks on gas pipelines decreased from 17 in 2014 to 10 in 2015.²

2. Background of the Baloch insurgent Movement and First Phase of Insurgency 1947

The pre independent province of Balochistan comprised four princely states: Makran, Las Bela, Kharan and Kalat. The governor general of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah wanted Baloch province to merge with Pakistan. Though the first three states merged readily with Pakistan, the Kalat state under its 'Khan' Mir Sir Ahmad Yar Khan Ahmedzai refused the merger. On the independence day of Pakistan i.e. 15th August 1947, the Khan of Kalat declare its independence too. Jinnah again threatened Kalat to amalgamate with Pakistan, but upon the delay from Khan, Pak forces attacked Kalat on 27 March 1948 and forcefully merged it.³ Accordingly, Ahmad Yar Khan also compelled to sign an accession treaty.⁴ This merger was challenged by his younger brothers Princes Agha Abdul Karim Baloch and Muhammad Rahim demanding political sovereignty. They further continued to attack Pakistani forces under the banner of Dosht-e-Jhalawan.⁵ Thus, this period can be termed as 'First Phase of insurgency' which was mostly guerilla warfare by Khan Brothers against Pakistani forces.⁶

2.1 Second Phase of Insurgency 1958-59

In June 1958, Yar Khan declared himself as the Khan of Kalat, hoisted the old flag of Kalat⁷ and disgraced Pakistani flag. On 6 October 1958, Pakistani forces arrested him under charges of sedition. His arrest provoked Nauroz Khan, the head of Zarakzai tribe. Between 1958 and 1959, Nawab Nauroz Khan led the resistance

¹ First Post (2016) "Uri, Kashmir, Balochistan: India and Pakistan's stand on contentious issues", First Post, 22 September 2016, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/world/uri-kashmir-balochistan-india-and-pakistans-stand-on-contentious-issues-3014992.html>

² South Asia Terrorism Portal (2016) "Balochistan Assessment – 2016" SATP, New Delhi, available at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/Balochistan/index.html>

³ Ahmad, Mahvish (2012) "Balochistan Betrayed", Naked Punch, 21 February 2012, available at <http://www.nakedpunch.com/articles/139>

⁴ Jai Kumar Verma (2016) "Baloch Problem and Arrest of Jadhav: India-Pak Ties Again Hit a New Low", Indiasaga.com, 13 May 2016, available at <http://theindiasaga.com/saga-corner/baloch-problem-and-arrest-of-jadhav-india-pak-ties-again-hit-a-new-low>

⁵ Butt, Qaiser (2013) "Princely Liaisons: The Khan family controls politics in Kalat", The Express Tribune, 22 April 2013, available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/538820/princely-liaisons-the-khan-family-controls-politics-in-kalat/>

⁶ Global Security.Org(-----) "Balochistan Insurgency - First Conflict 1948", available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/balochistan-1948.htm>

⁷ Global Security.Org(-----) "Balochistan Insurgency - Second conflict 1958-59", available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/balochistan-1958.htm>

against federal government's one unit policy which sought to curtail provincial autonomy of the tribal people. He was later arrested and put in jail where he died also five members of his family charged with treason and hanged in Hyderabad jail. Later, Yar Khan was released and his title was also restored in 1962.¹

2.2 The Third Phase of Insurgency 1963-69

The Third phase began in 1962 and ended by 1969, fought between Baloch tribe and Pakistani paramilitary forces. The continued one unit policy along with the opening of new bases in the province by Pakistani armed forces to strengthen its presence were resisted by the Baloch leaders. Chief of Marri tribe, Sher Muhammad Birani Marri along with heads of Mengal and Bugti tribes launched fierce guerrilla warfare against the Pakistani government. They bombed railway tracks, attacked army installations and convoys and killed several security personnel. The army, which retaliated with a vengeance, killed and arrested a large number of Balochis, raped their women and burnt their houses, which further intensified the insurgency.²

2.3 The Fourth Phase of Insurgency 1973-77

The then Pakistan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, in 1973 dismissed provincial governments of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan under sedition charges along with promulgating martial law in these regions. Against this move, the head of the Marri tribe Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, formed 'Balochistan People's Liberation Front' (BPLF). The BPLF recruited a large number of fighters from Marri and Mengal tribes who known to be spirited fighters. The BPLF started guerrilla war against the government and killed more than 400 Pakistani armed personnel. Pakistani army also killed thousands of Balochis, destroyed several houses, raped women and perpetrated diverse kinds of atrocities on civilians as the real guerrilla fighters were hiding themselves in the hills, where the Pakistani army was hesitant to go.³

2.4 The Present Phase of Insurgency

The fifth phase of the movement resurfaced in 2004 with the able leadership of Nawab Akbar Shahbaz khan Bugti. In 2005, He along with Mir Baloch Marri presented a 15- point agenda to the government of Pakistan, demanding more autonomy, more royalty for the mineral resources of the province and stoppage of construction of military bases in the state. However, the federal government did not respond to the memorandum. It resulted in the separatist attack on the Frontier Corps' Major General Shujaat Zamir and a brigadier.⁴ The Pakistani army became furious and used lethal weaponry against the movement. In 2006, 79-year-old Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed by the Pakistan Army. Nonetheless about 60 Pakistani soldiers and 7 officers were also exterminated. President General Pervez Musharraf charged Akbar Bugti for several bomb blasts as well as firing of rockets with the intention to kill him.⁵

In April 2009, The Pakistani forces abducted Baloch National Movement (BNM) president Ghulam Mohammed Baloch and two other prominent leaders of BNM. After torture, they were killed them and their bodies thrown in the market to show that the rebels would be eliminated ruthlessly. The Pakistani forces resorted to mayhem but could not break the resolve of the Balochis. Mir Suleiman Dawood Khan of Kalat, on 12 August 2009, declared himself the ruler of an independent state of Balochistan which included Sistan and the Baluchistan province of Iran. Several secessionist groups of Balochistan, including Nawabzada Brahumdag Bugti, the grandson of Akbar khan Bugti, declared their allegiance to the Khan of Kalat. The international media also commented that the barbarity in Balochistan downgraded the image of Pakistan in the world. General Abdul Waheed Kakar, former chief of the Pakistan army, while criticizing the abomination by Pakistani security forces in Balochistan also stated in a seminar in May 2010 that the military operation launched in 2006 was 'a crime against Pakistan'. He also stated that Musharraf 'committed a big mistake' by launching an operation in Balochistan and it was totally unjustified.⁶

¹ Dawn (2012) "Deposed Khan of Kalat restored" Dawn, 7 November, 2012, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/762171/deposed-khan-of-kalat-restored>

² Global Security.Org(-----) "Balochistan Insurgency - Third conflict 1963-69", available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/balochistan-1963.htm>

³ Global Security.Org(-----) "Balochistan Insurgency - Fourth conflict 1973-77", available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/balochistan-1973.htm>

⁴ Global Security.Org(-----) "Balochistan Insurgency - Fifth conflict 2004-to date", available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/balochistan-2004.htm>

⁵ Gall, Carlotta (2006) "Tribal Leader's Killing Incites Riots in Pakistan", The New York Times, 28 August 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/28/world/asia/28pakistan.html>

⁶ Awan, Asim (2010) "Musharraf's Balochistan operation was a "mistake", The Express Tribune, 16 May 2010, available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/13657/musharrafs-balochistan-operation-was-a-mistake/>

3. Why India's Foreign Policy tilted towards Balochistan

Indian mainland and Balochistan shares close cultural and religious ties. There are few ancient Hindu temples in its territory also. Interestingly, a section of local people speaks Brahui, a Dravidian language still exist despite distance between Baloch and Southern India. The Red Fort speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflected the blueprint of government's dynamic shift towards Pakistan Policy. Pakistan has continued interference in India's internal issues since long time. India alleged that Pakistan sponsored, perpetrated terrorism in Indian soil and provided terrorists safe haven in Pakistan. The investigation by Indian intelligence agencies proved that Pakistan is responsible for terrorist attacks that India faced in the last twenty years. Some major attacks are: attack on Indian Parliament on 13th December 2001, Delhi bombings 2005, 26/11, 2008 Mumbai attacks and last three attacks - 27 July 2015 Gurdaspur Punjab, 2 January 2016 Pathankot Air Force Station and 18 September 2016 Uri attack. According to Defence experts, "the last terrorist attack i.e. Uri attack is a calculated move by Pakistan to avert India's attention from the Balochistan issue which had agitated the Pakistani establishment because of it being raked up all across the world".¹

According to former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal "By raising the Balochistan issue, Modi has changed the rules of the game. From the PM's point of view, this is a warning signal to Pakistan".² Balochistan card offers India a tool to pressurize Pakistan in terms of politics and diplomacy to counter Pakistan's Kashmir strategy. The rebellion in Balochistan offers India the option of tying down large numbers of the Pakistan Army, if India could stoke the already existing rebellion thereby providing material assistance to the Baloch rebels.³

By exposing human rights violation in Balochistan, India is keen to isolate Pakistan on terrorism issue in international community. Even, Baloch National Movement of North America extended their gratitude to PM Narendra Modi on his support to Baloch cause, by stating that, "Baloch people have welcomed and are grateful for the support shown by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at such a critical juncture when our nation is struggling to be free from the illegal military occupation of Pakistan since 1948".⁴

The Baloch rebellion gives India a leverage to force or to punish Pakistan for its asymmetric terror strategy. But the most important benefit of the Balochistan strategy is that it gives India the option of responding forcefully to Pakistan's own use of terrorist force against India without fearing nuclear escalation. G. Parthasarathy, Former High Commissioner to Pakistan praised Modi for direct response in his words as, "long overdue" and a 'necessary step... there has to be some inducement for Pakistan to fall in line'.⁵

Another important aspect of the policy shift is that, as we have mentioned above, Baloch people opposed the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by blaming Pak government looting their natural resources and settling outsiders in the province. Interestingly, India too objected CPEC on the ground that it runs through Gilgit-Baltistan which is an integral part of Jammu and Kashmir. Thus India have an opportunity to curtail this move by supporting Baloch rebellion which could also help Indian intelligence expend its footing within the territory of Pakistan.⁶

Apart from keeping Pakistan on its knee over its Kashmir Policy, India has another strategic reasons to support the Baloch movement. For instance, the land of Baloch i.e. Balochistan have vast reservoir of natural gas, oil, minerals. If it explored and developed jointly with Indian technology, will be suffice to end energy crisis. Secondly, Pakistan use the territory of Balochistan to hide nuclear weapons. If India would be able to strengthen its ties with Baloch people, it can make Pakistan a nuclear free zone. It would also counter the nuke arsenal from being used by non-state actors. Thirdly friendly relation with Balochistan would provide India security from anti India naval bases like Gwadar. If it happens there will be no naval base from Karachi to Bandar Abbas. Fourthly, if the Baloch rebellion would succeed, the disintegration of Pakistan is guaranteed in form of independent states of not only Balochistan but India friendly Sindh also. This will help India to get security from the menace of terrorism on the west front as well as existence of a peaceful South Asia.

¹ Dubey, Saurabh (2016) "Pm Modi's Balochistan Strategy: A Critical Study" *The Discussant* July September 2016 Journal of Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice Vol. IV No.3

² Talukdar, Sreemoy (2016) "Why Modi's bold Balochistan strategy will strengthen, not weaken India's moral position" First Post, 16 August 2016, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/why-modis-bold-balochistan-strategy-will-strengthen-not-weaken-indias-moral-position-2958406.html>

³ Dubey, Saurabh (2016) "Pm Modi's Balochistan Strategy: A Critical Study" *The Discussant* July September 2016 Journal of Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice Vol. IV No.3

⁴ First Post (2016) "Baloch, Indians protest as Nawaz Sharif addresses UN General Assembly", First Post, 22 September 2016, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/world/baloch-indians-protest-as-nawaz-sharif-addresses-un-general-assembly-3015106.html>

⁵ Talukdar, Sreemoy (2016) "Why Modi's bold Balochistan strategy will strengthen, not weaken India's moral position" First Post, 16 August 2016, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/why-modis-bold-balochistan-strategy-will-strengthen-not-weaken-indias-moral-position-2958406.html>

⁶ Dubey, Saurabh (2016) "Pm Modi's Balochistan Strategy: A Critical Study" *The Discussant* July September 2016 Journal of Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice Vol. IV No.3

4. Conclusion

In the past India used to sympathize with Baloch cause which it abandoned in order to woo General Zia in 1970s. Indian intentions are absolutely not relied upon interventionist policy because India holds firm belief in non-interference principal of sovereign states. Prime Ministers Narendra Modi through his reference to Baloch Cause, wants to internationalize the issue of human rights violation besides indirectly pressurizing Pakistan to stop oppression against its own people. The Baloch leaders welcomed this remark by Indian PM and consider it a positive step towards their freedom struggle from Pakistan. In the future, India can begin with lobbying for a UN declaration against genocide applied in Balochistan. Thus, policy shift towards Balochistan has moral as well as strategic importance for India. Nonetheless, Balochistan card is a countering tool in the hands of Indian government against Pakistan. The Pakistan needs to taste its own prescribed medicine which it uses against India in the name of its Kashmir Policy. The Red Fort remark of Narendra Modi reflected India's future roadmap that how it will deal with Pakistan politically and diplomatically. By friendly relations with Balochistan, India not only keep Pakistan under control but also forge secure borders and peaceful South Asia. Though the strategy is not as easy as it seems because India might have to face opposition from Iran and Afghanistan because few parts of Baloch land lies under their territory. Furthermore, "Chinese interests and Iran's growing friendship with Russia as well as its eagerness to build its economic and military strength - might lead to the emergence of the Baloch region as a new theatre for power struggles".¹

¹ Pandya, Abhinav (2016) "Why India Should Support Balochistan In Its Fight For Freedom", Huffpost, 21 July 2016, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.in/abhinav-pandya/why-india-should-support-balochistan-in-its-fight-for-freedom_a_21432713/