

The Reasons of Violence in Balochistan: An Analytical Study of Various Uprisings

Abdul Basit Khan*, Muhammad Azhar** and Ayaz Muhammad***

Abstract

The Baloch nationalist sentiments urging to resist the British occupation had been germinated since the early twentieth century. After the establishment of Pakistan, Balochistan witnessed various uprisings and consequent army actions causing heavy losses to the people as well as forces of the state. In retaliation to the frequent use of coercive power by the state, the insurgents, from time to time, have substantially damaged the state-installations like railway lines, bridges, gas fields, pipelines and electric transmissions. Over the years, the ever-prevailing misunderstanding and lack of trust between the Baloch nationalists and the policy-makers in Islamabad have rather intensified thus making the issue much complex and complicated. The alleged foreign involvement in the province further sensitized the issue. The instant study evaluates the historical discourse of various Baloch uprisings in Pakistan and their impact on the present trends of violence in Balochistan. It concludes that this situation prevails because neither the federal government has been able to comprehend and accommodate the aspirations of the confronting Balochs nor the latter have ever appreciated the ground realities which may still provide them opportunities to secure their objectives properly within the larger framework of the federation of Pakistan.

Key Words: Uprisings in Balochistan, Baloch Nationalist Movement, Militancy, Violence

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* Abdul Basit Khan, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Government College University, Faisalabad.
Email: basitniazi@yahoo.com

** Muhammad Azhar, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Government College University, Faisalabad.

*** Ayaz Muhammad Professor, Former Chairman, Department of Political Science, Former Dean Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

The Uprising of 1948

When the government of Pakistan administered unconditional accession of Kalat in 1948, it faced a forceful and violent armed resistance at the hands of Prince Abdul Karim Khan who was younger brother of the Khan of Kalat and had also served as Governor of Makaran until March 1948. Marri records that after some brief skirmishes with the relatively well-trained Pakistan Army, the Prince along with almost 1000 followers, moved to Afghanistan on May 16, 1948, where some other Baloch activists also joined him¹. Harrison observes that the Prince was anticipating some active support from Afghanistan. He issued a manifesto in the name of Baluch National Liberation Committee wherein he disavowed the unconditional accession agreement signed by the Khan, proclaimed the independence of Kalat and demanded fresh negotiations with Pakistan. Later, in 1980, K.B. Nizamani, a participant and eye-witness of that mini-revolt, revealed in an interview that the revolt had a tacit approval of the Khan to whom the move was a last-ditch attempt to restore his princely prerogatives².

While speaking in the state's Lower House on December 14, 1947, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo of the Kalat State National Party (KSNP) categorically rejected amalgamation of the Kalat State with Pakistan. However, the leading members of various Baloch nationalist parties and the Royal Court of Kalat (commonly known as Darbar) did not agree with the Prince that an armed struggle against Pakistan was feasible at that juncture³. Harrison mentions that Afghanistan denied support to Karim's revolt for the independence of Balochistan whereas the government of Pakistan was convinced that the guerilla operations launched by the Prince against the Pakistan Army were fully supported by Afghanistan⁴. Inayatullah Baloch believes that Kabul denied support to the Prince since it was in favor of inclusion of Balochistan to an Afghan-controlled "Pushtunistan"⁵.

On July 8, 1948, after being disappointed by the indifferent response from the Afghan government, the Prince returned to Balochistan where he was arrested along with some one hundred militants, after a low-intensity clash near Harboi with Pakistan Army. He was tried in Mach Jail by a special *Jirga* and on November 27, 1948, sentenced to ten years of rigorous imprisonment while a fine worth Rs. 5000 was also imposed; Mohammad Hussain Anka, his colleague and adviser, was also sentenced to the same length of imprisonment whereas rest of the companions were sentenced to different terms and had to undergo

imposition of fines⁶. Some scholars believe that the Khan, under pressure from the Pakistan government, had persuaded his brother to surrender assuring him of safe conduct and amnesty as pledged by the Pakistan Army. The adventure waged against Pakistan was of little immediate significance since it lacked any unified political support from the Balochs and military support from Afghanistan; nevertheless, his arrest and trial was regarded within the Balochs as a breach of the safe conduct agreement by the Pakistan government. They considered it as the first of a series of “broken treaties” which had cast an aura of distrust over relations with Islamabad (here Harrison has used ‘Islamabad’ as a symbol for Pakistan government although by then Islamabad didn’t exist)⁷.

The Uprising of 1958

The amalgamation of various areas of Balochistan and the provinces of Sind, NWFP and Punjab into a single unit under the One Unit Scheme substantially changed the nature of the Pakistan politics in general and that of West Pakistan in particular. The Scheme was vehemently opposed by the rulers of the states especially by the Khan of Kalat and the chiefs of the prominent tribes because to them it stood for alien control over the destinies of their people; its implementation caused the feeling of neglect or deprivation in Balochistan to grow deeper and acute⁸. The Baloch leaders defied the ban placed by the federal government on political activity and immediately organized demonstrations against the Scheme. In 1955, Prince Abdul Karim Khan, who by then had completed the term of his imprisonment, formed a party known as the *Ustoman Gal* (People’s Party); the party as well as the Khan of Kalat opposed One Unit and demanded for the formation of a unified Balochistan province⁹. Feldman mentions that because of the open defiance of authority of central government, it seemed at one point of time that the province had seceded¹⁰. In October 1957, forty-four tribal Sardars, including the Baloch Sardars of Dera Ghazi Khan and Sind, met in Karachi under the chairmanship of Mir Ahmad Yar Khan and demanded the abolition of One Unit and restoration of the Kalat State¹¹.

In October 1958, the first countrywide martial law was imposed in Pakistan on the justification that the Khan of Kalat, who had acceded to Pakistan under duress, was mustering forces to secede from Pakistan. The government alleged that Abdul Karim along with his uncle had been secretly negotiating with Afghanistan for support of a full-scale Baloch rebellion and, for that purpose, had assembled a force of 80,000 tribesmen. On

October 6, 1958, Pakistan Army moved into Kalat and arrested the Khan on the charges of sedition but the Khan and his companions maintained that the said allegations were without substance and planted deliberately to provide a pretext for the imposition of nationwide martial law¹². Ahmad holds that the Balochs were a proud people and they loved and obeyed their *Sardars* while the Khan was the “*Sardar of Sardars*”, the Khan-e-Azam, whose arrest clearly had not appeased the people of Balochistan who already had a dislike for the course of events that took place after August 15, 1947¹³.

The arrest of Khan of Kalat led to second Baloch insurgency. The movement rose strongly from the villages of Jhalawan sub-division of Kalat district under the leadership of Nawab Nauroz Khan, the Chief of Zehri tribe, who was then ninety years of age. He had also taken part in armed rebellion against the British in the 1920s and 1930s. In the start, he claimed the support of 750 to 1,000 activists but the movement soon spread within the length and breadth of Jhalawan and various other guerilla bands joined him in the hills. Failing to counter the activities of the insurgents which continued for more than a year, the military assured Nawab Nauroz Khan of safe conduct and amnesty; nevertheless, the rebel leadership was taken into custody when they came down the hills and moved to Kuli Camp in Quetta¹⁴. Breseeg narrates that Nawab Nauroz Khan along with his elder son Mir Batay Khan and seven others were tried in Hyderabad Jail and sentenced to death after charges of treason; however, considering the age of the Nawab, the death sentence on him was commuted to life imprisonment. The Nawab died in prison in 1964. The other participants including Sabzal Khan Zehri, Bahawal Khan, Wali Muhammad Zarakzai, Ghulam Rasool Nichari, Masti Khan and Mir Batay Khan were hanged on July 15, 1960, in Hyderabad and Sukkar Jails¹⁵. All of them were regarded as nationalist martyrs and their shrines had a symbolical significance in the political culture of Balochistan¹⁶.

Ziring explores that during a meeting with political workers in Quetta in 1962, the Baloch leaders warned Ayub Khan not to contemplate a military solution of the Balochistan issue. Probably at the exhortation of Mr. Z.A. Bhutto, Ayub Khan realized that it would be expedient to release the Khan of Kalat from house arrest in Hazara district. He thus reconciled and the Khan was released on November 6, 1962¹⁷. However, despite these reconciliatory measures, the guerrilla activities increased in the Jhalawan and Marri regions. In 1963, Sher Mohammad Marri,

along with a group of Baloch nationalists, laid down the organizational infrastructure of the *Parari* Movement; its major objective was to wage an armed struggle against military until its withdrawal from Balochistan. Until the end of 1960s, the numerical strength of the *Pararis* had reached to nearly one thousand. They adopted hit-and-run strategy, attacked government buildings and ambushed military convoys and trains while the army retaliated with air strikes and ground fire¹⁸. After the downfall of Ayub regime, General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan took over and announced the abolition of One Unit Scheme on March 30, 1970, thus conferring a full provincial status on Balochistan after 23 years of the creation of Pakistan; a cease-fire was resulted because of the said development¹⁹.

The Uprising of 1973

In 1972, the National Awami Party (NAP), in alliance with Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), formed the provincial government in Balochistan. The leadership of the NAP included notable Baloch nationalist politicians like Sardar Ataullah Mengal, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo²⁰. In April 1972, Mr. Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo took charge as Governor of Balochistan and Sardar Ataullah Mengal as its Chief Minister²¹.

The contiguity between Pakistan and Iran was of enormous geopolitical strategic significance for the entire region. The Shah of Iran was uncomfortable because of the emerging nationalist tendencies in Iranian Balochistan while Ahmad believes that the erstwhile Soviet Union was responsible for the said situation. Being the co-signatories of the US-sponsored defense pact called CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), both Iran and Pakistan had cordial relations which could be affected adversely by these developments while Bhutto could not afford the same²². It appeared that the NAP government was pursuing such a radical line of action which could create an upheaval in Iranian Balochistan; consequently, a high level tension evolved and prevailed between Bhutto and the NAP administration in Balochistan²³. Khan Abdul Wali Khan, the leader of NAP, disclosed in the National Assembly that Bhutto was reluctant to install the NAP government in Balochistan. Moreover, during his trial in the Supreme Court, he added that the Shah of Iran actually had disapproved such installation²⁴.

The newly installed government of Mr. Z.A. Bhutto promulgated a fresh constitution in 1973. Ahmad observes that the

coalition government of NAP in Balochistan seemed to act more independently than was considered desirable. It did not confine itself to the constitutional limits defined by the Federal Government and had started throwing out Punjabi officials from the services which included some 2,600 policemen²⁵. Shafqat believes that the rift between the provincial government in Balochistan and the centre steadily increased when the former attempted to assert its autonomy and the latter insisted on asserting its authority. Consequently, in February 1973, the PPP government dismissed the provincial government of Balochistan under the pretext that it was hatching a plot to overthrow the central government²⁶.

The said act of Mr. Bhutto once again sparked a sharper confrontation from the nationalists with the centre leading to an uprising that remained at its peak during 1973 up till 1977. Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Ataullah Mengal and Khair Bakhsh Marri were arrested by the federal government and army was stationed in the province to restore peace²⁷. The guerillas struggling against army represented two kinds of people; one had tribal affinities with the imprisoned leadership particularly with Bizenjo and Marri and the other had an ideological commitment to the cause of nationalists. The Mengal and Marri tribes were fighting in Jhalawan and Marri areas respectively while the resistance had a mixed pattern in other areas²⁸.

Balochistan witnessed intense fight between the Pakistan army and the guerrilla forces in the upcoming years. Harrison mentions that some 55,000 Balochs including 11,500 organized militants were fighting against military personnel numbering over 80,000. Iran provided 200 million dollar as financial aid to Pakistan and deputed combat helicopters to join the shelling. The insurgency continued for four years and claimed the lives of almost 3300 army men along with 5,300 Baloch fighters²⁹. According to government of Pakistan, the insurgency was at its peak first in 1973 and then at the end of 1975. In 1974, 178 major army encounters took place out of which 84 were in the Marri area³⁰. Sarawan and Jhalawan areas along with Nushki, Kharan and Turbat were the other main areas of the insurgency³¹.

General Zia-ul-Haq, who replaced Bhutto in 1977, was conscious enough about the intensified resentment within the Baloch people. Realizing the sensitivity of the issue, he followed a more rational approach towards the Balochs and released many of the Baloch prisoners and also disbanded the Hyderabad Tribunal which was setup to trial the dissident Baloch and Pashtun

leadership; that move was widely appreciated by the warring Baloch tribes. He granted general amnesty to the tribesmen and their families repatriating from Afghanistan. As a natural consequence of these measures, Zia regime pacified the unrest in Balochistan³². Harrison, nevertheless, observes that when the insurgency in Balochistan started in 1973, the Balochs were fighting only for regional autonomy within a radically restructured, confederal constitutional framework and not for independence; however, by the time the shooting subsided in 1977, the separatist feelings had greatly been intensified. He writes: "In mid-1980, I found a pervasive mood of expectancy among the Baluch, a widespread desire to vindicate Baluch martial honor, and a readiness to renew the struggle when and if circumstances appear to be favorable"³³.

The Uprising of 2005

The Baloch nationalist segments enjoyed a relatively calm political atmosphere during 1980s and 1990s; nevertheless, the establishment of cantonment boards in Sui and Kohlu along with the development of Gwadar Port by the military regime of General Pervaiz Musharraf in the early 2000s renewed the insurgency in Balochistan with greater vigor as predicted by Harrison in 1981. The nationalists feared that they would be turned into a minority as a consequence of settler's influx from other provinces to these mega projects. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) started guerilla operations targeting paramilitary forces and state installations. Balach Khan Marri, Hyrbyar Khan Marri (the sons of Khair Bakhsh Marri), Sherbaz Marri (the leader of the Bijrani Marris) along with Brahamdagh Bugti and Shah Zain Bugti (the grandsons of Akbar Bugti) were the chief activists while the main centers of their resistance were Kohlu, Ketch (Turbat), Gwadar, Khuzdar and Dera Bugti³⁴.

Kundi observes that Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, too, had registered his annoyance regarding the said mega projects. The mishandling of the rape issue of Dr. Shazia Khalid by the Sui administration in January, 2005, further swelled the grudges. Nawab Bugti alleged that some military personnel committed the crime hence disgraced the tribal culture and values³⁵. He led the violent demonstrations in Dera Bugti wherein some security personnel lost their lives while the retaliatory action by the military forces claimed several civilian lives³⁶. Pervez Musharraf threatened the Bugtis reminding them of 1970s and claimed that this time the army needed not to climb over mountains to chase

them instead it would hit them in such a way that they would have no cognizance of what had hit them³⁷. Ayaz Amir advised the Pakistan army that it had to be more circumspect while dealing with the Bugtis who had been a proud and warlike people compounded with a sense of bitter grievance against the perceived injustices of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy i.e. Pakistan's permanent ruling party. He added that although the strength of army and the Bugtis is incomparable nevertheless taking on the Bugtis would not be a tea party at all. One could bet the Bugtis would take to the hills which would create another South Waziristan for the army (the army by then was already engaged in South Waziristan against terrorists). He demanded from the general to show flexibility and statesmanship adding "if one-fortieth of the largely unrequited flexibility shown towards India were shown towards the Baloch people, Balochistan would be Pakistan's most peaceful province"³⁸.

The general, however, didn't pay any heed to such voices and the security forces attacked Dera Bugti in March 2005 where indiscriminate shelling over the Hindu ghetto claimed scores of civilian lives including Hindus. The insurgents also responded by attacking the security forces; Chaudhary Shujat Hussain, a leader of the ruling party, was sent to Dera Bugti in order to negotiate for a ceasefire. In December of the same year, the BLA fired rockets on a paramilitary camp in Kohlu where general Musharraf had to lay down the foundation of a garrison. In retaliation, the Marris of the region were attacked by security forces which resulted massive collateral damage to the inhabitants. Because of the extended military operation which engulfed the entire region, Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch, President of the National Party, declared that the then prevailing situation of Balochistan resembled to that of former East Pakistan (1970)³⁹. The weekly Friday Times reports that with the increased deployment of military, the insurgency also intensified and soon spread through length and breadth of the province except the northern Pashtun belt. The militants attacked frequently on gas pipelines, electricity grids, railway tracks in almost all areas where the Baloch lived in majority i.e. from Chagai- at the border of Afghanistan, and Gwadar, on the southern coast, to Hub, the industrial city bordering on Sindh⁴⁰.

Killing of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti and the Subsequent Developments

President Musharraf had repeatedly stated that leaders of the Baloch tribes were against development of Balochistan and wanted

backwardness to prevail in their respective areas. He said that the rebellion in Balochistan was actually a reaction against the said development⁴¹. He warned the Baloch nationalists to end inciting people through slogans of “sovereignty” and “rights” of Balochistan and declared that his government would forcefully quell any attempt to impede the development process in Balochistan⁴². He reiterated in August 2006 that the time had come to end the sway of nationalist Sardars and establish the writ of the government to protect national assets and installations. He resolved that the government would not opt for any political settlement with Baloch Sardars who already had record of anti-government, anti-democracy and even anti-state activities⁴³. Nawab Bugti, who had declared that the struggle of the Balochs was for the protection of their cultural values and traditions, was aware of the threat of his elimination. He responded: “we will not be there forever. They might kill me. But I am sure our coming generations will continue my mission for the attainment of Baloch rights”⁴⁴. Gazdar believes that Musharraf’s statement about fixing up the Balochs aggravated the situation. In response, the Nawab declared that it was better to die in battlefield than in the sickbed; the subsequent events proved both Bugti’s and Musharraf’s words to become true⁴⁵.

The tragedy which could be foreseen through the abovementioned circumstances emerged when, on August 26, 2006, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti along with 37 of his followers were killed in a military operation in Chalgri area of Bhamboor hills of Dera Bugti district; around 21 security personnel including 6 officers were also killed during the clash. Najeeb Marri, the spokesman of the Marri tribe, however, claimed that 140 people from Bugti and Marri tribes had been killed in that operation⁴⁶. The initial report about Bugti’s death revealed that his whereabouts were traced through a satellite tracking system and was attacked through navigated rockets armed with advanced technology. The civilian government stated that the forces were deployed to capture Bugti alive but the insurgents resisted and Bugti lost his life in the retaliatory action taken by the forces. After Bugti’s elimination, President Musharraf expressed his pride on the success of mission and sent message of congratulation to the commander. He boasted that Bugti was attacked through rocket navigation technology and he could not know what had hit him. The government committed further follies by desecrating his dead body which was widely condemned throughout the country. The people from all over Balochistan and the Balochs settled in Karachi demonstrated protest after his death⁴⁷. Nawab Bugti was regarded as a symbol of

Baloch unity and his killing during military operation was a significant event in the history of Balochistan. Kundi observes that his death made him a martyred role-model for nationalists and non-nationalists alike⁴⁸. Gazdar believes that Nawab Bugti was hospitable, straightforward and honor bound; at the same time, he had features of ruthlessness, cruelty and oppressiveness. He led a life of hard bargainer and soft tribal chief. He had been a parliamentarian for many times who took oath of allegiance to state of Pakistan but suddenly had to turn into an insurgent and sacrifice his life. His refusal to obey military regime of Musharraf elevated his status within the Balochs who regarded him as a martyr. His demise had infused a sense of urgency into the "Baloch cause"⁴⁹. Later on, that "cause" found another martyred hero in the assassination of Mir Balach Khan Marri in Afghanistan on November 21, 2007. Like his father Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, Mir Balach, too, believed in armed struggle to secure the political and economic rights of the Balochs. His death further boosted the nationalist sentiments in Balochistan⁵⁰. Sial & Basit observe that, after the death of Nawab Bugti, a phenomenal increase had been observed in the number and frequency of attacks on state institutions and installations in Balochistan. Moreover, sectarian violence was also increased in the region. 2400 violent attacks were reported during January 2006-December 2009, killing 1186 people⁵¹.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came into power in 2008 while Mr. Asif Ali Zardari succeeded general Musharraf as President of Pakistan who had ruled the country for almost nine years. General Musharraf had already been succeeded by General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani in November 2007 as Chief of Army Staff. The PPP government tried to pacify the unrest in Balochistan through Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan Package (November 2009), restructured 7th NFC Award (December 2009) and the much pronounced greater provincial autonomy conferred through 18th Constitutional Amendment (April 2010) but all the said efforts couldn't bring peace for the people of Balochistan.

The installation of nationalist government in Balochistan under Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch of National Party (June 2013-December, 2015) was believed to be a positive sign for the people of Balochistan in order to bring peace and tranquility in the region. General Raheel Sharif, the Chief of Army Staff (2013-16) was also interested to pacify the unrest in Balochistan. Both these authorities, working in collaboration, managed to repatriate a number of *Pararirs* into national political mainstream,

nevertheless, unrest still prevailed therein and the ratio of violent incidents still remained quite alarming. The “South Asia Terrorism Portal” (SATP) describes that 653 fatalities (including personnel from security forces, militants and civilians) were recorded in Balochistan in 2014 during the acts of terrorism while the number reduced to 635 in 2015. SATP further cites the report of Provincial Home Department released on November 6, 2015, which claimed that the acts of target killings and terrorism had been reduced to 50% during the preceding two years⁵². Furthermore, the Express Tribune cites the report of the provincial home department wherein it was claimed that 238 fatalities were recorded in 183 terrorist incidents in year 2016 while some 517 people were injured in these incidents. The same report further mentions that 202 people were killed and 310 were injured in 226 violent attacks of the similar nature in year 2015⁵³.

The daily Dawn reveals that numerous guerrilla outfits have erupted in the region. It enlists some of them as: Baloch Liberation Front-led by Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, Balochistan Liberation Army-led by Mir Balach Marri until 2007 and then succeeded by Harbyar Marri who himself is under asylum in UK, Balochistan Republican Army-led by Brahamdhagh Bugti, United Baloch Army-led by Mehran Marri who is the youngest son of Khair Bakhsh Marri, Lashkar-e-Balochistan-led by Javed Mengal who is the brother of Akhter Mengal, Balochistan Students Organization-Azad-established by Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch-Zahid Baloch was its chairman after whose abduction in 2014 it is chaired by Karima Baloch⁵⁴. During a field survey in Balochistan (2015), the researcher observed that the masses in Balochistan were afraid of these outfits particularly from Baloch Liberation Army and Baloch Republican Army which were symbols of real terror for them. The people were, in fact, hesitant and reluctant to talk freely about political matters.

Analysis

The unrest in Balochistan has remained a matter of grave concern for the pro-federalist elements of both Quetta and Islamabad. The authorities in Pakistan often proclaimed publicly that the separatist factions (pretending to be nationalists) enjoy some cross-border support particularly from India and Afghanistan. The interest of the international community in Balochistan might be gauged from the instance that, in February 2012, Dana Rohrabacher, the then Chairman of US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, demanded in the House of

Representatives that the Balochs should be given the right of self-determination. In recent times, India has increasingly been investing in Afghanistan in terms of finance and human resource which is for strategic objectives only. In that perspective, the arrest of Kulbhushan Yadav (March 2016) from Balochistan was the major breakthrough to unfold the reason of violence therein. He was an in-service officer of Research & Analysis Wing (RAW), i.e. an Indian security agency. The officer confessed that RAW was involved in Balochistan and he was assigned the duty to frustrate the reconciliatory efforts in Balochistan so that the proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) could not be materialized. The abovementioned account of events demands that the government of Pakistan must take some solid initiatives so that the countries hostile to the integration and development of Balochistan might not exploit the centrifugal tendencies present in the region. The cross-border movement from Afghanistan and Iran into Pakistan should effectively be checked. A meaningful political dialogue with all the major stakeholders of Balochistan is also imperative since any forceful suppression of contending groups would lead to further deterioration.

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