

# Balochistan: Continuing Violence and Its Implications

Alok Bansal

## Abstract

*State-building efforts in Pakistan have been increasingly come under challenge from ethno-national movements. The current spate of insurgency in Balochistan is a product of repressive policies coupled with historical grievances that have led to increased alienation amongst the Baloch and a general perception that they are being exploited. The continuing violence has the potential to destabilise not only Pakistan but the entire region. Stability and peace in Balochistan is not only crucial For Pakistan but to India as well since it is a critical area through which both the Iran-Pakistan-India as well as the Central Asian energy pipelines will traverse in the future. India needs to carefully monitor the trajectory of the Baloch movement and be prepared for events that may impinge on its policies towards energy flows.*

“It is not the '70s and we will not climb mountains behind them, they will even not know what and from where something has come and hit them”

General Pervez Musharraf<sup>1</sup>

“If it is not the seventies for us, it is also not the seventies for them. If there is any change, it will be for all. If we have to face severe consequences of a change, then they will also not be in a comfortable position”

Sardar Ataullah Mengal<sup>2</sup>

On December 17, 2005, the Pakistani troops launched a full-fledged operation against Baloch insurgents in Kohlu District – an area dominated by Marri tribesmen, the most belligerent of the Baloch tribes. This was the

---

*Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Jan-Mar 2006

© Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

third time in 2005 when security forces fought pitched battles with Baloch nationalists. The previous operations, however, were mainly restricted to the contiguous Dera Bugti District dominated by the Bugti tribe. A large number of Balochis have been killed in the recent assault, which include women and children<sup>3</sup>. Combat jets, helicopter gunships and artillery have been relentlessly pounding Baloch camps.<sup>4</sup> In response, the Baloch nationalists are targeting the cantonments, police stations, railway and power transmission lines, gas pipelines, mines, industrial complexes and telephone exchanges across the length and breadth of Balochistan. The uneasy lull that existed in the restive province since the last pitched battles were fought in March 2005 has collapsed and Pakistan's largest province in area now resonates with the sound of bombs and shelling of rockets.

The current spate of violence in Balochistan comes in the wake of the planned operation by the paramilitary forces' against the Marri tribesmen for suspected involvement in rocket attacks and bomb explosions.<sup>5</sup> The ethnic violence and the way the state is handling the issues raised by the Baloch people again underlines both the inflexibility and the fragility of the Pakistani state. The four provinces of Pakistan, 58-years after independence, still reflect ethnic divisions that Islamabad neither fully accommodates nor can eliminate. From Ayub Khan to Pervez Musharraf, the military rulers have always tried to promote a united Pakistan without comprehending the socio-political reality of ethnic identities in the country. General Zia ul-Haq had in fact argued against respecting such identities when he said that he would "ideally like to break up the existing provinces and replace them with fifty-three small provinces, erasing ethnic identities from the map of Pakistan altogether."<sup>6</sup> In their quest for unity, the army has always favoured military solutions over political ones and this has provided a fillip to separatist tendencies.<sup>7</sup> Four times since Pakistan's creation, the Baloch, who like many Sindhis and Pakhtoons, never wanted to be a part of Pakistan, have demanded greater autonomy or even an independent state that would reunite the five million Baloch in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan under one flag.<sup>8</sup> The reason is not hard to fathom. Balochistan comprises 43 per cent of Pakistan's area but has only five per cent of Pakistan's population. It has immense natural resources and holds most of Pakistan's gas resources. Conscious of the strategic and economic importance, the Baloch have been extremely resentful of the military's arrogance and contempt. In the past, the Pakistani army has exercised its power by manipulating Islam so as to weaken Baloch nationalism and to

conceal the Baloch problem from the outside world. However, the continuing Baloch crisis epitomises the army's ineffective governance and its uneasy relation with the people.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly six decades after independence, Pakistani nationalism constructed on the basis of a common religious identity, has failed to evolve. With the possible exception of the dominant Punjabi community all other ethnic groups place their ethnic identity before their state identity. Ethno-nationalist identities pose the most serious threat to the country's unity. Pakistan, in fact, is a peculiar federation. The population of Punjab exceeds the population of the other three provinces put together. The capital of Balochistan is in Punjab and so are the headquarters of the army, navy and air force, the railways and the Water and Power Distribution Authority (WAPDA). The armed forces, more significantly the army, are overwhelmingly Punjabi. This is significant because the army exercises enormous influence on the civil life and administration. When under military rule, which has been longer than elected governments, the smaller provinces (in terms of population) of Pakistan feel deprived of political power and discriminated against by the Punjabi elite.<sup>10</sup> The feeling of persecution is the strongest in Balochistan. If the violence and the disaffection continue to ravage Balochistan it will not only have a profound effect on Pakistan, it will also re-shape the security environment in the region spanning from Iran to India.

## **Background**

The Baloch joined Pakistan reluctantly. The State of Kalat was a princely domain of the British Balochistan and not part of British India. Khan of Kalat, therefore, sought a status similar to that of Nepal.<sup>11</sup> He claimed that Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the chief political force behind the Pakistan movement in the Muslim League, and who was then the legal advisor to the State of Kalat, supported this position. The Baloch also maintain that the British prior to independence had transferred the control of British territories in Balochistan to the State of Kalat. After independence, in spite both the houses of parliament in Kalat unanimously rejecting the proposal to merge with Pakistan, the areas of Balochistan were made a part of Pakistan. The municipality of Quetta, a body that was overwhelmingly dominated by non-Baloch settlers, ratified the proposal. Subsequently, the Khan of Kalat was forced to sign the merger document and Kalat was annexed.

This led to the first armed insurgency in 1948 organised by Prince Karim, the brother of the Khan.<sup>12</sup>

The Baloch rose in revolt thrice more: in 1958, 1963-69 and 1973-77. Their history represents an unending saga of treachery and discrimination by the ruling elite in Islamabad. Though the insurgencies in the past were crushed, they have left behind unhealed scars. Each successive insurgency has been more intense and has witnessed greater popular support than the previous one. At the height of the insurgency in 1973, 55,000 insurgents faced 80,000 Pakistani troops supported not only by the 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 till 1977.<sup>13</sup> The Pakistani forces used unrestrained force to quell the insurgency and redeem their honour after the humiliating defeat in Bangladesh. The insurgents were hoping for a Soviet intervention, which did not materialise.<sup>14</sup> Gen Zia ul Haq, who seized power from the civilian Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that year, pursued a policy of appeasement towards the Baloch leaders following the crushing of the insurgency. He granted general amnesty and rehabilitated most of the insurgents.<sup>15</sup> Since then a section of Baloch nationalists have been represented in the provincial government. Yet the province remains economically and socially underdeveloped.

At the time of Partition, the tribal areas of Balochistan were amongst the most backward in the Indian subcontinent. Nearly six decades later, not much has changed. While the ruling sardars drive around in luxurious SUVs and TV dish antennas have sprouted, women are still not allowed to leave their homes even to vote; girls are not sent to schools; and the only law that exists is laid down by the tribal chiefs.<sup>16</sup> Since the Afghan war, guns and drugs have become easily available in Pakistan. Many of the tribesmen now carry automatic Kalashnikov assault rifles instead of ancient Lee Enfield 303s. The rebels in the on-going resistance in South Waziristan and parts of Balochistan have missiles, anti-aircraft weapons and an array of modern and lethal arms at their disposal. In fact, the army as a counter response is now using helicopter gunships to fight the rebellion.<sup>17</sup>

### **Causes of Insurgency**

The Pakistani elites have rather simplistically attributed the triggering of violence in Balochistan to mainly two factors: first, the rejection of

nationalist parties by the voters in the last elections and their consequent removal from power, and second, the apprehension of the feudal lords that the mega developmental projects will expose the population to the outside world and thereby undermine their hold. A careful analysis of the events, however, shows that there is a deep-rooted alienation within the Baloch population. The Baloch feel that they have been denied adequate representation in the government. According to the former Baloch chief minister Ataullah Mengal, "There are only a few hundred Balochs in the entire Pakistani Army. The famous Baloch Regiment has no Baloch in it"<sup>18</sup>. There are hardly any Baloch in the Army or top federal jobs, even most of the provincial jobs are held by outsiders. Not surprisingly, the ratio of unemployment in Balochistan is far higher than the other provinces. According to the latest census, the unemployment rate in Balochistan is 33.48 per cent, as against the overall unemployment ratio of 19 per cent for Pakistan as a whole.<sup>19</sup> There is also the case of perceived economic exploitation by Islamabad. The Baloch feel that their natural resources and assets are being exploited without any benefit to the local people. A case in point is the Sui Gas, which was being supplied to almost all the households and industries across Pakistan except in Balochistan till General Zia decided to set up a Corps Headquarters in Quetta.<sup>20</sup>

The Baloch today fear that because of the steady influx of Pakhtoons and other Pakistanis they are being marginalised in their own province. Already the Northern Districts are overwhelmingly dominated by Pakhtoons. The minority fear has led the Baloch to oppose mega projects being undertaken in the province. They perceive that these developmental projects though resulting in greater economic opportunities will, however, be used by outsiders to colonise their land and reduce them to a minority.<sup>21</sup> For example, the Gwadar Port, which the Pakistani establishment has been propagating as another Karachi, is causing considerable heartburns. According to Ataullah Mengal, "If there are jobs in Gwadar, people would flock there. With time, they would get the right to vote. The problem is that one Karachi in Gwadar is sufficient to turn the whole population of Balochistan into a minority. We would lose our identity, our language, everything. That's why we are not willing to accept these mega projects".<sup>22</sup> While Gwadar is being connected to Karachi, it has not been connected through the Baloch populated areas of Turbat, Panjgur and Khuzdar to Quetta. As a result the rest of the province will derive little benefit from these projects. The Baloch are restive fearing that their area is being

converted into a landlocked province despite having the longest coastline in the country.<sup>23</sup> The absence of genuine federalism and the lack of any worthwhile decision making under the current military dispensation has accentuated the alienation of population.<sup>24</sup>

### **Revival of Insurgency**

The current spate of violence has manifested after a hiatus of three decades and at a time when most of the nationalists are out of power in Quetta. The insurgents have mainly targeted developmental activities and infrastructures. Gas pipelines, railway tracks, bridges, power transmission lines, telephone exchanges, military and government installations have been targeted with alarming regularity. According to government sources, since 2002, a total of 843 attacks and incidents of violence had been reported in different parts of the province. These include 54 attacks on the law-enforcement agencies and 31 on gas pipelines. There were 417 incidents of rocket-firing, 291 incidents of mine blasts and 50 cases of abduction. In the same period, a total of 166 incidents of violence were reported in the Kohlu district alone. These included 45 incidents of bomb blasts and 110 of rocket-firing.<sup>25</sup> Violence more pronounced by 2004. High profile acts during the year were the murder of Chinese engineers working on Gwadar Port Project, attack on Chief Minister's convoy as well as an attack on Sui airport. There were more than 30 bomb attacks in Quetta of which the most deadly was in December, which killed 11 and injured 30.

The year 2005 began on an ominous note as the clashes erupted in Sui after reports that a lady doctor was gang-raped by a Captain and three personnel of the Defence Security Guards (DSG). The inability of the administration to deal with this alleged outrage prompted massive retaliation by Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).<sup>26</sup> There was large-scale damage to property of residents as well as the Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL). In the four days of intense fighting, the insurgents fired 14,000 rounds of small arms, 436 mortar and 60 rockets<sup>27</sup>.

After the January incidents an uneasy truce prevailed in Bugti lands. The tenuous peace was broken on March 17, 2005, when the personnel of a convoy stopped a Bugti tribesman outside Dera Bugti and tried to disarm him. This led the Frontier Corps (FC) men and tribesmen, already in a stand off position since January, to start firing rockets and shelling mortars at each other's positions as well as at the civilian population. A number of

shells hit Nawab Bugti's residential complex and the surrounding Hindu Mohalla. The day long shelling claimed 60 lives, including that of 33 Hindus and eight FC men. Over 100 people were injured and houses and temples severely damaged.<sup>28</sup> It appears that the intention was to eliminate Nawab Bugti.

The present operations in Balochistan started as a sequel to the December 14 rocket attacks on Kohlu town when President Pervez Musharraf was on a visit to lay the foundation stone of one of the three new cantonments to be set up in the province. The Baloch nationalists are fiercely opposed to the construction of cantonments on Baloch land and the provincial assembly had passed a unanimous resolution to this effect on September 23, 2003.<sup>29</sup> The rocket attacks on Musharraf was followed the very next day by machine-gun fire on an Army helicopter that was carrying the Inspector-General, Frontier Corps (IGFC), Maj-Gen Shujaat Zamir Dar, and his deputy Brig Saleem Nawaz. Both the officers sustained bullet wounds but the pilot succeeded in landing the helicopter safely.

Though the operations were ostensibly launched against the Marri tribesmen in Kohlu district for their suspected involvement in rocket attacks and bomb explosions, an analysis of events indicate that the operation had been planned in advance. In fact, the operation, which had long been coming, was delayed due to the earthquake that hit Pakistan on October 8, 2005. For quite some time now, Nawab Bugti has been talking about the movement of troops, artillery and helicopter gunships in Bugti lands. The latest military offensive against the Baloch nationalists is intended to permanently crush them. Security forces supported by air force jets, helicopter gunship and artillery have been targeting the strongholds of Baloch nationalists in Kohlu and Dera Bugti districts and claim that the operation is directed against the "miscreants" and aimed at destroying their "terrorist camps". The situation is reported to be worsening. Baloch nationalists have claimed that indiscriminate firing by the security forces have led to large-scale death and destruction. According to Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) 72 tribes men were killed and 228 injured in a month of bombings and rocket fire in Dera Bugti district alone<sup>30</sup>. A number of women and children have been killed and according to Senator Sanaullah Baloch the security forces have also used poisonous gases against the people.<sup>31</sup> He has alleged that Phosphorous bombs have been used against people<sup>32</sup>. Photographs of women and children burnt by 'Gas Bombs' have been circulated and shown to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

(HRCP)<sup>33</sup>. According to official and unofficial sources, the security forces have likewise suffered huge casualties during the operation in the Marri area.

Opposition parties in parliament have accused the government of carrying out genocide of “innocent citizens” in Balochistan. Asma Jehangir, the chairperson of HRCP was prevented from visiting Balochistan.<sup>34</sup> HRCP has urged the government to stop killing Baloch in Kohlu, bring about immediate ceasefire and to resolve the issue politically. It further stated that the military operation was a violation of national and international rules and expressed concern about people disappearing from the area and condemned the role of intelligence agencies in this regard.<sup>35</sup> Nawab Bugti, in a similar tone, appealed for UN mediation in the conflict and stated that over 85 per cent of those killed are women and children.<sup>36</sup>

The insurgents seem well versed in military craft and appear to be flush with arms and ammunition. Their greatest strength lies in the inhospitable terrain that Balochistan presents. As the security forces are dependent on the long lines of communications to sustain themselves in the arid land, the insurgents accordingly are targeting the communication links with the aim of delinking Balochistan from the rest of Pakistan. They have also been prompt in claiming responsibility for any act of violence perpetuated and seem to be proficient in the entire gamut of psychological operations.

A clever ploy has been to instigate other ethnic minorities against perceived Punjabi domination with the purpose of widening the conflict and have been rewarded by widespread support from non-Punjabi ethnic groups. Certain political elements are rallying behind the Baloch to gain political mileage for their own struggle against the federation. The Pakistani media openly acknowledges that the public sympathies are with Baloch nationalists not only in Balochistan but across Pakistan including the Punjabi heartland. This convergence of interests is dangerous for Pakistan as it signifies separatist movements gaining voices in domestic media and in international forums. Baloch nationalists are at this point of time seeking to gain global acceptability and international backing. Some Baloch nationalists, with the ostensible purpose of pandering to international sensitivities, have stated that they would immediately accept the de-nuclearisation of any future Baloch state<sup>37</sup> in exchange for international support to their struggle for independence.<sup>38</sup>

## **The Theory of Foreign Hands**

An insurgency of this magnitude, it is argued by the Pakistani establishment, cannot be sustained for long without foreign assistance. Pakistani media has been hyperactive with rumours of Indian, Iranian, Afghan and even Russian hand in the insurgency. However, most of these countries do not have the wherewithal to support the insurgency. Many of the Pakistani media reports, taking cue from the official stance, have accused India and Iran of being behind the violence on the assumption that the two countries do not want Gwadar to emerge as a rival to Chah Bahar port, which the Indians are developing in Iran as a gateway to Central Asia. However, Iran with a substantial Baloch population is unlikely to stroke Baloch nationalism and India does not have a rationale to support an insurgency in Balochistan at a time when the relations with Pakistan are moving forward the region is looking forward to a period of sustained growth and closer economic integration, nor does it have the geographic contiguity for logistically supporting such an insurgency. Also, such a support would undermine India's interest in the gas pipeline project from Iran to India. The only other country with a capability and reach to influence local politics is the US. But, the US does not have a history of supporting ethnic and provincial movements in Pakistan and it would appear preposterous that it would stir trouble at a time when the Pakistani junta is a key ally in America's global war against terror. Of course, a prolonged instability in the province will prevent Gwadar Port, which is being developed with Chinese collaboration, from realising its true potential. That may indirectly benefit the US as it is not comfortable with the idea of a major Chinese presence with a possible naval component so close to Iran and the Gulf. . As has been observed by a commentator: "The Baloch guerrillas with a paltry \$ 2 Million per month can tie down 3 to 5 Pakistani divisions. An independent Balochistan could be a strategic opportunity for US and for linking US occupied Afghanistan directly to the Indian Ocean. A few billion US dollars pumped in the possibly independent state can make Balochistan more prosperous than Dubai."<sup>39</sup> The Baloch insurgency would also spread to Iran without the US having to undertake an internationally unpopular war against Tehran. The turmoil in Balochistan could also force China to reconsider its economic commitments in the region. In any case a sovereign Balochistan provides an access to Afghanistan and Central Asia independent of Iran or Pakistan. The rising Baloch nationalism, given the leftist orientation of the leaders, can help

reduce fundamentalism and Taliban influence in Balochistan, a key aim of the US. It is not that the US wants to break up Pakistan but it has such an option in case the Pakistani regimes are not pliant.

But the theory of the 'foreign hand' for explaining away the Balochi nationalist movement and the repeated outbreak of insurgency and revolt stands on extremely weak grounds in view of the historical, political and economic factors that are the driving forces and that need to be understood and addressed by the Pakistani establishment if long-term stability is to be sustainable.

### **Regional Implications**

Balochistan has been a source of constant worry to Islamabad and to the American geo-strategic planners during the Cold War because of the fear of growth of Soviet influence within the Baloch movement, especially after its presence increased in Afghanistan. The large size of the province makes it hard to defend and its geographical position, stretching from the Afghan border all the way along the Iranian border to the sea, is strategically important. That wouldn't matter so much if the Baloch were not fierce nationalist people, who from the very start were reluctant Pakistanis.<sup>40</sup> This has resulted in the creation of a strong and justified liberation movement from the yoke of what is perceived to be a cruel, colonial and alien federal authority in Islamabad. The Baloch have consistently resisted all attempts at encroachment upon their status and identity. Of late the resistance has manifested in violence being spearheaded by the BLA. "The BLA originally comprised Marri tribesmen loyal to Nawab Khair Baksh Marri, most of them veterans of the armed insurrection of the '70s. However, members of the Bugti and Mengal tribes have lately joined its ranks. Many BLA members are drawn from the educated middle class. The present conflict in Balochistan has, for the first time, united the educated Baloch with the tribesmen".<sup>41</sup> The current insurgency, therefore, is spread across the length and breadth of Balochistan unlike previous insurgencies which were localised. Undoubtedly its implications will be felt across the province. It will require enormous manpower and sustained effort to subdue this insurgency should the Pakistani elite exercise a military option.

Insurgency in Balochistan has always been difficult to suppress on account of its vastness, hostile terrain, arid climate and a population that has never really reconciled itself to the idea of Pakistan. Successive

governments have, therefore, selectively co-opted Baloch leaders in order to keep the uprising under control. Gen Musharraf, in order to win over the Balochs, initially appointed Mir Zafarulla Khan Jamali, a Baloch, as the Prime Minister. His subsequent sacking did not win Musharraf many friends in Balochistan. In all likelihood, if the insurgency continues, the federal government will be forced to appoint a few Baloch to important ministerial positions. If successfully quelled, the Baloch would become further marginalised.

The alienation of the Baloch, particularly the younger generation, has found little space in the media and representative institutions due to the disunity in their political ranks.<sup>42</sup> The absence of a strong and resilient middle class because of economic and social backwardness has served to concentrate political and social power in the hands of tribal sardars, who represent today's Baloch nationalism.<sup>43</sup> In the 1990s, the Baloch nationalists were quiescent, sharing power at the centre and in the province with the ruling PPP and PML parties in turns. That, however, has changed under Musharraf who has instead shared power and privileges with the mullahs in Balochistan and forced the nationalists to sulk and conspire in the wilderness. A second generation of Baloch students and tribal leaders have readily taken to arms, targeting such multi-billion rupee development projects as Gwadar which have largely left the local Baloch with little benefits. Financial donations from working class Baloch communities in Oman and the Gulf as well as foreign powers interested in fishing in troubled waters, flows in easily. The weaponry available with the BLA suggests that military means alone cannot resolve the crisis.<sup>44</sup> A prolonged insurgency is bound to delay the mega projects being undertaken in the province and inordinate delay may make some of them unviable.

A long drawn insurgency in Balochistan has the propensity to spread to surrounding regions and slow the pace of foreign direct investment in Pakistan, including those from China. Without substantial foreign direct investments, Pakistan's growth targets will be critically stymied, and the new mega projects would suffer. The Centre pins great hopes on Gwadar, which it expects to become a gateway to Central Asia and serve Afghanistan as well. But if the spate of violence continues even after the port comes into operation this year, foreign investors would be reluctant to visit and invest there.<sup>45</sup> Pakistan also needs to ensure the uninterrupted supply of energy from Balochistan to keep its economy moving. The implications of continued violence in Balochistan cannot be over emphasised. Today, a

large chunk of Pakistani forces are occupied on the western borders and in FATA. Balochistan along with rising sectarianism in Northern Areas will compel the Centre to allocate more resources and forces to meet its internal security challenges. This will seriously limit its capability to commit forces in pursuance of its external policy objectives as well as to spare manpower to undertake civilian tasks.

Unless a political compromise is reached the insurgencies in Pakistan are destined to linger on. As long as Pakistan exists in its present structure, it is unlikely to let slip Balochistan. On the other hand, seeking a military solution is also not a viable option. Events in South Waziristan have clearly demonstrated that a couple of hundred motivated militants with local sympathies and support can pose serious problems despite all the new US supplied helicopter gunship and sophisticated weapons that the Pakistani Army has acquired. In fact, Musharraf faces the challenge of how to speedily extricate himself from the deeply troubled WANA and would do well to ensure that the armed forces are not sucked into the Baloch quicksand.<sup>46</sup> Balochistan, as stated earlier is altogether a different proposition. The support of local population is far more crucial than guns and equipment in winning the battle.

A prolonged insurgency will further accentuate the demands for restoration of democracy and is not in the interest of the army. It may with the passage of time lead to abdication of power by Musharraf. Pakistan's need for a modern State and a democratic system is far more compelling than the existing weak and fractured system.<sup>47</sup> A prolonged insurgency in Balochistan will definitely fuel fissiparous tendencies in Sindh, another province with longstanding problems with Islamabad. Already a shadowy outfit called Sindh Liberation Army (SLA) has emerged in Sindh. It has claimed responsibility for attacks and bomb blasts in the Sindhi hinterland as well as in Balochistan. Synchronisation of various acts of sabotage in Sindh and Balochistan show a link between SLA and the BLA<sup>48</sup>. As the insurgency in Balochistan gains momentum it will have resonance in Sindh. Even the MQM leader Altaf Hussain despite being the part of the government has been making pro-Baloch statements and knowing his past record may stir up Karachi, if he finds the going tough for the Army. Thus there is a strong possibility that the Baloch insurgency may ignite a number of ethno-linguistic fires. Already the three smaller provinces are clamouring for genuine federalism and the parliamentary committee on Balochistan has recommended elimination of concurrent list but the states

are demanding that the Centre should only keep, defence, foreign affairs, communications and currency. The insurgency will definitely lead to substantial constitutional devolution of power to the states. However this 'dejure' delegation of power is meaningless as long as the Army remains the 'de facto' custodian of Pakistani governance.

The creation of a sovereign Balochistan through a successful separatist movement is unlikely as Baloch are not only a tiny fraction of Pakistan's population but even in their own province they are faced with growing Pakhtoon population.<sup>49</sup> The Baloch realise that despite occupying the largest province in Pakistan, their numerical strength precludes them from defeating the much larger and better-equipped Pakistani Army. The Baloch are prepared for a long haul. They are also trying to broaden the movement by incorporating Sindhi nationalists and other ethnic minorities. The struggle for a sovereign Balochistan has the potential to destabilise Pakistan and Afghanistan, and may cause upheavals that could change the structure of Iran.

The involvement of Chinese technicians in the construction of Gwadar Port, development of Saindak Copper Mines and other projects in the region have led to speculation about China's interests in this vital region. China is the largest investor and its long-term aim is to integrate Pakistan into the Chinese economy by outsourcing low tech, labour intensive industrial production.<sup>50</sup> The prospects of supplying crude oil to China from Gwadar Port, across Balochistan and NWFP, through the mountainous regions of the Northern Areas, over the Khunjerab Pass to northwestern China are being studied.<sup>51</sup> China has, therefore, a stake in restoration of peace in Balochistan. The large Chinese presence in Balochistan, however, irks the nationalists, who feel that the Chinese are helping Islamabad to rob them of their natural resources. The Baloch nationalists have accused the federal government of gifting away several profitable projects to China for very little in return<sup>52</sup>. This has led to the targeting of Chinese personnel in Balochistan. After the killing of three Chinese engineers working for a construction company in Gwadar in 2004, a few Chinese engineers working for a cement plant at Hub have been killed in February 2006. Prolonged violence in Balochistan will ensure that the Baloch nationalists will step up their attacks on Chinese assets and personnel. These attacks will not only delay the development projects, but also have the potential to strain Sino-Pak relations and may force China to review its investments in Balochistan.

## **Implications for India**

For India a prolonged insurgency that ties down Pakistani troops within the country could of course reduce the army's capability to sponsor terrorism across the borders. It may also put some pressure on Pakistani government to settle contentious issues with India. Large-scale disturbance in Balochistan could also force Pakistan to open up more towards India in order to import petroleum products for Punjabi heartland directly from Indian refineries. Pakistan could also become more positive towards SAFTA and closer economic ties with India. However, one of the major drawbacks of prolonged disturbances in Balochistan is that neither the Central Asian pipeline nor Iran-Pak-India pipeline can materialise if the region remains disturbed. Both the pipelines would have to traverse a large part of Balochistan and the Pakistani security forces seem unable to provide the security.<sup>53</sup> Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti has said that a gas pipeline from Iran to India across Pakistan would not be possible without Baloch goodwill. The situation by any standards is tricky and requires restraint and wisdom on both sides<sup>54</sup>. The political turbulence in Balochistan, therefore, adversely affects the long-term energy security interests of both Pakistan and India.

The continued violence has also led to Hindus and Sikhs living in Gwadar and on the Mekran coast moving to the adjacent Sindh province. The widespread human rights abuses and appeals by opposition MPs and Baloch leaders for international intervention have finally led India to break its silence. The External Affairs Ministry has warned Pakistan to "exercise restraint and take recourse to peaceful discussions to address the grievances of the people of Balochistan."<sup>55</sup> A sovereign Balochistan is unlikely, but if it emerges it will sound the death knell for the idea of Pakistan. It would in all probability also mark the end of Pakistan as a military power capable of posing any threat to India and the loss of nuclear test facilities may prevent further testing by Pakistan. However, the consequence of an unstable, conflict-driven, and breaking Pakistan would pose serious security challenges to India and other neighbours. It is therefore in Pakistan's interest to address the Baloch grievances with sincerity and with urgency.

## **Conclusion**

If violence in Balochistan intensifies, the Pakistani army will definitely be sucked into a war that will fester and bleed Pakistan. Over the years, the Balochi nationalist fervour has steadily grown. There is no doubt that

the province has not been adequately compensated for its natural resources that have been crucial for the development of Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> The state building process since independence has been counterproductive as was shown by the Bengali ethno-national movement in East Pakistan during 1948-1970.<sup>57</sup> The issues bedeviling Pakistan today are fundamentally the same that severed East Pakistan. The current forces may be weaker and divided but the underlying grievance cannot be ignored. The confidence that defeating the Baloch dissidents would be quicker in the absence of a hostile neighbour to provide arms and shelter should not make Pakistani authorities complacent. The mistrust will exacerbate and economic progress will suffer.<sup>58</sup>

Pakistan, with a mindset of a colonial power, is playing a dangerous game by using brute force to quell the Baloch insurgency. It must be noted that the Pakistani army, with 70,000 troops in Waziristan and six brigades deployed in Balochistan, is already over stretched<sup>59</sup> and with other ethnic minorities coming out in support of the Baloch, the situation will become far too complex to manage and control. If the issue is not dealt prudently, the ethno-national fires emerging from Balochistan could in all possibility sound the death knell for Pakistan. As Sardar Ataullah Mengal ominously puts it, "This could be our last battle. At the end of it either their soldiers will be standing alive, or we will."

### References/ End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In a televised comment on January 11, 2005 as quoted by Mubashir Zaidi in "State of Confusion", *Herald*, February 2005, p 64b.
- <sup>2</sup> In response to General Pervez Musharraf's statement in no.1 as quoted in Zahid Hussain, "Gathering Storm", *Newsline*, February 2005, pp 23-24.
- <sup>3</sup> "No alternative to dialogue", Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, January 24, 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> Praveen Swami, "The war in Balochistan: A Backgrounder", *The Hindu*, Chennai, January 12, 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.newkerala.com/news.php?action=fullnews&id=69589> (Accessed December 19, 2005).
- <sup>6</sup> Selig S Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baloch Nationalism*. Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, New York, 1981, p 151.
- <sup>7</sup> Frederic Grare, "Pakistan: The Resurgence of Baluch Nationalism", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 2006, p 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Mary Anne Weaver. *Pakistan in the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2002, p 93.

- <sup>9</sup> Frederic Grare, no. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Kunwar Idris, "Is the federation at risk?", *The Dawn*, Karachi, January 8, 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> Veena Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan: Political Processes, Conflicts and Crises*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p 131
- <sup>12</sup> Taj Mohammad Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism: Its Origin and Development*, Royal Book Company, Karachi, 2004, pp 238-240.
- <sup>13</sup> P Sahadevan, "Coping with Disorder – Strategies to End Internal Wars in South Asia ", *RCSS Policy Studies*, 17, Colombo, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2000, p 38
- <sup>14</sup> Alok Bansal, "The Revival of Insurgency in Balochistan", *Strategic Analysis*, 29 (2), Apr-Jun 2005, p 252.
- <sup>15</sup> Tahir Amin, "*Ethno National Movements of Pakistan*", Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, 1988, pp 176-177.
- <sup>16</sup> Irfan Hussain, "Out of Time, Out of Place", *The Dawn*, Karachi, December 24, 2005,
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State*, Penguin Books, Suffolk, 1983, p 117.
- <sup>19</sup> "Balochistan needs more jobs, Centre told", *The International News*, Internet Edition, January 21, 2005.
- <sup>20</sup> M Ilyas Khan, "Money ,money, money", *The Herald*, Karachi, September 2004, p 52.
- <sup>21</sup> Alok Bansal, "Balochistan: Still in Flames", *SAPRA India Bulletin*, November 2005, p 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Idrees Bakhtiar, "Mega-projects are a Conspiracy to turn the Balochis into a minority in their Homeland", an interview with Sardar Ataulah Mengal, *The Herald*, August 2004, p 51.
- <sup>23</sup> Abdul Hakim Baloch, "Bringing development to Balochistan", *The Dawn*, Karachi, December 13, 2004.
- <sup>24</sup> Alok Bansal, "Balochistan Still Simmering" at [http://www.ipcs.org/Pak\\_articles2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=1855&country=1016&status=article&mod=a](http://www.ipcs.org/Pak_articles2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=1855&country=1016&status=article&mod=a) (Accessed September 19, 2005)
- <sup>25</sup> Muhammad Ejaz Khan, "11 Farari camps dismantled in Balochistan", *The International News*, Network Edition, January 22, 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> Ghazi Salahuddin, "A Crisis of Governance", *Opinion, The International News*, Internet Edition, January 16, 2005.
- <sup>27</sup> Syed Irfan Raza and Arshad Sharif, "Troops to Protect Sui Plant: Sherapo, - Operation in the Offing – ISPR", *The Dawn*, Karachi, January 13, 2005.
- <sup>28</sup> Shahzada Zulfiqar, "War without End", *Newsline*, Karachi, April 2005, p 45.

- <sup>29</sup> Naveed Ahmad, "Accept us as equal federating units or we will try to get rid of you", Interview of Senator Sanaullah Baloch, *Newsline*, January 2006.
- <sup>30</sup> Shahzada Zulfiqar, "Fight to the End", *Newsline*, February 2006, p 35.
- <sup>31</sup> Zahid Hussain, "Musharraf's Other War", *Newsline*, January 2006, p 28.
- <sup>32</sup> Shahzada Zulfiqar, no. 28, p 31
- <sup>33</sup> Amir Ali, "It seems the Army has learnt nothing from History", An interview of Asma Jahangir, Chairperson, HRCP, *Newsline*, February 2006, p 43.
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.onlinenews.com.pk/details.php?id=91490> (Accessed January 4, 2006).
- <sup>35</sup> *Daily Times*, at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2005%5C12%5C31%5Cstory\\_31-12-2005\\_pg7\\_15](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2005%5C12%5C31%5Cstory_31-12-2005_pg7_15) (Accessed January 4, 2005)
- <sup>36</sup> Irfan Ali, "Bugti says he welcomes UN role in Balochistan", *Daily Times*, at [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C01%5C16%5Cstory\\_16-1-2006\\_pg7\\_31](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C01%5C16%5Cstory_16-1-2006_pg7_31) (Accessed January 17, 2006).
- <sup>37</sup> Chagai Hills Pakistan's only nuclear test site is in Balochistan.
- <sup>38</sup> Frederic Grare, no.7, pp 11-12.
- <sup>39</sup> A H Amin, "The Six Steps to Get Out of the Balochistan's Quicksand", *South Asia Tribune*, Washington DC, February 25, 2005.
- <sup>40</sup> Emma Duncan, *Breaking the Curfew – A Political Journey through Pakistan*, Penguin Books, London, pp 137-138.
- <sup>41</sup> Zahid Hussain, "Gathering Storm", *Newsline*, February 2005, pp 23-24.
- <sup>42</sup> Rahimullah Yusufzai, "At Boiling Point" *Newsline*, October 2004, pp 33-35.
- <sup>43</sup> "The Sui Situation", Editorial, *The Dawn*, Karachi, January 13, 2005.
- <sup>44</sup> Najam Sethi, "Balochistan's Volcanic Eruption", Editorial, *The Friday Times*, Lahore, January 14-20, 2005.
- <sup>45</sup> no. 43.
- <sup>46</sup> Najam Sethi, no. 44.
- <sup>47</sup> Nasim Zehra, "Balochistan: Towards Conflict Resolution", Opinion, *The International News*, January 24, 2005.
- <sup>48</sup> Hasan Mansoor, "Sindh Liberation Army: Myth or Reality?", *The Friday Times*, Lahore, February 11-17, 2005.
- <sup>49</sup> Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p 221.
- <sup>50</sup> Alok Bansal, "Implications of Gwadar Port Project", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, 13 (2), August 2005, pp189 -190.
- <sup>51</sup> Mehmood – ul - Hassan Khan, "New heights of Pak-China Ties" at <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/27754> (Accessed March 8, 2006)
- <sup>52</sup> B Muralidhar Reddy, "Chinese Engineers killed in Balochistan", *The Hindu*,

Chennai, February 16, 2006.

- <sup>53</sup> Aditya Sinha, "Battlefield Balochistan", *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 15, 2006, p 16.
- <sup>54</sup> no. 43.
- <sup>55</sup> *Hindustan Times* at [http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/7598\\_1588776,000500020000.htm](http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/7598_1588776,000500020000.htm) (Accessed January 4, 2006)
- <sup>56</sup> Irfan Hussain, no. 16.
- <sup>57</sup> Tahir Amin, no.15, p 3.
- <sup>58</sup> Kunwar Idris, no.10.
- <sup>59</sup> Farrukh Saleem, "Balochistan: An Objective Assessment", *The International News*, Internet Edition, January 22, 2006.

Alok Bansal is a Commander in the Indian Navy and a Research Fellow at IDSA.