

The Resilience of Baloch Insurgencies: Understanding the Fifth Period

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The geographical expanse of Balochistan as a “brooding and melancholy place” rightly captures the essence of its post-1948 history (Weaver 2002, 90). Its history is marred with betrayal and contradictions vis-à-vis the Pakistani state. It is the largest and the most resource-rich of the four provinces of Pakistan but the least populated and developed. Even though the Baloch[1] nationalist movement has continuously faced the state’s brutal repression, it has always revived with more intensity than before and outlasted other resistance movements. While the insurgency started right after the Khan of Kalat was forced to sign the instrument of accession in 1948, it has broadly occurred in five different periods. The current and fifth period started in 2004 and is still active, making it the longest and the most violent episode. To this effect, the paper seeks to analyse the fundamental causes that led to the insurgency and continue to sustain it. The paper also examines the reasons that led to the weakening of the insurgency post-2015 and its subsequent revival again in 2020.

It is pertinent here to note that the reasons behind the current period of insurgency are not exclusive of history, they are merely manifestations of decades of unresolved issues that keep amplifying. Hence, to aid the objective of the paper, it is divided into three broad sections. The first section outlines the history of Balochistan and its people to understand the context of the insurgency. The second section focuses on the reasons behind the current period of insurgency through the themes of political alienation and marginalization, economic deprivation and underdevelopment, megaprojects in the province, and military response by the state. The penultimate section focuses on the post-2015 period of the weakening of the insurgency due to intra-Baloch rivalry and its second revival in 2020.

Historical Background

The Land and the People

Before the arrival of the British in the region, Balochistan (formerly the state of Kalat) was under the rule of Khan of Kalat and divided into four provinces – Kalat, Lasbela, Makran and Kharan (Devasher 2019, 11). The Khanate of Kalat extended to the present states of Iran and Afghanistan since, as the Khan of Kalat (1840-75) said to the Afghan and British envoys, “all the regions where the Baloch are settled are a part and parcel of our state” (Ibid).

After losing the First (1838-42) and the Second (1878-79) Afghan Wars, the British started to annexe and consolidate large parts of the present-day regions near Pakistan and Afghanistan border. Devasher (2019, 12) further points that to prevent Russian advances towards British India, “the British demarcated their border with Iran [then Persia] and Afghanistan giving away large parts of the princely state of Kalat to these two countries” with the motive of appeasing their rulers and acting as a buffer zone to prevent Russian advance.

The British government declared that they would “respect the independence of Kalat as long as it would act in subordinate coordination” (Mendez 2020, 44). They effectively divided the Khanate into two administrative regions, the first was the state of Kalat and the second area was directly under British control which included areas “leased by the British from Kalat and the Marri and Bugti tribal areas” (Devasher 2019, 14) and also included dominant Pashtun

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areas. Thus, the latter unit was also a part of British India while the former was not [2].

The Marri and Bugti tribes have also occupied a dominant position in Baloch politics. The Marris are numerically the largest tribe in Balochistan and “consider themselves Balochistan’s master tribe” (Weaver 2002, 116). The two groups are part of a group called Eastern or Sulaiman Baloch which is also dominant among the seventeen groups into which the Baloch are categorised in addition to the 400 sub-groups. The other major group is the Western or Makran Baloch “who have traditionally been viewed as the ‘original nucleus’ of the Baloch people” (Devasher 2019, 26).

Additionally, in the 1901 census, the British made a distinction between the Baloch and the Brahvis (even though they are just another group of Baloch) who are an “ethnic group of Dravidian origin based in central Balochistan”, while the other groups were mainly based in the south and south-west parts of the state (Devasher 2019, 23). The Brahvis have three subdivisions: the Brahvi nucleus, the Sarawan and the Jhalawan Brahvis. The Khan of Kalat belongs to a sub-division of the Brahvi nucleus while “a Jhalawan tribe, the Mengals, have become the most powerful player in Balochistan politics” (Dunne 2006, 16).

The geography of Balochistan and a scattered population helped in building strong tribal identities or barriers that alienated them within themselves but also helped in ensuring isolation from outside forces. The advent of British rule certainly changed this. Taj Mohammad Breseeg in his book *Baloch Nationalism: Its Origin and Development* (2004, 181) argues that Baloch resistance to the British authorities was the result of individual tribal chiefs due to their own contentions. The failure to form a national struggle was due to “the lack of communication between the Baloch tribes and contact with the Indian people, having an enemy superior in arms and resources, and the lack of a proper political organisation to mobilise the masses.”

According to Devasher, the establishment of the *Anjuman-e-Ittehad-e-Balochistan* (Organisation for the Unity of Baloch) in 1929 marked the emergence of a “secular, non-tribal nationalist movement” (2019, 71). Most of the members and leaders of the group “were from the urban bourgeoisie, large and small, educated youth, and nationalist-minded members of the clergy and tribal aristocracy” (Breseeg 2004, 216). Finally, as also stated by Breseeg (2004, 223), it is pertinent to list the demands made by them:

1. Reform in the Khanate.
2. Unification of the traditional Baloch lands which were divided between different administrative units (and countries).
3. Establishment of a sovereign, independent and united Balochistan.

Accession to Pakistan and Aftermath

Like many other issues that are endemic to South Asia, the predicament of Baloch nationalism and insurgency deepened with the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. As the withdrawal of the British and the partition became evident, the state of Kalat decided that it would remain independent and not join either India or Pakistan. Interestingly, in 1946, it was M.A Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and the then legal advisor of the Khan of Kalat, who submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission arguing that “Geographically, Kalat does not fall within the territorial limits of India” and “ethnographically, the people of Kalat and of the territories under its suzerainty, have no affinities with the people of India” (in Devasher 2019, 5&25).

Subsequently, the government of Kalat was set up with the establishment of a new Parliament as well as the adoption of a new constitution and flag. Elections were also held in the two houses of Parliament in late August of 1947. While Pakistan accepted an independent Kalat initially, “Jinnah had second thoughts... and was now desirous of obtaining its accession in the same form as was accepted by other rulers who joined Pakistan” (Ibid, 87). Consequently, as negotiations between the two broke down, Pakistan invaded Kalat and “the Khan was forced to sign the merger document and Kalat was annexed. This led to the first armed insurgency in 1948 led by the Khan’s brother” (Bansal 2005, 252).

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After the first period of insurgency, and before 2004, the Baloch have launched a rebellion against the state three times in 1958, 1963–69, 1973–77. Devasher rightly notes that every Baloch “rebellion has lasted longer than the previous one, every rebellion has encompassed a wider geographical area than the previous one and every rebellion has involved more Baloch than the previous ones” (2019, 90). For instance, while the first two periods were relatively small, in 1973 “55,000 insurgents faced 80,000 Pakistani troops supported not only by Pakistani Air Force but also the Iranian Air Force. More than 5,000 insurgents and over 3,300 soldiers were killed in the insurgency that lingered on until 1977” (Bansal, 2005, 252).

Over the years, Pakistan’s pervasive and hard-handed response has induced a “psychological alienation from Islamabad” for the Baloch that has further pushed many towards demanding independence from the state rather than provincial autonomy (Harrison 1981, 4; Grare 2013). While tension and violence were fomenting for a few years, the current period of conflict was provoked in 2005 by the rape of a female doctor, Shazia Khalid, in the small Baloch town of Sui in the Dera Bugti Area committed “allegedly by the captain and three personnel of the Defence Security Guards. The government’s subsequent handling of the incident and its blatant attempt to cover up the crime and shield the culprits triggered massive outrage” (Wani 2016, 812).

The 1990s had ushered in a hope of political reconciliation with the rise of Baloch nationalist parties like the Balochistan National Party (BNP) but Pervez Musharraf’s coup in 1999 and his aggressive stance acted as a catalyst for the insurgency. While the state blamed the conflict on the tribal chiefs (Sardars), the tensed relations were “centred on grievances related to provincial sovereignty, the allocation of resources, interprovincial migrations, and the protection of local language and culture”, prevalent for decades (Grare 2013).

Fundamental Causes of the Insurgency

Political Marginalization

One of the main causes of the insurgency has been the fact that the Baloch, and many other ethnic identities, have been colonized by the dominant Punjabis who control not only the federal (central) government but also the entire state apparatus and its institutions. The Baloch have been completely alienated from the state as they are numerically inferior since the population is only about six per cent of the total population while the province covers nearly forty-four per cent of the state. Additionally, the Baloch are under-represented in all the “organs of the Pakistani State and even most of the provincial jobs are held by outsiders. As a result, people find it difficult to identify themselves with the government. The government and its organs are, therefore, perceived as aliens lording over Baloch territory” (Bansal 2005, 258).

The issue of underrepresentation in politics is further aggravated by the “belief that the Baloch governments were not allowed to complete their terms by the Punjabi establishment” (Devasher 2019, 106). For instance, till the 1990s, provincial governments led by ethnic Baloch served a total of only three years. The first was dismissed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto only after ten months in 1972-73[3]. The second was led by Nawab Akbar Bugti (1988-90) and was dissolved with Benazir Bhutto’s first government. Finally, the third government lasted for only about fifteen months and was led by Akhtar Mengal in 1997-98 (Ibid, 106). Furthermore, “in the first three decades of Pakistan’s existence, only 4 of the 179 persons who joined Pakistani cabinet at different points of time were ethnic Baloch” (Bansal 2008, 186). Before the 1970s, only Akbar Bugti, who also led the fifth wave of insurgency before getting killed in 2006, was a federal minister. In 2002, Zafarullah Khan Jamali, an ethnic Baloch, was appointed the Prime Minister by Pervez Musharraf but was subsequently forced to resign after nineteen months, becoming one of the shortest-serving Prime Ministers (Reddy 2004).

Frederic Grare (2013, 10) also points out that Baloch nationalist parties, either by forming coalitions with mainstream parties or joining them, were able to win support and form government in the late 1990s. However, in the 2002 elections, “the military rigged the elections and reinvigorated its long-standing alliance with the region’s mullahs, helping the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) coalition of religious Islamic parties to gain power”. Furthermore, even The Election Commission of Pakistan colluded with the establishment and denied eligibility to certain qualified candidates (including Akbar Bugti) while accepted madrassa diplomas as valid as an attempt to Islamize the largely

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secular Baloch province and movement (Ibid).

Even when Baloch leaders were appointed in the government, they had no control over the decision making. For instance, Mohammad Jam Yusuf was appointed the Chief Minister in 2002 but his cabinet was dominated by a conservative Islamist party, the Jamaat-Ulema-u-Islam (Grare 2013, 10-11). Additionally, Musharraf also launched a devolution plan that sought to establish local governments “entirely dependent on the central government for their survival” and render provincial assemblies as insignificant. While it was a “form of decentralization, all provinces except Punjab perceived the scheme to be an imposition of a centralized form of government and a negation of provincial autonomy — clearly an irritant for Baloch nationalists” (Ibid).

The delimitation of electoral constituencies in Balochistan presents another intriguing problem. The NA-272 Gwadar-cum-Lasbela constituency covers the entire 750-kilometre-long coastline of Balochistan, stretching from Karachi to Iran. Similarly, the NA-270 comprises of the four central Balochistan district and amounts to a total of 94,452 square kilometres making it about half the size of Punjab province and bigger than the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (Mehdi 2018). Indeed, the average provincial constituency size in Balochistan is ten times higher while the national constituency size is 12.8 times higher than the other three provinces (Devasher 2019, 106-7).

In an aptly titled article – ‘Obfuscating Balochistan’ – Tahir Mehdi (2018) argues that the “numerical equality of constituencies does not always result in equal suffrage. If it is taken too literally, it can, in fact, turn into a tool for marginalisation and exclusion”. Interestingly, Mehdi points out that the state had “legally allowed the population number in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) constituencies to be half that of the national average [...] to compensate for ‘the representation deficit’ that it suffers for not being a part of a provincial assembly”. Thus, it is evident that in Balochistan neither can a politician’s campaign nor the people exercise their ultimate democratic rights. Therefore, they not only risk losing all political value but this also further strengthens their feeling of alienation with the state.

In addition to the political under-representation, the Baloch occupy a marginal place in the bureaucracy and thus the wider administration and policymaking. Even though Zia-ul-Haq promised after the fourth period of insurgency to match the Baloch representation in the bureaucracy to their share of the population (then 3.9 per cent), it never materialised (Bansal 2008, 186). The problem is further exacerbated by the “fake domicile certificate racket [which] has been going on systematically and wilfully to deprive the Baloch people of progress on the economic ladder” (Talpur 2015). The quotas also get occupied by Pashtuns, the second largest ethnic group in Balochistan, since the reservations are based on provinces rather than ethnicities. The problem, however, also goes beyond the bureaucracy. For instance, in 2002, “out of a total of fourteen provincial government secretaries in Quetta, only four were Baloch; of a total of 3,200 students at Balochistan University, fewer than five hundred were Baloch; of a total of 180 faculty members, only thirty were Baloch” (Bansal 2008, 186).

The former Chief Minister of Balochistan rightly observed that Islamabad behaves “like the East India Company” (Devasher 2019, 110). Even in the Army, the recruitment has historically been from the Punjab region while from Baloch it only grew to 5 per cent in the 1970s from 0.6 per cent since the British rule (Bansal 2008, 185). In 1972, the Chief Minister of Balochistan declared that “there are only a few hundred Baloch in the entire Pakistan Army. The famous Baloch Regiment has no Baloch in it” while for the Kalat Scouts and Sibi Scouts “The officers are from Punjab and soldiers from the Frontier” (Ibid, 185). The problem of under-representation is highlighted by the fact that “ex-servicemen from Balochistan for the period from 1995-2003 numbered 3,753 men only while the numbers for the North Punjab and the NWFP for the same period were 1,335,339 and 229,856, respectively” (Dawn 2005). Similarly, even though the province boasts of a 750 km coast, there is no Baloch in the Navy (Devasher 2019, 112).

Like the Bureaucracy, the quotas in the Army are also filled with Pashtuns from Balochistan rather than ethnic Baloch. The Pashtuns now form nearly thirty-five per cent of the population in Balochistan and are mainly concentrated in the northern districts. The Baloch constantly fear that they are getting “marginalised in their own province by the rising influx of Pakhtoon and other Pakistanis” (Bansal 2005, 258). This fear has been compounded by the large influx of Pashtun origin Afghan refugees since the 1979 Soviet intervention and thus leading to “Pashtun claims of equal or even majority population in Balochistan leading to the Baloch becoming a minority in their

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homeland” (Devasher 2019, 119).

Economic Deprivation and Underdevelopment

The sense of political marginalization, inefficient governance and colonisation by the state is further exacerbated by the fact that Balochistan is the poorest province of Pakistan and continues to be exploited for its rich natural resources. Selig Harrison in 1981 rightly noted that “the conviction that Baluchistan [i.e. Balochistan] contains vast, untapped natural wealth is central to the separatist creed” (Wani 2016, 817). The economic potential of the region is one of the most important reasons why the province is integral to Pakistan while an absence of native ownership, as well as benefits, forms the primary reason behind the insurgency.

In a speech to the Kalat State Assembly on 12 December 1947, the then governor Baksh Bizenjo declared “Pakistan officials say that Balochistan should join Pakistan as it would not be able to sustain itself economically. We have minerals, we have petroleum and ports. The question is where would Pakistan be without us?” (Siddiqi 2012, 158). While Balochistan contributes nearly four per cent to the GDP of Pakistan, the province provides almost forty per cent of the country’s energy needs through natural gas, coal, and electricity (Samad 2014, 304). The province is also home to large quantities of uranium, coal, platinum, gold, silver, copper and aluminium deposits. Many of these deposits remain to be unexplored and the government is keen on undertaking more projects while expanding previous ones to meet the demands.

On the other hand, “more than five decades after the first Sui gas discovery, 70% of Balochistan’s provincial population remain deprived of this resource; 78% are without electricity” (Wani 2016, 818). Grare (2006: 5) also points out that Balochistan’s consumption of its own resources was only about seventeen per cent while the remaining eighty-three per cent “is sent to the rest of the country. In addition, the central government charges a much lower price for Baluch gas than it does for gas produced in other provinces, particularly Sind and Punjab”. Moreover, the town of Dera Bugti, where the gas fields are located, received supply only during the mid-1990s after a paramilitary camp was established in the region. Even by 2014, fifty-nine per cent of the urban population was deprived of gas while in Punjab ninety-seven per cent had access to it (Devasher 2019, 128).

The federal government has consistently failed to invest in developing the basic infrastructure of the region. The average allocation for development schemes done through the Public Sector Development Plan (PSDP) “over the period from 1989-90 to 2015-16 constituted less than 6 per cent of the total federal PSDP allocations and a mere 0.19 per cent of national GDP” (Devasher 2019, 125), while the actual amount disbursed perceptibly remains lower than the allocations.

Additionally, after the proviso for the seventh National Financial Commission (NFC) in 2009 was changed to account for poverty and underdevelopment and not only population, the share for Balochistan naturally increased from five to nine per cent and, evidently, for other provinces it fell marginally (Wani 2016, 819). However, these funds have “mostly been absorbed by the increase in development funds for legislators and payments to federal security agencies on ‘internal security’ duty in the province” (Devasher 2019, 136).

Socio-Economic Issues

From the ninety-one districts of the country, most of the districts from Balochistan are among the worst performers – with the gas-rich Dera Bugti at the bottom – according to the Human Development Index. According to a World Bank report in 2008 (124-5), Balochistan has the “weakest long-term growth, the worst quality of employment and the weakest social development” of all provinces. The province had an average growth of 2.8 per cent, a drop from four per cent in the 1980-90s, while other provinces range from 4.5-5.5 for the period of 2000-11. The province also “scores lowest in the 10 key indicators for health, water, and sanitation, and education for 2007-8” (Aslam 2011, 196-7). Furthermore, according to a report by the United Nations Development Programme in 2003, nearly sixty-two per cent of the population had no access to safe drinking water, while another report in 2015 stated that “almost 60 to 70 per cent of the population is projected to be at direct or indirect risk from droughts in the area” (Devasher 2019, 134). Although the province’s share of the total national population is only six per cent, it accounts for nearly twenty

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per cent of the total unemployed of the country which naturally aggravates or gives rise to other problems.

According to a report published in 2016, “two out of three households in Balochistan cannot afford a proper meal and 83.4 per cent children in the province are facing severe malnourishment” (Ali 2016), leading to the declaration of a nutritional emergency by the provincial health minister in 2018. The report draws a stark comparison between Balochistan and Punjab in terms of social indicators like mortality rate and infant mortality rate and comparing the former with war-torn countries like Somalia and Liberia. Pakistan, according to Ali (2016), thus needs to:

Invest in providing care to its citizens, particularly in the health and education sectors. Unequal distribution of resources and lack of healthcare facilities in Balochistan and other remote parts of Pakistan have a direct impact on the socio-economic development of these regions [...] Along with the CPEC, Balochistan needs a corridor of health, education, and empowerment.

The Mega-problems of Megaprojects

Another major contention for the Baloch and the state revolve around the mega infrastructural projects like the Gwadar International port, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Saindak copper-gold project, and the Reko Diq project among various others. As stated in the previous section, the Baloch see these projects as tools of colonisation since they serve the strategic requirements of the state but bear no utility or benefit for the people of the province.

The province receives only a marginal sum of monetary incentive from the resources produced in the region as it remains entitled to only 12.4 per cent of the royalties for supplying gas (Grare 2006, 5). For instance, while the province contributes to nearly \$1.4 billion USD in a year through gas revenues, it receives only \$116 million USD from the government in royalty. Similarly, the Saindak project, operated by the Chinese, provides only two per cent of the total profit for the Baloch while it expropriates eighty per cent and gives eighteen per cent to Pakistani federal government (Devasher 2019, 132).

Interestingly, “the federal government violates the right of Baloch province (and the constitution of Pakistan) and only Islamabad and Lahore have possessed the authority to take any decisions” over providing land to both foreign and domestic actors (Muzaffar et. al. 2018, 116). Moreover, in 2013, the Chief of Minister of Balochistan said, “we have no idea how much gold and other minerals are being dug out by the Chinese company from the Saindak project” (in Devasher 2019, 132). The situation also reflects the larger problem of the provincial government as it has no control on either the land or the resources of the province.

Even though “the Baluch are determined to prevent further exploration and development without their consent”, the federal government regularly extends contracts or lease for the extraction of nearly “19 trillion cubic feet of gas and 6 trillion barrels of oil reserves in Baluchistan” (Grare 2006, 5). For instance, in the last few years, nearly “six new exploration concessions were signed with Pakistani and foreign companies, but with no input from the province” (Devasher 2019, 131).

The key megaprojects at the heart of insurgency are the two Chinese projects – Gwadar port and the CPEC – inextricably linked together as the overall success of one depends on the other. The construction of the Gwadar port started in 2002 and since then has been subject to immense criticism from the people of Balochistan due to a host of reasons. The project was conceived with complete exclusion of the Baloch from all aspects and thus, as part of the agreement, Gwadar was leased to the Chinese for forty years. Additionally, Pakistan will receive fifty per cent of the profit while China would take forty-eight per cent, leaving only two per cent for the province (Aslam 2011, 197).

The project has also led to the displacement of many fishermen who form nearly eighty per cent of the local population and never received any compensation. According to the former Chief Secretary of Balochistan, the provincial government lost trillions of rupees after “land grabbing become one of the contentious issues after the Punjabi elites appropriated lands owned by locals who possessed no ownership documents” (in Wani 2016, 811). Importantly noted by Aslam (2011, 196):

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The technical positions on the port were filled largely by Punjabis and other non-Baloch workers [...] no effort has been made by the central government to train the local population [...] The Baloch also fear that once the government's plans for the port are complete, the population of Gwadar and the surrounding districts is expected to rise from 70,000 to approximately two million, overwhelmingly transforming the ethnic makeup of the region as more and more Punjabis, Sindhis, and other workers will move into the area.

There is also a looming fear that because of the strategic location of the port, both Pakistan and China are attempting to make Gwadar a naval base which would further militarize the area and become an omnipresent threat to the Baloch. As part of the port and the CPEC, the Chinese, plan to settle nearly 500,000 Chinese "which will have serious repercussions on the national, economic, and historic rights of the Baloch. With so many Chinese set to enter Balochistan, the Baloch fear irreversible demographic changes and increased marginalization" (Mendez 2020, 56).

Even as the insurgency progressed, the issue of CPEC gained prominence in the country. The government led by Nawaz Sharif, an ethnic Punjabi, in 2013 altered the original (and shortest) route of the project from Balochistan and KPK to Sindh and Punjab. While the people of Balochistan welcomed the original route and the prospect of investment, the shift led to a widespread protest by all sections. By connecting Gwadar to Karachi, the Baloch fear that "they are being converted into a landlocked province despite having the longest coastline in the country" (Devasher 2019, 165).

In 2015, the President of the Balochistan National Party (BNP) stated, "All they are doing is build a modern Punjab and equip it with all facilities and boost its economy" (in Dawn 2015). Another report from the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) finally culminated the fears of all Baloch as it argued that "at the current rate of influx of Chinese nationals into Balochistan and after completion of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the native population of the area will be outnumbered by 2048" (Financial Express 2016).

The repeated attacks on the Chinese in Pakistan by Baloch insurgents since 2004 now accurately signify their extreme discontent with these projects and their future prospects. Most of the attacks were carried against Chinese workers in Gwadar. In August 2018, BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army) carried a suicide attack, the first-ever by a Baloch Nationalist, on a bus carrying Chinese workers and escorts from the Frontier Corps to "warm China to vacate Balochistan and stop plundering its resources" (Pantucci 2018).

In November again, the 3 BLA attackers tried to enter the Chinese consulate in Karachi while using suicide bombs (Hassan 2018). Indeed, the Baloch nationalist often targets energy infrastructure, mainly transnational gas pipelines and other modes of distribution since, like the Chinese workers, they "are perceived as accomplices and profiteers from Pakistan's colonial projects. With systematic targeting of economic installations and frequent disruption of energy supplies, Baloch(s) are invariably increasing the costs of the conflict for the Pakistani state" (Wani 2016, 817).

State-Military Repression

The resilience of Baloch insurgency can be attributed to the fact that – to this day – there has been no concrete political settlement. Instead, the interaction between the Baloch and the state has largely been violent and militaristic in nature. Grare (2013, 5&10) argues that it was "the state's repressive response that radicalized most elements of the 'nationalist' movement", and the possibility of a political solution "disappeared – or at least greatly diminished – as soon as it became clear that the military regime was seeking the elimination of the nationalist leadership". Thus, the violent military and the poor state response has been a crucial reason for sustaining the insurgency.

Even before the start of the fifth period, Balochistan comprised of "four existing cantonments at Quetta, Sibi, Loralai and Khuzdar, there are three naval bases, four testing sites, two nuclear development sites and fifty-nine paramilitary facilities" (Devasher 2019, 112-3). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2006, 42) reported that there are "35,000 FC, 12,000 Coast Guards, 1,150 Levis, 6,000 Balochistan Reserve police, 2,000 marines and four army brigades deployed in Balochistan". The military has been increasingly engaged in taking over land forcibly when the locals refuse to sell it. Devasher (2019, 113) argues that:

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The cantonments have become a sort of parallel government by themselves where the writ of the provincial government (or sometimes even the federal government) does not run.

After a series of attacks in 2005 targeted security forces, the Inspector General of Frontier Corps as well as President Musharraf, stated that they “rejected any political compromise and turned to Military Intelligence who advised him to crush the opposition” (in Samad 2014, 294). Furthermore, Musharraf saw Nawab Akbar Bugti as the leader of the Baloch and went on television to announce to the Baloch: “Don’t push us. This is not the Seventies. They [the Baloch] will not even know what has hit them” (in Siddiqi 2012, 165).

In August 2006, Bugti along with sixty others was killed in their mountain hideout. Bugti’s killing severely intensified the insurgency. Musharraf consolidated the “enmity of not just the Baloch rebels but the wider Baloch population, who may not have believed in taking up arms but were still frustrated with Islamabad for its failure to develop the province” (Devasher 2019, 245). As the conflict spread from six per cent to nearly half of the province by 2006, the Khan of Kalat invited all tribal chiefs for a Grand Jirga in September. The International Crisis Group (2007, 12) offers a solid description of the meeting:

It was attended by 380 leaders, including 85 sardars [...] exposing Musharraf’s claim that he enjoyed the support of all except three sardars. Condemning Bugti’s killing, the jirga appealed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague against the ‘violation of [...] territorial integrity, exploitation of Balochistan’s natural resources, denial of the Baloch right to the ownership of their resources and the military operation in the province’ [...] Baloch nationalists maintain that the jirga succeeded in its twin objectives: to raise the Baloch cause internationally and to unite Baloch tribes and factions.

Musharraf’s response to Baloch nationalists and militants was to set up more military cantonments and outposts throughout the province. The state launched a full-scale military campaign against the Baloch militants and even used Cobra helicopters and F-16’s to attack civilians in Baluchistan (New York Times 2006). Furthermore, the military, in the Marri Bugti areas, “launched major security operations resulting in 200,000 Internally Displaced Persons of which 20– 30,000 took refuge in Afghanistan” (Samad 2014, 295).

Between 2006 and 2010, more than 1600 casualties occurred in a total of 1,850 incidents; nearly 50 per cent civilians, 23 per cent militants and 22 per cent security forces (Devasher, 2019, 249). The figures also include prominent Baloch leaders like the Balach Marri, leader of BLA, who was killed during an Army operation near the Afghan border. Three popular Baloch nationalist leaders belonging to a middle-class background, in April 2009, “were picked up from their lawyer’s office in broad daylight and their decomposed bodies found in Turbat after being tortured” (Siddiqi 2012, 166).

As a result, the violence has gradually “expanded from attacks and bombings of government installations and pipelines, to attacks against Punjabi settlers and the security agencies” by the militants (Samad 2014, 295). Evidently, ethnic killings against Punjabis and other nationalities became frequent. For instance, “high profile non-Baloch teachers and professors of universities, schools, and colleges have been killed, with many schools becoming non-functional as a result of such attacks (Siddiqi 2012, 166). The excessive violence and repression meted out the by the state, also gave rise to a trans-tribal Baloch nationalism, further explained by Lieven (2017, 181):

Due to the growth in recent decades of an urban Baloch society in Quetta, and especially in the appearance of a trans-tribal Baloch ‘intelligentsia’, semi-educated by Balochistan’s rudimentary higher education system, and unable to find jobs in the province’s backward economy. This class naturally shares to an extreme degree Baloch resentment at domination of the Baloch economy by non-Baloch. This section sees no future for itself in Pakistan and thus plays a monumental role in the nationalist movement.

Nonetheless, the most prominent repressive tactic adopted by the military has been the ‘kill-and-dump’ operations or ‘enforced disappearances’. As early as 2006, the intelligence and security agencies have been engaged in intimidation, arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances and extrajudicial killings of Baloch—students, doctors, nationalists, lawyers and journalists –all of whom were detained but not tried before any court of law (International

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Crisis Group 2006, 23). In most cases, people are abducted “only to be added to the ever-expanding list of missing persons. In many cases, their dead bodies are either found in a badly mutilated condition by the roadside or their skeletal remains are discovered in mass graves” (Mir 2020).

The exact number of kidnapped/killed remain to be determined since they are covered in utmost secrecy but for the Musharraf period that ended in August 2008, the “Baloch nationalists claim that the figure runs into the thousands” while the Provincial and federal government argue it ranges between 1000-1100 (Samad 2014, 295). According to Bashir Azeem, a 76-year-old Secretary-General of the Baloch Republican Party (BRA), who was abducted in 2010 was told during his detention that “Even if the president or chief justice tells us to release you, we won’t. We can torture you, or kill you, or keep you for years at our will. It is only the Army chief and the [intelligence] chief that we obey” (HRW 2011). After an enquiry commission was set up by the Supreme Court to investigate the matter, the President of the commission observed that the “government appears to be helpless before the spy agencies” (Ibid).

The Weakening of the Insurgency

As the unabated cycle of violence continued by both sides, several developments occurred that led to a period of stagnation in the insurgency. According to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the Baloch insurgency reached its peak in 2015 with 96 violent events and 383 reported fatalities, an increase from almost 80 events and 300 fatalities in 2014. However, “from 2017 to 2019, ACLED records 38 events with 110 reported fatalities” (ACLED 2020, 2).

The Pakistani government in 2015 introduced an incentive-based disarmament and rehabilitation program for Baloch militants. The government claims that nearly “2000 Baloch separatists had surrendered to the security forces over the last years (2015-2017). As part of the amnesty scheme, the surrendered separatists were to be given money and government jobs” (Devasher 2019, 255). However, the identity of the surrendered militants remains a subject of speculation which raises doubt about the validity of the claim. Indeed a few major figures like the “Baloch separatist, Abdul Rasool, leader of the Baloch Liberation Army, along with his group surrendered to the security forces” in 2017 (The Nation 2017).

Both the Military and the government have attempted to disrupt the secular, ethnic movement and tribal identity, through Islamization of the province. The Baloch have largely rejected the Islamization process. Along with propping counter-nationalists and bribing rival tribe leaders, the state actively promotes Deobandi madrassas as well as groups like Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Lashkar-e-Janghvi, a prime recruiter of Baloch youth. This has created new challenges for the Baloch insurgents as they need to tackle the state and its military, as well as extremists supported by the state intelligence agencies.

Nonetheless, the primary reason for the weakening of the insurgency rests with the insurgents. After the insurgents started attacking Baloch politicians in the country as well as non-Baloch settlers (like Punjabi teachers), they “alienated the moderate Baloch political parties opposed to violence by questioning their patriotism and commitment to the ‘national cause’” (Devasher 2019, 254). The attacks also violate ‘Balochmayar’ or the Baloch code of conduct and “alienate supporters of Balochistan who live outside the province and the country” (Ibid).

The latter group along with the political elite “which talks a nationalist talk, but most of the time is closely linked to Pakistan” has also reduced the credibility of the movement (Lieven 2017, 182). For instance, Obaidullah, a surrendered Lashkar-e-Balochistan commander said, “We were trapped by our leaders who said they are fighting for the rights of Baloch, but later we realized that they were enjoying their lavish lives abroad and had pushed us and our families to a war here” (in Khurshid 2015).

Inter-Baloch rivalry and lack of leadership have also been another prominent weakness of the insurgency. According to the ACLED report (2020, 3), the death of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri in 2014, who provided an ideological platform for Baloch armed movements, and was credited by many for inspiring the latest wave of Baloch militancy, created a leadership gap for the insurgency. This led to discontent between his two sons over succession, eventually leading two separate groups. The Balochistan separatist groups are divided into two distinct groups. The first group consists

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of BLF (Baloch Liberation Front), UBA and BRA, whereas the second group includes BLA and BNLF (Nabeel 2016).

Previously, Baloch organisations were able to consolidate their hold over different territories and coordinate their attacks against the common enemy. However, after 2014 the groups were occupied with attacking each other, even their own members in many cases, leading to a large number of deaths and a constant blame game. The military naturally welcomed this and was able to make headway in those areas of the district which were previously known as 'no-go areas'. Lastly, factionalism has also prevented the nationalists from preparing a coherent plan or a viable alternative for the future of Balochistan (Devasher 2019, 253).

Lastly, as of 31 July 2020, ACLED (2020, 3) records 30 organized violent events involving Baloch separatists and 95 fatalities this year, with 75 per cent of the fatalities involving security forces. This has been due to the formation of a new alliance called the Baloch Raaji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) between the two groups led by the former rivals and two largest militant organisations, BLA and BLF. In July 2020, BRAS collaborated with the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) to attack the Karachi Stock Exchange, later formally announcing an operational alliance with the "Sindh-based militant outfit aiming to establish an independent homeland for Sindhis, the native ethnic group of Sindh province" (Ibid). The Chinese have also been the common target for both groups.

The alliance was also formed in the background of increased repression by the military in Baloch villages and can thus be assumed to be seeking revenge. The group has carried out "26 attacks in the province during the first three months of 2020" with a "degree of technical sophistication in bomb-making and in the availability of human intelligence needed to track security forces communications in the province" (Jamal 2020). As the military launched an operation along the Iran border against the organisations, the Baloch have further raised their voice against an increasing number of enforced disappearances (Al Jazeera 2020).

Conclusion

For nearly 72 years, the Baloch have continued to wage an insurgency against the Pakistani state. While the problems for the Baloch have essentially remained the same, they continue to evolve into something greater. Like the insurgency, it moves from one phase into another. The issue of Balochistan points to the larger problems with the state of Pakistan. The state remains a Punjabi nation dominating other nationalities. The centralizing and authoritarian tendencies of Pakistan have led it to seek a military and violent solution for a problem that is essentially political and economic. This again leads to the problem of excesses committed by the military-intelligence complex against its own people as well as the poor condition of minorities in the country

Finally, through different periods of insurgency, the Baloch prove their resilience and ability to generate a momentum for a grassroots cause that is unlikely to subside even if it cannot win. Pakistan, therefore, needs to rethink its policy towards Balochistan and other provinces, nationalities and minorities. The insurgents should also do the same regarding their own human rights abuses and weaknesses to ensure credibility and widespread support. It is in the interest of the state to reconcile with Balochistan by placing the Baloch people at the centre and not their resources. Even if the military manages to control the insurgents, the Baloch will remain and a sixth period of insurgency does not seem unlikely. The Pakistani state is therefore actively repeating history.

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Endnotes

[1] For the scope of this paper, the term Baloch refers to ethnic Baloch and includes both the moderates who seek provincial autonomy and separatists who demand a separate state unless otherwise mentioned.

[2] The Pashtun dominated Quetta division and the Baloch dominated Kalat division were combined to form the modern Balochistan province after the abolition of the One Unit Scheme in 1970.

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