

Balochistan: Its History, Geopolitics and Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Balochistan connected the pre-partitioned India with Middle East and Central Asia through Makran Coast and Bolan Pass, respectively. Alexander the Great and his army marched through the coastal area of Makran as a shortest route to return back home from India. The Arabs under Mohammad Bin Qasim marched along the coastline of Makran in early 8th Century to invade Sindh. The expansionist Tsarist Russian Empire desired to make inroads into the Indian subcontinent through the Kalat State during the Great Game. Owing to the strategic Bolan Pass and Makran coastline, the British Empire colonized the Kalat State and other Baloch princely states after the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42). The competing European powers during the First and Second World War had their strategic footprints in Balochistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was believed to be an expansionist attempt to access the warm waters of the Arabian Sea of the Indian Ocean via Balochistan. In early 21st Century, the seismic shifts in global politics after 9/11 and the quests for

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geopolitical and geo-economic domination once again brought Balochistan into the spotlight of power politics. This research paper analyses the history, geopolitics and ethnic conflict of Balochistan by applying a qualitative method based on explanatory, descriptive and analytical approaches.

Introduction

Balochistan's history and geopolitics have always remained instrumental in recurrent ethnic conflicts. The geopolitical landscape of a state has utmost influence in its internal and external policies. Balochistan, which lies in the active conflict zone of the geopolitical rivals and in immediate proximity of Middle East and Central Asia, has turned to be an epicentre of the unfolding power politics in the highly contested geopolitical region. The changing geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics at the global stage further solidified the cordial and strategic ties between China and Pakistan. Balochistan has mineral resources in the central region, gas resources in eastern districts, maritime resources in southern districts and the agricultural resources in the northern areas of the province. Balochistan is also a hub of trans-national energy transit routes from Middle East and Central Asia. Positioned at the crossroads of Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia, it has emerged to be the regional hub of trade and energy transit in the simmering New Great Game of the 21st Century. Amid great power's game of competition and the geo-strategic quest for abundant energy resources of Middle East and Central Asia, the geostrategic location of Balochistan has heralded economic opportunities for Pakistan; however, the resurgence of sub-nationalism and ethnic insurgency has unleashed several security challenges for Pakistan.

The security situation in Balochistan began deteriorating after the 9/11 attacks and regime change in neighbouring Afghanistan by the US at the end of 2001. The revelation of Iran's nuclear programme in 2002 and an expected regime change by the US further enhanced the strategic value of

Balochistan. Before the seismic shifts in the region, China started taking keen interest in the maritime and mining sectors of Balochistan. With the US troops on ground in Afghanistan, China started constructions of Gwadar Sea Port and mining in the copper and gold project at Saindak Chagai.

Amid the shifts in power equations at regional and extra-regional levels, the politics of resource-exploitation, economic deprivation and political-marginalization in Balochistan gained momentum after the Baloch nationalists rejected the politics of mega-project-development and demanded provincial autonomy promised in the 1973 Constitution. The exacerbating situation turned grotesque in August 2006, when a nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti was mysteriously killed in a counterinsurgency operation, which turned to be a tinderbox; starkly altering the ultra-nationalists' demand for greater provincial autonomy into separatism. The geopolitical location of Balochistan has emerged to be a geostrategic vulnerability and security challenge besides magnetizing colossal economic opportunities through multi-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

As a multi-ethnic country, Pakistan constantly faces the dilemma of national integration given that the Fall of Dhaka in 1971 continues to haunt the paranoid politicians, policy-makers and the security establishment till to date. Majority of the elected representatives from Balochistan did not sign the 1973 Constitution and demanded for more provincial autonomy. Pakistan's federal structure drafted in the 1973 Constitution has addressed the ethno-nationalism in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to a great extent, but it has been unsuccessful to mainstream the ethno-nationalist movement in Balochistan. With a huge territory and ample natural resources, but a thin and scattered population, the Baloch nationalists could not exert much influence over the central government; as a result, they have faced resource-exploitation, economic deprivation and political

marginalization. These factors have been instrumental to aggravate the persistent ethno-nationalism.

History of Balochistan

Many historians believe that Balochistan was part of the Achaemenid or Persian Empire (550-330BC) founded by Cyrus the Great. Before Baloch settlement, the present-day western Makran to eastern Balochistan and up to the Indus was part of the Achaemenid Empire until 330 BC, when Greek Seleucid Empire took this region, who ruled till 305 BC. After that, this region was incorporated in the Mauryan Empire of India and was ruled by several succeeding empires until it came under the Iranian Sassanid rule.¹ Historically, Balochistan had been a pathway for the remarkable military and naval expeditions from Europe and Middle East towards the Indus Valley in India. Earlier than the invasion of Portuguese on the Makran Coast in the 16th Century, the legendary Greek commander, the Macedonian King Alexander the Great passed through this water-scarce barren coast during the homeward march from India. Alexander began his return journey from Indus to Persia in the dreaded and inhospitable Makran desert in 325 BC where only a quarter of his army could hardly survive.

The Arabs invaded Makran Coast in 644 AD towards the end of Umar Caliphate and then again in during reign of Ali (656-61AD), but both were repulsed. Makran was finally subjugated under the first Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah-I (661-80).² In early 712 AD, Umayyad Caliphate general, Muhammad bin Qasim attacked Sindh following the route of Alexander via Makran desert.³ The Central Balochistan, called Turan, with its capital Qusdar (Khuzdar), was part of the Habbari dynasty of Mansura that ruled the Abbasid

1 Jan Muhammad, *The Baloch Cultural Heritage* (Karachi: Qureshi Art Press, 1982), 33.

2 Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17.

3 Moti Chandra, *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977), 186.

province of greater Sindh (841-1024) until the end of the 9th Century, when Mughira Ahmad dominated Turan who shifted capital from Qusdar to *Kijkanan* (Kalat). The Kharijites occupied Qusdar in 971, who became significant in Makran towards the end of the 9th Century and independent Banu Macdan dynasty ruled Makran from *Kiz/Kej* (Kech) for at least a century and half. The sultanate of Makran emerged out of Ghaznavid/Ghuridrule by the turn of 12th Century and its foundation was laid down by Malik Hasan with an orthodox Sunni religious belief. Rulers of Makran promoted maritime commerce from main port Gwadar and mariners from Makran reached the East Asian shores. Thus Makran, like Sindh, contributed to the early commercial and cultural contacts between Middle East and South-East Asia.⁴

Balochistan is also believed to be part of the Khwarazm Empire in the 12th Century and its northern parts were also hit by the barbaric Mongolian invasion in the 13th Century. The maiden expedition of Portuguese voyager Vasco da Gama from South African city of Cape Town to Indian Goa, by the end of 15th Century, opened the Indian Ocean for Western trade and military sailors, followed by the Portuguese colonizers to reach the waters of Balochistan.⁵ But they faced stiff resistance from a warrior Kalmati tribe near Gwadar under the military leadership of Mir Ismaile Kalmati, grandfather of the heroic Mir Hamal Kalmati.⁶ The *Imperial Gazetteer of Indian Provincial Series: Baluchistan* reports that, "From 1556 to 1595, the country [Baluchistan] was under the Safavid dynasty. Then it fell into the hands of the Mughals of Delhi until 1638, when it was again

4 N. A. Baloch and A. Q. Rafiqi, "The Regions of Sind, Baluchistan, Multan and Kashmir: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting," *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* 4, no. 1 (1998): 300-307.

5 Sabir Badal Khan, "Portuguese Encounters with Makoran Baloch during the Sixteenth Century," *Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 10, no. 2 (July 2000): 153-69.

6 Faiz Aziz, "Hamal Kalmati: A Symbol of Arousal," *Bolan Voice*, June 2013, available at <https://bolanvoice.wordpress.com>, accessed on October 1, 2017.

transferred to Persia.”⁷ Later on, it came into the indirect control of Nadir Shah and finally turning into a *de facto* suzerainty of Ahmed Shah Durrani (Afghan ruler).⁸

Most of the historians trace the origin of Baloch with the migration theory from the Middle East. According to the Baloch oral history, they had migrated from modern Syrian city of Aleppo. In their oral poetic history, Baloch traces their history from Halab (modern Syrian city of Aleppo). “We [Baloch] are the offspring of Mir Hamza... We rise from Halab and engage in Battle with Yazid in Karbala and Bompur, and we march to the towns of Seistan [Iran].”⁹ Sardar Khan considers Baloch to be descendants of Chaldeans or Babylonians and the word Baloch is derived from Belus, which corrupted into Baloch.¹⁰ Naseer Dashti traces the origin of Baloch as Aryans, who left their abodes in Central Asia nearly 3000 years ago and a section among them became known as Indo-Iranic tribes. Some of the Indo-Iranic tribes settled in north-western Iranian region of Balashakan and circumstances forced this pastoralist nomadic group tribes, known as Balashchik at that time, to migrate and settled in the south and eastern fringes of Iranian plateau. Here they changed from being the Balashchik to become the Baloch.¹¹

Inayatullah Baloch believes that the Baloch under Mir Jalal Khan had migrated from the Middle East in the 12th Century. He writes, “In the 12th century, 44 Baloch tribes were forced to migrate from Seistan and Kirman [Iran] to Makran under the leadership of Mir Jalal Han... The Baloch epic poetry

7 R. Hughes-Buller, *Imperial Gazetteer of Indian Provincial Series: Baluchistan* (University of Michigan, 2002), 13.

8 *Elibron Classics Series* (Calcutta: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 15.

9 M. Longworth N. Dames, *The Baloch Race: A Historical and Ethnological Sketch* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904), 123.

10 Muhammad Sardar Khan Baloch, *History of Baloch Race and Balochistan*, 3rd ed., (Quetta: Khair-un-Nisa Traders, 1984), 16-26.

11 Naseer Dashti, *The Baloch and Balochistan: A Historical Account from the Beginning to the Fall of the Baloch States* (USA: Trafford Publishing, 2012), 1-5.

refers to Mir Jalal Han as the ruler of all the Baloch.”¹² Many historians consider Baloch to be a very close ethnic group of the Kurds in Middle East. The *Baloch of Kurdish Folk*, written by Mohammad Saleh Zangana Baluch, recalls an ancient ballad, which narrates the common origin for the Baloch and Kurds.¹³ Longworth Dames postulated that the Baloch are an Iranian race, who migrated from Caspian Sea neighbourhood to Kerman and Siestan into Western Makran in the 10th Century after Seljuk invasion and further eastward following Changiz Khan’s conquests.¹⁴ Balochi language has been classified as a North-western Iranian language.¹⁵ Another theory of Baloch migration also links them to Al-Burz mountain region of the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. Interestingly, there is also a village named Makeran in the Caspian Mazandaran province of Iran. Many scholars believe that the Baloch had migrated from Caspian Sea neighbourhood to Kerman and Siestan into Western Makran. Why and when the migration occurred is not clear. It is possible that it was brought about by Khusrow I Anushirwan’s campaigns against the Baloch or by the incursion of the Hephthalites into Northern Iran.¹⁶

By the 14th Century, Baloch were settled in Makran and up to the *Jhalawan* hills and they further migrated towards the plain areas of the Indus Valley. Prior to the arrival of Muslims and Baloch, a Hindu dynasty known as Sewa is believed to have ruled Kalat region. The Muslim and Baloch migration into southern and central Balochistan drove out most of Hindu Sewais, but the remaining Hindu Dravidian population intermingled with the nomadic Baloch tribes, and according

12 Inayatullah Baloch, *The Problems of Greater Balochistan: A Case Study of Baloch Nationalism* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1987), 95.

13 Mehrdad R. Izzdy, *The Kurds: A Concise History and Fact Book* (Washington: Taylor & Francis, Inc., 1992), 94.

14 Dames, *The Baloch Race*, 52-53.

15 Carina Jahani, “The Balochi Language and Languages in Iranian Balochistan,” *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 4 no. 2 (October 2013): 153.

16 Dames, *The Baloch Race*, 29.

to most of the historians and linguists, the Brahui language emerged from this social interaction. The Brahui language has appeared with the displacement of a mysterious Hindu Sewa dynasty in Kalat. To date, a large number of Hindus in Balochistan are still living in Kalat. Before the decolonization of the united India, there were around 54,000 Hindus in Balochistan.¹⁷ It is believed that Brahui is a Dravidian language, but because of its isolation from the Dravidian family, it has incorporated a huge quantity of Balochi vocabularies. Genetically, the Brahui speaking tribes are Baloch and they have proudly preserved the Balochi tribal structure, culture and traditions.

The first Baloch unified confederacy was established under Mir Chakar Khan in Makran, Kalat, Kachhi and Sibi in Eastern Balochistan.¹⁸ Mir Chakar Khan Rind along with his tribesmen migrated from Makran in search of fertile lands established his rule in Kalat in 1487, but he moved further towards Sibi and Kachhi and handed over the control of Kalat to Mir Mandu Rind.¹⁹ In the following years, Mughals expanded their influence on Kalat, but when Shah Jahan lost Kandahar in 1650, their authority weakened over Kalat and a tribal assembly elected Mir Hassan Khan Brahui as their tribal chief.²⁰ After that, the Kalat State was established by Ahmedzai dynasty, a sub-tribe of Qambarani tribe in 1666. Politically, most of today's Balochistan was united by Mir Naseer Khan (Khan of Kalat) in 1755, who ruled until his death in 1795. He ended the paramountcy of Durrani Empire of Afghanistan over Kalat State and established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, Iran and Oman.²¹ Moreover, he

17 Mohamad Zafar, "For Balochistan's Hindus, there is a silver lining" *The Express Tribune* (Karachi), March 30, 2013.

18 Mir Khuda Bakhsh Bijarani Marri Baloch, *Searchlight on Baloches and Balochistan* (Quetta: Nisa Traders, 1985), 137.

19 Gul Khan Naseer, *Tarikh-e-Balochistan* (Quetta: Kalat Publishers, 1979), 6.

20 Mir Khuda Bakhsh Marri Baloch, *Searchlight on Baloches and Balochistan* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1974), 137.

21 Taj Mohammad Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism: Its Origin and Development* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 2000), 155-56.

expanded his influence and subjugated other Baloch areas like Kharan, Lasbela and Makran, and linked Kalat with the Indian Ocean through Pasni and Sonmiani ports.

When Mughal Empire in India was crumbling, the Russians were intending to move towards Central Asia and Afghanistan that grabbed the attentions of the British in India. The British Empire decided to subjugate the Kalat State and its territories in late 1830s to checkmate the Russian expansion in Afghanistan and Central Asia during the Great Game. The British Balochistan was carved out from the *Khanate* territories for the British strategic purpose during the Great Game. However, the Kalat State along with other Baloch princely states—Makran, Kharan and Lasbela—were kept under the British control until the decolonization of the India subcontinent and the ultimate demise of the British Empire. The Baloch nationalists attempted to restore their political sovereignty, but their princely states were annexed with Pakistan, mainly for strategic reasons in the wake of the unfolding Cold War between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

Origin of Baloch

The origin of the Baloch is still obscure, but four theories regarding the Baloch origin have been presented by different historians and linguists: (a) they are the first nation of Balochistan; (b) they are Arabs; (c) they are Aryans, and (d) they are the decedents of mixed ethno-racial-linguistic groups. Some of them negate the Baloch migration theory and consider them to be indigenous ethnic group of this region. According to the Persian poet Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, the Baloch tribes were living in present-day Balochistan in 1000 A.D.²² Dr. Jahanzeb Rind, an historian and archaeologist at the University of Balochistan, Quetta, does not believe that Baloch have migrated from Syria or Iran. They are the aboriginal people of this land, and the ancient

22 "The Baluch and the Brahui and their Rebellions," *Cultural & Geographic Research, Tribal Analysis Center* (September 2009), available at <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com>, accessed on 17 October, 2017.

remnants and settlements at Mehrgarh civilization are their archaeological evidences.²³ Mehrgarh, an early village farming community located near the strategic Bolan River Pass, is believed to be a Neolithic site, which was discovered by the French archaeologists in 1974. "In native Balochi 'mehr' stands for love and 'garh' for heaven, translating Mehrgarh into 'the heaven for love'.... [P]ottery resembling that of Mehrgarh is still made, decorated and used in Sibi and its adjacent areas establishing another undetached linkage between the past and present."²⁴

But most of the scholars and writers believe in the migration theory from the Middle East. However, there is not any historical record on it except the oral history. The Baloch oral history traces the genesis of Baloch migration from the Syrian city of Halab/Alab/Alap (presently known as Aleppo).²⁵ Sabir Badal Khan agrees that all Balochi oral traditions endorse the migration theory from Alab after the famous battle at Karbala in which they sided with Imam Hussain (R.A.). He quotes a 19th Century Balochi poet Mast Tawkali, "Our war is with the enemies of (Imam) Husain. We are the part of the Imam. Mast is accompanying the innocents (i.e. children) of the loved one (i.e. the Imam)."²⁶ "Baloch migrated in three major groups. The first who settled in Sistan were called Naro, followed by Brahu who settled in Turan (*Jhalawan*) and the last was Rind, a Baloch word *Randhi* means the last."²⁷

After migrating from Syria, Baloch have lived in the southeast of Kerman (Iran) from where they have migrated

23 Jahanzeb Khan, archaeologist and faculty member of the Area Study Center, University of Balochistan, Quetta, *Interview by author*, Quetta, October 22, 2017.

24 Muhammad Akbar Notezai, "The Lost Civilization of Mehrgarh: A Treasure in Ruins" *Dawn* (Karachi), March 10, 2017.

25 Dames, *The Baloch Race*, 34.

26 Sabir Badalkhan, *Two Essays on Baloch History and Folklore* (Università di Napoli, "l'Orientale", 2013), 46-47.

27 Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Introduction in *The Baloch Cultural Heritage*, Jan Muhammad, i-xxiv.

farther east to present-day Makran and beyond. Before the Baloch migration from Arabia, there were Dravidian Hindus living in Kalat and its proximities known as Sewais. "Hindus ruled Balochistan before the invasion of the Arabs in 712 AD."²⁸ In pre-Islamic history, the Hindu Kingdom of Sewa dynasty is known to have existed in between Indus River and the Persian Empire. "It is understood that a Hindu Dynasty called Sewa ruled over this part of state prior to the seventh century, as Kalat is still known as Kalat-i-Sewa. The Arabs reached the Makran belt in early eighth century when Arab invader, Muhammad Bin Qasim conquered the whole region, including Sind and Balochistan."²⁹ "In the 12th century, 44 Baloch tribes were forced to migrate from Seistan and Kirman [Iran] to Makran under the leadership of Mir Jalal Han."³⁰ Janmahmad Dashti, a leading Baloch intellectual, believes that Baloch are Aryan, who migrated from Caspian Sea region to Makran probably around 1200 BC as a result of a quarrel between Baloch chief and Kirman ruler.³¹ But the genesis of Baloch nationalism dates back to the 12th Century migration of Baloch tribes under Mir Jalal Khan from the West Asia or Caspian region. A Baloch tribal confederacy in Makran region was virtually intact under Mir Jalal Khan in the 12th Century. Marco Polo, in 1290, described Makran as *Kesmacoran* with a king and a peculiar language.³²

Sayed Hashmi, an eminent Balochi poet and writer, connotes Alab or Halab as "Albane", which is a place in the west of the Caspian Sea and considers Persia as the original homeland of the Baloch.³³ Some historians posit that

28 Muhammad Akbar Notezai, "The Balochistan Hindus dilemma," *Daily Times*, (Lahore), May 16, 2013.

29 *Kalat: District Development Profile 2011*, Government of Balochistan, available at www.balochistan.gov.pk, accessed on October 23, 2017.

30 Baloch, *The Problems of Greater Balochistan*, 95.

31 Muhammad, *The Baloch Cultural Heritage*, 1-32.

32 Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism*, 13

33 Sayad Hashmi, *Balochi Language and Literature: An Analysis* (Karachi: Sayed Hashmi Academy, 1986), 208-212.

invasion of Seljuk Turks in the 11th Century forced eastward migration of Baloch nomadic tribes from the Caspian Sea region. The Seljuk Turks defeated Ghaznavids and took over Khorasan in September 1040 AD.³⁴ According to Inayatullah Baloch, the Baloch are not a race but people of different origins.³⁵ Charles Masson also believes that Baloch comprised many tribes of very different descendants inferred from their physiological distinctions apart from the variety of dialects they speak.³⁶ Surat Khan Marri also believes that, "It [Baloch] is an amalgam of various race, religions, tribes and people."³⁷ Baloch tribes in Sindh speak Sindhi, in Punjab they speak Seraiki, while a third of Baloch population of Balochistan speaks Brahui as their mother tongue. The Baloch tribes are Aryan and Iranian with pastoralist nomadic characteristics, but as far as the Brahui is concerned, he considered it to be an Indian origin on the basis of linguistic differences.³⁸ "Whatever their ethnic origin may be...the Brahui regard themselves as part and parcel of Baloch nation, sharing a common culture, religion, historical experiences and unifying symbols."³⁹ The Baloch and Brahuais although speak different dialects, they share strong biological and cultural bonds. The historical literature, to a great extent, supports the Aryan theory of the Baloch origin, who have migrated from post-Islamic Middle East/ Caspian region to present-day Balochistan. Their tribal set-up is identical to that of the Arabs, but their language (Balochi) is

34 Everett Jenkins Jr., *The Muslim Diaspora: A Comprehensive Chronology of the Spread of Islam in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas* Vol. 1, 570-1500) (Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland Publishers, 2010), 137.

35 Baloch, *The Problems of Greater Balochistan*, 41.

36 Charles Masson, *Narrative of a Journey to Kalat, Including an Insurrection at that Palace in 1840: And a Memoir on Eastern Balochistan* (University of California: R. Bentley, 1843), 337.

37 Surat Khan Marri, *The Serviles of Baloch Resistance* (Quetta: Gosha-e-Adab, 2014), 115.

38 Manzoor Ahmed and Gulawar Khan, "The History of Baloch and Balochistan: A Critical Appraisal", *South Asian Studies* 32, no. 1 (Jan-June 2017): 39-41.

39 Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism*, 131.

closer with the Persian language and their culture matches with the Kurds.

Geopolitics of Balochistan

The political geography has always played a very instrumental role in defining the foreign relations of any state in the international system. The geopolitical landscape of a state has utmost influence in its internal and external policies. Saul Bernard Cohen defines geopolitics as the analysis of interaction between geographical settings and political processes. The geographical settings are natural features, while political processes are the forces that operate at domestic level and influence the international behaviour.⁴⁰

The theory of geopolitics has developed through five stages: colonialism and imperialism, German *realpolitik*, American geopolitics, Cold War era and the post-Cold War period.⁴¹ The European colonialism and imperialism enhanced the significance of geopolitics in international politics. In a short span of time, geopoliticians introduced new concepts and approaches of using modern communications in international politics to access important routes and regions on land and seas. The US Cold War strategists embraced the geopolitics as the basis of national security policy to confront Soviet expansionism, which resulted in to the emergence of new geopolitical concepts like containment, balance of power, domino theory, liberal democracy and free marketism.

The geography of Balochistan has spread over three neighbouring countries—Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The Encyclopedia *Iranica* defines the historic boundaries of Balochistan to be comprised over an area of around half a million square kilometers in the south-eastern part of the Iranian plateau, south of the Helmand River and in the arid coastal lowlands between the Gulf of Oman and the Iranian

40 Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, 3rd ed., (London: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2015), 16.

41 Cohen, *Geopolitics*, 16.

plateau.⁴² Charles Masson, a British soldier of the East India Company writes in his memoir that Balochistan comprises the extensive regions confined between the Indus valley and modern Persia. To south the Indian Ocean, and to north Iran's Sistan and Afghanistan mark its boundaries.⁴³ According to Edward E. Oliver, "Balochistan [sic], in the ordinary acceptance of the term, includes all the country between the Arabian sea and Afghanistan; Sind and Persia."⁴⁴ In remote past, for the western invaders, Balochistan had been the gateway to India. In early history, Balochistan served as a bridge between the Mesopotamia and the Indus civilizations. Balochistan means the land of Baloch people who live in vast area of around 600,000 square km from Kirman and Bandar Abbas in the west up to Hub/Karachi along the Arabian Sea, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur in the east, and Nimrouz and Helmand in the north. The historic Balochistan is spread over Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan but this study is mainly focused on Pakistani part of Balochistan.

Balochistan is Pakistan's solitaire diamond, making it central to the Eurasian Heartland and the Rimland of the Indian Ocean.⁴⁵ Owing to its unique geopolitics, it is vital in both Spykman's Rimland theory and Mackinder's Heartland theory. Balochistan is strategically placed in a central position at the crossroad of two geographic axes, east-west and north-south of three regions—Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean basin. It is called as the Asian Middle East for the reasons that; (a) it hinges between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Euro-Asiatic steeps of the Iranian Plateau and (b) a gateway to Persian Gulf and Red Sea of the Indian Ocean. Geographically, it stands on the tri-

42 Brian Spooner, "Baluchistan: Geography, History and Ethnography" *Encyclopaedia Iranica* III (2010): 598.

43 Masson, *Narrative of a Journey to Kalat*, 281.

44 Edward E. Oliver, *Across the Border or Pathan and Biloch* (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1890), 18.

45 Khalil-ur-Rahman, "The New Great Game: A Strategic Analysis," *The Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (Winter, 2014): 6.

junction of South Asia, Central Asia and the West Asia. "It derives its importance from its central location.... It is vital for the defense of Pakistan by implication to the defense of Iran, Afghanistan and India, indeed the entire region."⁴⁶ In addition to a coastline of roughly 770 km along the India Ocean, Balochistan shares around 1100 km of Pakistan's 2,400 km long border with Afghanistan, 909 km border with Iran, which is of prime importance for the regional and transnational players in the region. If it were not for the strategic position of Balochistan and rich mineral and hydrocarbon resources, it would have been difficult to imagine by anyone fighting over this bleak, desolate, hard and forbidding land.⁴⁷ Its strategic Gwadar Deep Sea Port on the northern edge of the Strait of Hormuz makes it the jewel in the geostrategic crown of the region.

In the post-9/11 regional scenario, the emergence of the New Great Game has enhanced Pakistan's geopolitics yet Balochistan has re-emerged to be a strategic nuisance for the policy-makers in Islamabad as the fifth ethnic insurgency has spiralled from eastern parts of the province to its western borders, which form strategic rear of the CPEC. Balochistan ethnic-driven political culture, dilapidated tribal system, inter-and-intra-tribal rivalries and the ethnic diversity are indeed the major obstacles towards development, but its valuable geopolitical position could be an economic bonanza since the geo-economics is replacing the geopolitics in international arena. Balochistan, located along the coastal belt from the Middle East towards rest of Asia, perfectly suits the geo-economics opportunities for Pakistan

Conflict of Balochistan

The Baloch ethno-nationalism, as a political movement, had engendered during the British colonial period in the 20th

46 Syed Iqbal Ahmad, *Balochistan: Its Strategic Importance* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1992), 250.

47 Selig S. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baloch Nationalism and Soviet Temptation* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981), 7.

Century. It was due to the rapid social and political changes in the context of British colonization and decolonization, and the merger of Kalat State with Pakistan in 1948. The recent narrative of Baloch ethno-nationalism illustrates its primordial or perennialist nature. As a result, it could be called as a case of ethno-symbolism; a post-modern paradigm synthesizing primordialism and modernism, which stresses on the existence of earlier ethnic identities and focuses on their persistence based on shared memories, beliefs and commitments and usually connected to a particular territory, which even they do not occupy.

With the proclamation of the foregoing Act in 1947, the colonial sovereignty of His Majesty's Government over the Indian States including the Kalat State lapsed; providing multiple options to around 565 princely states to join either India or Pakistan, or retain their independent status.⁴⁸ Over British Balochistan, the Indian Independence Act of 1947 stated; "the territories of Pakistan...at the date of passing of this Act...also include the Chief Commissioner's Province of British Baluchistan."⁴⁹ The British Balochistan had previously established a *Shahi Jirga* (Urdu: Royal Council) dominated by Baloch-Pashtun tribal leaders, which was declared as the Electoral College to decide the fate of British Balochistan. Despite being a non-elected body, the *Shahi Jirga* voted in favour of Pakistan. A historical document by the *British Foreign Policy Centre* maintains that the participants of the *Shahi Jirga* were British nominated and its recommendations were related to the British Balochistan only.⁵⁰ The Baloch Sardars of the British Balochistan—Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, Nawab Akbar Bugti and Sardar Akbar Sanjrani had already signed up to join Pakistan.⁵¹ According to Inayatullah

48 "Indian Independence Act, 1947" *The Official Home of the UK Legislation*, UK Government, available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>, accessed August 5, 2018.

49 "Indian Independence Act, 1947".

50 "Balochis of Pakistan on the Margins of History" *Foreign Policy Center London* (November 2006): 1.

51 Tahir Bizenjo, *Baba-e- Balochistan: Statements, Speeches and Interviews of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo* (Quetta: Sales and Services, 1999), 43.

Baloch, both, Marri and Bugti tribal chiefs, requested in writing to the British authorities for joining the Kalat State, but many including A. B. Awan believe that both Baloch leaders voted in favour of Pakistan.⁵² Senator Akram Dashti and Zaid Hussain believe that Nawab Bugti never advocated for Balochistan's separation from Pakistan and he was one of the Baloch leaders to vote in favour of Balochistan's accession to Pakistan in the *Shahi Jirga*.⁵³

The rise of tribal movement against the British Empire and the subsequent political consciousness among the Baloch leadership against the colonial power could be a case of pure nationalism. But after Balochistan's merger into Pakistan, the rise and resurgence of nationalist movement is indeed an ethno-nationalism or sub-nationalism. The Baloch ethnic movement is still potent as much as it was before the East Pakistan debacle.⁵⁴ The Baloch ethno-nationalism poses a serious threat to Pakistan's national security as the ethnic insurgency has now emerged with a separatist agenda.

The Baloch nationalists still believe that it was a forced annexation from Pakistani side, while many consider that the Khan of Kalat joined Pakistan by his own will. In his biography, the Khan did not mention any kind of forced annexation rather he cites the external threats from India, Afghanistan and Soviet Union against Pakistan as the reasons of merger.⁵⁵ Khan of Kalat's younger brother, Agha Abdul Karim waged a low-intensity and limited insurgency against the annexation. Prince Karim along with his fighters crossed the Durand Line on May 16, 1948, and approached the Afghan authorities as well as the Soviet embassy in

52 "Nawab Bugti: Maligned but Widely Respected" *Dawn* (Karachi), August 28, 2006.

53 Shah Meer Baloch, "Akbar Bugti's Death and the Revival of the Baloch Insurgency" *Herald*, September 17, 2017.

54 Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir Ethnic Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3-18.

55 Ahmed Yar Khan, *Inside Baluchistan: A Political Autobiography of Khan-e-Azam* (Michigan: Royal Book Company, 1975), 159-64.

Afghanistan, but they refused to support the irredentist Abdul Karim. He returned Balochistan and decided to fight without any foreign backing. After a brief skirmish near Harboi, Prince surrendered with an assurance from his elder brother, the Khan of Kalat, who persuaded him in return of a promised amnesty, but the promise was immediately broken.⁵⁶

The Baloch nationalists rejected the One Unit as a tool of curtailing their autonomy promised during the accession with Pakistan.⁵⁷ Thus, Khan also protested and agitated against the inclusion of Balochistan States Union (BSU) in the One Unit. He gathered the Baloch tribal leaders in Karachi where he expressed his veiled desire to restore his *Khanate* on ethnic, cultural and historical lines. Political resistance against the One Unit was more visible in Balochistan than any other part of the country. Reports highlighted that Pakistani flag was replaced with Kalat State's historic flag.⁵⁸ The Army moved to Kalat on October 6, 1958, and detained the Khan and other tribal notables on account of rebelliousness and reported help from Afghanistan.⁵⁹ The irksome episode of arresting the Khan caused violent protest and ultimately stirred up a tribal guerrilla campaign led by Nawab Nauroz Zehri.⁶⁰

The Central Government approached the octogenarian Nawab Nauroz through his nephew, Sardar Doda Khan Zehri, who offered him amnesty under an Oath of the Holy Quran, by assuring that their all demands had been

56 Yaqoob Khan Bangash, "Recalling Baloch history" *Express Tribune*, (Karachi), June 14, 2011.

57 Paul Titus and Nina Swilder, "Knights, Not Pawns: Ethno-Nationalism and Regional Dynamics in Post-Colonial Balochistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32, no. 1 (February 2000), 51.

58 Herbert Fekdman, *From Crisis to Crisis: Pakistan 1962-1959* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972), 203.

59 Ahmad, *Balochistan*, 167.

60 Martin Axmann, *Back to the Future: The Khanate of Kalat and the Genesis of Baloch Nationalism 1915-1955* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 286.

accepted by the higher authorities.⁶¹ Nawab Nauroz agreed to surrender on May 15, 1959, in exchange of amnesty, but after their surrender, he and his fellow rebels were arrested on rebellion charges and were tried in a military court. His son and five other comrades were hanged in Hyderabad Jail in 1960 and he died in Kohlu prison in 1964.⁶² Nawab Nauroz became a rallying symbol of resistance for the future ethnic insurgencies to come.

The third ethnic insurgency in Balochistan started with the expansion of Soviet influence and the rise of left-leaning politics in the early 1960s. But what inflamed the old wounds was the unfair treatment meted out to the distinguished Baloch leaders by the then military regime to punish them for their tirade against President General Ayub Khan in the National Assembly. The tribal insurgents continued their militant actions until 1967 when a general amnesty was announced to pardon the Marri, Mengal and Bugti tribal chiefs. All chiefs were reinstated to their tribal positions.⁶³ The third wave of insurgency and left-wing ethno-nationalism induced mostly the lower middle class Baloch students into resistance politics who formed the Baloch Student Organization in 1967.

After the fall of Dhaka, Z. A. Bhutto agreed with the NAP for formation of provincial government in Balochistan in return of supporting the new constitution. He appointed Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo as the Governor of Balochistan on April 29, 1972. Sardar Attaullah Mengal became the first Chief Minister of Balochistan on May 1, 1972. When Bhutto found his political position secure after getting the new constitution passed, he started a vilification campaign against NAP.⁶⁴ He also played off differences among Mengal, Marri and Bugti

61 Axmann, *Back to the Future*, 287.

62 "Killings of Zehris and History of Balochistan's plight" *The News* (Karachi), April 17, 2013.

63 Ahmad, *Balochistan*, 167.

64 Ahmad, *Balochistan*, 167.

for political purposes.⁶⁵ There were reports in the mainstream press about a London Plan. The NAP was alleged to be in collusion with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for conspiring a partition scheme against Pakistan. Coincidentally, Wali Khan, Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Sheikh Mujib were in London at that time.⁶⁶ On February 10, 1973, a large cache of weapons and ammunitions were found in the residence of Iraqi military attaché in Islamabad. The federal government charged the NAP government in Balochistan for breaking Pakistan with the help of Iraq and Soviet Union.⁶⁷ Two days later, on February 12, the NAP Government of Sardar Mengal was dismissed by Z.A. Bhutto and Governor Rule was imposed. That fired up the Mengal, Marri and Bizenjo tribes to take up arms against the federal government. Thus, the ethnic insurgency resurged for the fourth time, which was responded with a full-scale military operation. This time, the Baloch insurgents enjoyed full support from Afghanistan, where the anti-Pakistan Sardar Daoud Khan was holding the reins of Kabul. President Daoud had good terms with the NAP leadership in Balochistan and NWFP (renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). He became the chief protagonist of Greater Pakhtunistan and *Azad Balochistan*.⁶⁸ The fourth ethnic insurgency ended when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed by the Army Chief General Zia-ul-Haq in a bloodless *coup d'état* on July 5, 1977, following the opposition protest over controversial and rigged general elections. General Zia-ul-Haq announced general amnesty and withdrew the Hyderabad Tribunal, thus, releasing the NAP leaders. The army was withdrawn

65 Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan: The Enigma of Political Development* (London: Wm Dawson & Sons 1980), 164.

66 Ghaus Bakhsh, , 182.

67 Selig S. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baloch Nationalism and Soviet Temptation* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981), 35.

68 Hussain Haqqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* (Lahore: Vanguard Book, 2005), 168. See also, M. AlamBrohi, "How Pakistan got into the Vortex of Terrorism" *Daily Times* (Lahore), October 28, 2019.

from Balochistan.⁶⁹ The military regime adopted an appeasement policy and all the demands of the nationalists were accepted and the province returned to normalcy.

Balochistan province remained almost peaceful during the decades of 1980s and 1990s. The nationalists participated in the successive general elections and the formation of the provincial governments. Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri returned to Balochistan from self-exile in the 1990s. However, during those peaceful decades, no sincere efforts were made to address the chronic politico-economic problems of the province. The energy resources of the least developed province were continued to be siphoned off for the industrial growth and development of the other provinces. With the onset of the 21st Century, the nationalist parties galvanized the Baloch masses through the politics of resources exploitation, political marginalization and relative deprivation.

The roots of fifth insurgency started emerging in early 2000s when the dynamics of international and regional politics started changing. After 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan, the Baloch insurgency returned with the deprivation politics of the nationalists and impolitic handling of the situation by the hybrid regime of General Musharraf. The Baloch nationalist parties jointly started public protests, demonstrations and large political gatherings all across Balochistan against the mega projects and decades long exploitation of gas and mineral resources. Professor Rasul Bakhsh Rais believed that President Musharraf had attitudinal problems and used insulting, aggressive and threatening language against the Baloch tribal leaders. The present insurgency is a legacy of the military rule led by General Musharraf.⁷⁰ The insurgency started with small guerrilla attacks on the gas pipelines and installations by

69 Feroz Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176-77.

70 Rasul Bakhsh Rais, "The Balochistan Package; Redefining Federalism in Pakistan" *Centre for Civic Education* (2010), available at www.civiceducation.org, accessed on December 20, 2018.

autonomy-seeking Baloch groups in 2003, which increasingly turned violent with a separatist ideology over the years.⁷¹ On December 14, 2005, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) attacked a military camp in Kohlu, which was housing the visiting President General Musharraf at the time.⁷² Three more Chinese engineers were killed in the industrial city of Hub near Karachi in February, 2006.⁷³ A full-scale military operation followed in the coming months, which resulted into the death of Nawab Bugti on August 26, 2006. His killing resulted in to ratcheting up of the nationalists' demands to right of self-determination and sovereignty; beyond the provincial autonomy.

In 2008, when the new democratic government of the Pakistan People's Party was formed, the Baloch militant organizations announced a unilateral ceasefire for few months, but neither the federal government nor the security establishment paid any response to their ceasefire. The militant resumed their violent activities with greater intensity throughout the province. Other than the 7th NFC Award, 18th Amendment and a socio-economic package, the PPP-led federal government did not pay any serious heed towards the violence-ravaged province. With such unprecedented bad governance, the insurgency-sectarian-hit restive province of Balochistan descended into further chaos and violence. After the general elections in May 2013, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, a moderate nationalist, was elected as the new Chief Minister of Balochistan, who in real sense made the first serious attempt for conflict resolution and transformation.

Dr. Malik Baloch said. "We decided to talk with the Khan of Kalat and Brahamdagh Bugti.... With the help of common friends, Brahamdagh Bugti agreed for negotiations...

71 Ahmed Rashid, "Walking up to the War in Balochistan," *BBC News*, February 29, 2012.

72 Mapping Militant Organizations, "Balochistan Liberation Army" *Stanford University*, available at <http://web.stanford.edu>, accessed on November 15, 2018.

73 "China Workers Killed in Pakistan" *BBC News*, February 15, 2006.

Brahamdagh was ready to accept Pakistan's constitution and renounce violence. The demands of Brahamdagh Bugti were not big and unacceptable.⁷⁴ Brahamdagh Bugti also acknowledged that Dr. Malik Baloch and General Abdul Qadir Baloch had met him in Geneva for negotiating a peaceful resolution of the conflict. "I am ready to talk for a negotiated resolution of the Balochistan issue if the Army has changed its mindset and want to stop military operation and seek a political solution."⁷⁵

The real prospects of a political settlement in Balochistan died down when Dr. Malik Baloch was replaced by Sardar Sanaullah Zehri as Chief Minister in late 2015. Then again, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified in 2017 by Pakistan's top court in the Panama Papers scandal. Sanaullah Zehri was least interested in any kind of engagement with the ultra-Baloch nationalists since his immediate family members were killed by the Baloch insurgents prior to 2013 elections.⁷⁶ Dr. Malik Baloch played a bridging role and the serious negotiations should have followed in a proper mechanism. The prospects of any political engagement or negotiation in foreseeable future seem to be off the cards.

Conclusion

The analytical study of Balochistan's history offers an empirical link between the Baloch ethno-nationalism/insurgency and the regional geopolitics. The ethnic Baloch are profoundly sensitive to their history, culture, language and homeland. The nationalism is rooted in the Baloch history and culture. The Baloch tribes fought collectively against the foreign invaders despite their inter-

74 "Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, Former Chief Minister of Balochistan and President of National Party, *Interview with BBC Urdu Sairbeen Radio Program*, September 28, 2016.

75 "Brahamdagh Bugti, President of Baloch Republican Party, *Interview with BBC Urdu Sairbeen Radio Program*, November 11, 2015.

76 "Sardar Sanaullah Zehri's covey attacked, 3 family members killed" *Express Tribune*, (Karachi), April 16, 2013.

tribal mêlées. The British Empire colonized Balochistan for strategic reasons and encouraged Pakistan to annex it for same reasons in the wake of Cold War as the Baloch princely states were too weak to withstand any foreign occupation. The role of geography in the conflict of Balochistan is indispensable. The geopolitics of Balochistan had a causal relationship with the rise of Baloch nationalism during the colonial period. However, after its merger in to Pakistan, the exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources, economic deprivation of Baloch people and political marginalization of Baloch nationalists have been causative reasons to provoke nationalist tendencies and insurgencies. The province has been perpetually robbed of its natural resources and deprived of its legitimate politico-economic rights, which provoke on and off political uprisings and ethnic insurgencies.

Ethno-nationalism in Balochistan refuse to die down despitedecades of repressive policies and militarized counter insurgency strategy. The first, second and third uprisings in Balochistan were tribal insurrections of limited scales, whereas the fourth insurgency in 1970s involved different tribes and non-tribal leaders from middle class background all across Balochistan. It was an ethnic-nationalist struggle for maximum provincial autonomy but the fifth and ongoing insurgency has emerged as an armed struggle across the breadth and width of the province for an independent and sovereign Balochistan. The geopolitical interests of the major world powers in Balochistan are unlikely to decline or fade away because of its coveted geographic location. The quest for strategic sea ports, secured maritime routes, energy resources, trans-national pipelines and international trade escalate the great powers' competition in the region.

The federal structure of Pakistan has not fully accommodated the politico-economic rights of the smaller provinces and ethnic groups. The successive military rules and hybrid regimes have weakened the federal system and triggered long-lasting political instability, which has worsened the economic crisis. Pakistan's industrial sector has been on

the verge of collapse due to the acute energy crisis. The untapped hydrocarbon resources in Balochistan could be the best viable and alternative option for Pakistan's energy security. But for that, the federal government needs to create a conducive political environment for reconciliation and conflict resolution. The federal government has taken some sincere steps such as the *Aghaaz-e-Huqooq-e Balochistan* Package, the 7th NFC Award and the 18th Constitutional Amendment to redress the longstanding demands of the Baloch nationalists for provincial autonomy. The 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 has strengthened the prospects of a democratic and cooperative federalism in Pakistan. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic state where a democratic set-up, a constitutional federalism, provincial autonomy, fair distribution of resources, full control over the provincial resources and more taxation power would do away with the ethno-nationalist movements and sub-nationalist conflicts.