

PAKISTAN's BALOCHISTAN

By

VP MALHOTRA

Pakistan's Balochistan is located between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. It is the largest province of Pakistan with an area of 347,190 sq km and population of 13,162,222 (March 2012) not including the districts of Khuzdar, Kech and Panjgur. Its landscape is composed of barren, rugged mountains and fertile land. 65 per cent comprises of poor and non-grazable rangeland with large parts being dry and arid, facing chronic water shortage. Most of the land in the west is barren and is sparsely populated. The southern part is generally desert, known as Makran. Balochistan is endowed with rich natural, mineral and energy resources. It has significant reserves of coal, copper, gold, zinc, lead, iron, chromites, uranium, lime stone, marble and so on. Pakistan receives 40 per cent of its energy needs ie natural gas and coal from Balochistan. Proposed gas pipelines - the Iran-Pakistan and Turkman-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipelines have to pass through it. Pakistan has three nuclear and possibly chemical weapons developing sites and six missile testing sites in Balochistan.

Balochistan has 770 km long coast line, which is 70 per cent of total coast line of Pakistan with potential for fisheries development, tourism and sea ports. The port of Gwadar, developed with major financial and technological contribution by China, is strategically important. This port is to provide Pakistan with another naval base, and release pressure on

Karachi and Port Qasim, which were the only major ports. The port is also projected to be the hub of an energy and trade corridor to and from China and the Central Asian Republics.

Balochistan is an arid desert and mountainous region in south-western Asia. It comprises the Pakistani province of Balochistan, the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan, and the southern areas of the Afghan provinces of Nimruz, Helmand, and Kandahar. Sistan and Baluchestan province is one of the 31 [provinces of Iran](#), contiguous to Baloch regions of [Pakistan](#) and [Afghanistan](#). Sistan and Baluchestan is the largest province of Iran as is Balochistan in Pakistan. The Baloch regions of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan have remarkable similarities in their composition.

The Baloch Nationalist Movement's demands have ranged from greater cultural, economic and political rights, to political autonomy, to outright secession and the creation of an independent state in Baloch regions of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The movement is secular and heavily influenced by leftist Marxist ideology with claims to receive considerable support from the [Baloch diasporas](#) in [Oman](#), the [UAE](#), [Sweden](#), [Norway](#), and other countries. Strategic Gwadar and Chabahar ports are respectively located in Pakistani Balochistan and Iranian Baluchestan. This article deals with the Pakistani Balochistan.

GWADAR

Gwadar, a fishing village at the apex of Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman, was bought by Pakistan in 1958 from Oman for \$3 million. It was integrated in to Balochistan in 1977 and a deep sea port has been completed in 2009 with the Chinese help. 500 Chinese worked for

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the project over a period of time. A green field airport has also been complete dcurrentl. Simultaneously, a road network has been developed linking the port with Karachi and the road network of Pakistan. The port is presently being operated by China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC). Earlier, the contract was given to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). On its flanks are the fishing ports of Jiwani, Pasni and Ormara. All these ports have runways of varying lengths.

Balochistan commanded a strategic position being a communication centre opposite Straits of Hormuz between South West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. The big game of the nineteenth century added to its strategic importance.

Sir Robert Sandeman concluded the 1876 Treaty with the Khan of Kalat* and brought his territories including Kharan, Makran and Las Bela under British suzerainty. After the first phase of Second Afghan War of 1878-80, in the Treaty of Gandamak, 1879, the Afghan Amir ceded the districts of Quetta, Pishin, Sibi, Harnai, and Thal Chotiali to the British. In 1883 the British secured control over the Bolan Pass, southeast of Quetta, from the Khan of Kalat for an annual fee.

** The Khanate of Kalat was an independent state in Balochistan*

In 1893 Mortimer Durand, then Foreign Secretary was sent on a special mission to Kabul to negotiate with the Amir Abdur Rahman, Khan of Afghanistan a treaty of amity and mutual security. As the plan was made by the British, it was natural that control of hilltops along the

border and major strategic points like Kyber, Tochi, Bolan, and Kurram were kept on the British side. The other major aspect was the threat from Russia through Afghanistan. The border is known as Durand Line.

The Baloch-Afghan border or McMahon Line extends from New Chaman to Perso-Baloch border. The boundary was demarcated by Indo-Afghan Boundary Commission headed by A Henry McMahon in 1896. The boundary runs through the Baloch country dividing the tribal areas. As the Khan of Kalat was not consulted while demarcation of Perso-Baloch frontier, the demarcation was seen as doubtful by the Baloch. The demarcation took place without taking in to consideration factors of geography, culture, history and the will of the people. It led to trifurcation of the Baloch territory among Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

Seistan and western Makran became part of Iran; Outer Seistan and Registan came under control of Afghanistan and Jacobabad, Derajat and Sibi were included in the British India (now Pakistan). The Khanate of Kalat was recognized as an independent state with status of protectorate.

On August 11, 1947, the British returned control of Balochistan to its ruler, His Highness Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, the Khan of Kalat. The Khan immediately declared independence, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah signed the proclamation of Balochistan's sovereignty under the Khan. The New York Times reported on August 12, 1947, "Under the agreement, Pakistan recognizes Kalat as an independent sovereign state with a status different from that of the Indian States". An announcement from New Delhi said "Kalat, Moslem State in Balochistan, has reached an agreement with Pakistan for free flow of communications and commerce, and would negotiate for decisions on defense, external affairs and communications". The next day, the *NY Times* even printed a map of the world showing Balochistan as a fully independent country.

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DURAND LINE: AFGHAN AND BALOCHI VIEW

The international community has recognized the Durand Line as the Pakistan- Afghan border since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, but successive Afghan rulers and Balochis as a community have repudiated its legitimacy for the following reasons:

- The Durand Line Agreement of 1893 between British India and Afghanistan divides territories between three sovereign countries - Afghanistan, Balochistan and British India. The Treaty did not include Balochistan, which was an affected party and was only in treaty relationship with the British and not their part.
- The Durand Line Agreement was an unequal treaty.
- The drawing of the border was arbitrary and disregarded the ethnicity.
- The boundary did not follow a defined geographical feature.
- The access to sea was denied to Afghanistan.

Hence, the Agreement was in error, and thus, it was null and void as soon as it was signed.

On August 15, 1947, the Khan of Kalat formed the lower and upper houses of Kalat Assembly, and during the first meeting of the Lower House in September 1947, confirmed independence. The Government of Pakistan retaliated by taking complete control of Balochistan on April 15, 1948 and taking several political leaders into custody. The Khanate was reverted to its previous status as it had existed under the British rule. The Khan of Kalat was persuaded or coerced to accede to Pakistan.

The Baloch are an ethnic group that belongs to larger Iranian people. The population density is only 28.7 per sq km due to the rugged terrain and water shortage. It comprises 45 per cent of the Pakistan territory and only 5 per cent of its population, and the least developed of all provinces. Its neighbouring regions are Iranian Balochistan to the west, Afghanistan and FATA to the north, and Punjab and Sindh to the east. Balochistan shares about 900 km long border with Iran and 1200 km with Afghanistan. To the south is the Arabian Sea. The principal languages in the province are Baluchi and Pashto; others being Brahui, Sindhi, Hazaragi, Saraiki and Punjabi. 70 per cent of Baloch live in Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan, 20 per cent in South East Iran and a significant numbers in Afghanistan. There are also a growing number of Sindhis, Kurdish, Punjabis, Mohajir and Iranians who have made Balochistan their home. In addition, over 440,000 Afghan refugees, which include Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Hazaras, have moved into the province. 75 per cent of the population lives in rural areas which is poor. Quetta is the capital and the largest city with Pashtun majority. The population density around Quetta is 255 against the state's average of 28.7 per sq km.

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Balochistan is predominantly a tribal structure headed by *sardars* who rule by tradition and their need. The tribal heads are hereditary and powerful even to the extent that they matter in the state affairs. The *sardars* tend to become mediators between the state and the tribe so as to maintain status quo. The divisive system is also exploited by the Federal Government, when required. There are around 400 tribes, each with a *sardar*. Marris and Bugtis are among the major tribes. Each tribe has its own tradition and systems with intra and inter-tribe rivalries. Balochistan, as such, has not been able to unify internally resulting in lack of coordination in every field, be it business, trade or projection of the state interests. The polarisation affects the developmental plans adversely and keeps the state away from meaningful integration with Pakistan. The tribes and ethnic groups maintain their armed forces which are armed with modern weapons including missiles and rocket launchers. The de-weaponisation program commenced in 2000, but could not penetrate most of Balochistan.

Balochistan has been divided in 'A' and 'B' areas. 'A' areas are the ones where the provincial police is effective and 'B' areas are generally governed by the tribal levies. The major towns fall under 'A' areas and the remaining under 'B' areas. 75 per cent of Balochistan falls under 'B' category. 'B' areas, as such, have become a safe haven for the law breaking elements, insurgents and terrorists. Following the anti terror drive in the wake of 9/11, a major initiative is under way to convert the 'B' areas into 'A' areas. Towards the effort, the Government has raised 6,000 strong Baloch Constabulary to enforce the new policies. The drive, however, is encountering major resistance from the levies who control 75 per cent of Balochistan. It will be ideal if this is properly thought through and then implemented to improve Balochistan's security.

Balochistan's literacy rate is 37 per cent against the national average of 52, out of which females account for only 23 per cent. There are 10,381 educational institutions in Balochistan against a total of 2164901 in the

country. Primary school enrolment stands at 25.8 per cent with steep drop out rate in the higher classes. Most schools lack water, sanitation, electricity and so on.

Balochistan has the lowest water and sanitation indicators in Pakistan. The urban poor spend a part of their income buying water, while in the rural area, fetching water from long distances is the burden of women and children. Nearly half the population relies on wells, ponds, rivers, canals or streams for their drinking water needs. In the urban areas, nearly 80 per cent of the population has access to piped water, where as the figure in the rural area is only 18 per cent. Electricity is supplied to barely 20-25 per cent of the population in Balochistan. Only 40 per cent of the population has access to excreta disposal. 71 per cent of the rural population do not have adequate excreta disposal. There is no waste water treatment plant in Balochistan.

The economy of Balochistan largely depends on production of gas, coal, copper, gold and other minerals. Agriculture and live stock also dominate the economy and account for 60 per cent of work force, linked directly or indirectly with these. Balochistan is endowed with production of a great variety of quality fruits. The province is known as the fruit-basket of the country producing 90 per cent of grapes, cherry and almonds, 60 per cent of peach, pomegranate, apricot, 34 per cent of apple and 70 per cent of date. But for the infrastructure, a large quantity of fruit products could be sold in other states of Pakistan or exported to neighbouring countries. Fisheries are another important economic activity in the coastal areas along the Arabian Sea. Tourism is picking up.

Balochistan's rich natural resources; due to the federal policy, the vested interests, the *sardari* system and the security environment, the industry has not developed in keeping with its potential. The Baloch are also not happy with the development of the Gwadar port and Saindak copper-

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gold projects in collaboration with China without their involvement in decision making. However, Gwadar will act as a major commercial and military hub with collateral development like Makran Coastal Highway, Mirani dam water project, Kachhi Canal, Quetta water and Sewage Scheme, export and industrial zones, international airport etc.

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, lowest in population and lowest in per capita income since 1947. Its per capita income is 2/3rd of the national average. Over 50 per cent of its people remain below poverty line. Statistically it is the most deprived state of Pakistan. Its Human Development Index is lowest of all states in Pakistan, despite highest per capita natural resources. One of the reasons is its low literacy level. Political, social, economic, military policies and insurgency are the other reasons.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

Kalat, on declining to accede to Pakistan, was invaded in March 48 and annexed. Khan was coerced to formally accede to Pakistan. In a bid to counter the majority of Bengalis in East Pakistan in 1955, the National Assembly passed a bill merging entire West Pakistan into one single province, with Lahore as its capital. The 'One Unit', because of linguistic and ethnic diversity, led to emergence of a large 'Anti-One Unit' movement in West Pakistan. The Pakistan Army invaded Balochistan in 1958 to crush the movement. A 1000 strong militia fought the army in pitched battles for over a year. In May 1959, Nauroz Khan, the leader of the Militia, was arrested and died in captivity in 1964, becoming a symbol of Baloch resistance. Five of his relatives, including his son, were hanged. 'One Unit' continued until General Yahya Khan dissolved it on July 1, 1970 and Balochistan received provincial status by merger of Quetta and Kalat. 300 - 400 army personnel and 8000 Baloch were killed during these operations.

In the wake of a visit of President Bhutto to Iran in 1973, the Shah cautioned him on the nationalist movements on Iran's border. Under various pretexts, the elected Government of Balochistan was dismissed. The Pakistani army invaded Balochistan again with 78,000 troops supported by Iranian Cobra helicopters, but were resisted by some 50,000 tribesmen. The conflict took the lives of 3,300 Pakistani troops, 5,300 tribesmen and thousands of civilians. In 1977 the military staged a coup and overthrew Bhutto, declared victory in Balochistan and withdrew.

The Bugti tribe, formerly led by late Nawab Akbar Bugti, fields a force of some 10,000 fighters. The Dera Bugti district has been the site of intense operations by the Pakistan military in 2005-06. More than 900 Baloch were killed, 140,000 displaced, 450 political activists (mainly from the Baloch National Party) missing and 4,000 arrested. There was wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure in Dera Bugti and Sui districts. The Meingal (the second largest tribe) and the Marri are in open revolt against the government in the province.

In May 2004, three Chinese engineers were killed and eleven others, including nine Chinese and two Pakistanis, were injured when a remote-controlled car bomb hit their van.

With the killing of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti in 2006 and Nawabzada Balach Marri, the Chief of the BLA in 2007, the momentum of the insurgency declined, as some leaders either fled Pakistan or were neutralized. The capacity of the BLA was considerably reduced with a large number of casualties to its personnel and considerable collateral losses. However, insurgencies do not cease with temporary setbacks, particularly when none of the underlying perceived or real causes are addressed in the right earnest. The violence, killings, kidnapping and

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disappearances and attacks on the infrastructure continue unabated to date.

On April 18, 2006, Government of Balochistan-in-Exile, was established somewhere in the Middle East (Israel?), and His Highness Mir Suleman Dawood Khan was nominated as King. The objective is to liberate Balochistan from the occupying forces. Red, green and blue with sun was chosen as flag and Kalat as capital. Why Israel was chosen as the venue of the government-in-exile was that Israel has no diplomatic relations with either Iran or Pakistan, as such extradition will be avoided. Not much is known about this government, it may well be a cyber organization or may have been wound up for want of support.

On 12 August 2009, [Khan of Kalat Mir Suleiman Dawood](#) declared himself ruler of Balochistan and formally announced a Council for Independent Balochistan. The council's claimed domain included [Sistan and Baluchestan province](#) in Iran.

Since there are about two million ethnic Baloch in Iran, it will not be out of place to mention the situation in there. Baloch people in Iran have several grievances. The Shi'ite Islamic revolution perceived the predominantly Sunni Baloch as a threat. Sistan-e-Balochistan, the province where Baloch have traditionally lived in Iran, has the country's worst rates for life expectancy, adult literacy, primary school enrolment, access to improved water sources and sanitation and infant mortality rate. Despite its important natural resources (gas, gold, copper, oil and uranium), the province has the lowest per capita income in Iran. Almost 80% of the Baloch live under the poverty line.

Baloch writer Naela Qadri Baloch, a long-time campaigner for Balochistan's independence arrived in New Delhi on 11 October 2016 with a view to set up a Baloch government-in-exile. "I am looking forward to meet a number of political leaders here to garner support to form a Baloch government-in-exile," she said. This is a significant event which needs to be watched.

With the historical baggage, the highhandedness of the Pakistani military, Baloch ethnicity and the *sardari* system, there is alienation of the Baloch people which is evident from emergence of the following organizations:

- The Baloch Students Organization is a student organisation that campaigns for the students of Balochistan. It was founded as a student movement in 1967 in Karachi and remains the largest ethnic Baloch student body in the country. It got divided due to ideological differences. BSO Pajjar and BSO Mengal affiliated themselves with the parliamentary framework of Pakistan. Dr Allah Nazar, founder of separatist wing, in 2002 while he was studying in college, created a breakaway faction, BSO Azad that advocates armed struggle for “Greater Baluchistan” based on Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistani Baloch areas. The Pakistani government has banned BSO Azad in 2013, being a terrorist organization.
- Leftist, Baloch People’s Liberation Front (BPLF), was formed in 1976 after developing irreconcilable differences with the Baloch Students Organisation. The differences emerged on the question of strategies to be adopted. The BPLF did not possess any command structure and was a loosely organised outfit. In the 1970s as the [Pakistani](#) security forces improved their operations, it increasingly fell back in camps inside Afghanistan.
- The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist militant group, was formed in the early 1980s, which calls for the creation of a Greater Balochistan, to include the Baloch territories in Iran and Afghanistan. The BLA is a well organised and motivated clandestine force, with a high degree of invisibility. Little is known about its leaders and cadres. One hears of them whenever there is a spectacular incident such as killing and kidnapping of Chinese working in the Gwadar port in May 2004, the eight explosions in Quetta on Pakistan’s independence day on August 14, 2004, the ambush of a group of seven Pakistani army officers shopping in the Khuzdar area, killing five of them, the abortive attempt to

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kill the Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Yousef in the same area the next day, the frequent disruptions of gas and oil supplies to Punjab, the blasts in the Sui local airport and so on. BLA was declared a terrorist organisation by the Pakistani and British governments.

- The Baloch National Party (BNP), an amalgam of moderate forces, calls for extensive provincial autonomy, limiting the central government to control of defence, foreign affairs, currency, and communications. Party also believes in denuclearization and demilitarisation of Balochistan.
- In the early 2000s the radical Islamist group [Jundallah](#) became active in Balochistan. The [al Qaeda](#) linked terrorist organisation has branches in both Iran and Pakistan. Jundallah is a militant organization that claims to be fighting for the rights of Sunni Muslims in Iran. It was reportedly founded by Abdolmalek Rigi who was captured and executed in Iran in 2010. Jundallah is responsible for a large number of terror incidents in Iran.
- Besides the above organizations, terror groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan also strike in Balochistan on as required basis.
- Quetta has witnessed a series of terror attacks over the years. The latest being killing of around 60 police training cadets. This is the third such attack on the Quetta Police Training College which was attacked in 2006 and 2008 as well. Quetta has become an easy target for the *jihadis*, with sustained demand for secession from the mainland.

Several Human Rights organizations have reported the cases of human disappearances. In 2015 alone 460 people in Balochistan have gone

missing. 18,000 have gone missing since 2003. A number of unreported mass graves have been discovered – a tragedy that is continuing by the Pakistani security forces.

According to a UNHCR report, 20.9 per cent of total Afghan refugees (1.6 million) in Pakistan are in Balochistan. The report further says that 83.3 per cent of the registered Afghan refugees were Pashtuns and 84 per cent of them were unwilling to return to Afghanistan for reasons of security, lack of shelter and livelihood. The Afghan refugees have come under criticism of Baloch leaders, who allege that the Government was deliberately delaying their repatriation in order to bring about demographic changes in Balochistan. They also hold them responsible for the law and order situation and influx of drugs and weapons in the province.

UNHCR and the humanitarian community in Pakistan reported in 2010 that they continued to experience difficulties in ensuring a pragmatic response to the needs of millions of displaced people. Humanitarian access remained a major challenge throughout the year (2010) and the security situation remained volatile, hindering access to certain areas in Balochistan, KPK and FATA.

As per Internally Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) based in Geneva, 84,000 people in Balochistan were internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were driven out of their homes due to military operations carried out by the government in Marri and Bugti tribal areas. Out of these 60 per cent are women and children. The IDPs are living in makeshift camps in Jaffarabad, Naseerabad, Quetta, Sibi and Bolan with near absence of hygiene and sanitation, and other human essential needs. The refugee influx and the IDPs have added to the ethnic sensitivities in the region. The refugees, the IDPs and other outsiders from Pakistan give the Baloch and the *sardars* a feeling of marginalization in their own home land.

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General Zia attempted to foster new relationship with the people of Balochistan by announcing the development of Kachhi Canal, Mirani Dam, Gwadar Port, Makran Coastal Highway, Saindak copper project and Quetta water supply scheme. Over 300 per cent increase was made in the national budget for development programs in Balochistan. The results, however, were not commensurate with the inputs.

ASSESSMENT

The strategic importance of Balochistan is due to its location opposite the Straits of Hormuz, its coast line and natural resources in the backdrop of illiteracy, poverty and sparse population, which makes the Baloch vulnerable. The root cause of insurgency in Balochistan is the denial of the benefits of the natural gas and other mineral resources of the province, denial of any meaningful role in decision making relating to the construction and administration of the Chinese aided Gwadar port project, influx of a large number of Punjabis, other non-Baloch population, refugees from Afghanistan and IDPs, and discrimination in matters of recruitment. The resentment against low level of representation, however, needs to be analysed keeping in view the sparse population of Balochistan and the literacy level.

The division of the Baloch people between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan creates centrifugal tendencies and animosity towards them by all the three states.

Low level of education, an inward looking society, the vested interests of *sardars* and diffused focus, prevent any meaningful investment in Balochistan by outside agencies including MNCs. Any outside project is seen a threat to the ethnic balance. Also there is trust deficit between the Federal Government and the Baloch, backed up by history and Pakistan's overbearing approach since 1947, leading to insurgency and poverty.

Pakistan's interest in Balochistan is obvious – it is its integral part, 45 per cent of its territory rich in natural resources, provides a transit route between developing international regions and has a vast coastline. Indian interest is to transport oil and gas from Iran and other Central Asian countries to its territory. On the other hand, the current situation provides a leverage to counter Pakistan's active interference in J&K. Also India cannot ignore the situation in Balochistan as an emerging power.

Chinese interests are so great that it has already built the Karakoram Highway from Xinjiang to access Indian Ocean and has developed Gwadar as a major port to find an alternate route to fill its deficit energy needs. Access to Balochistan also suits China in its policy of engagement of India through other South Asian countries.

Denial of the territory of Balochistan for transporting Iranian oil and gas to South Asia will compel Iran to compete with the Russian oil and gas in Europe and Turkey, leading to competitive energy prices. Russia on the contrary will prefer to provide oil and gas to Europe and Turkey as a single vendor. Stability in Balochistan favours Russia.

USA and Europe are rather unhappy with the flip flop policies of Pakistan supporting and harbouring terrorism, and Iran's belligerent attitude over nuclear issues. Balochistan provides them an opportunity to settle scores with both the countries. They are already there and their intelligence is active for an opportunity for exploiting the grievances of the Baloch people in Pakistan and Iran to create Greater Balochistan. Baloch people will support this option to reap the benefits of the natural resources, promote their culture and way of life. USA is looking for a consulate in Quetta.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRIGADIER VP MALHOTRA (RETD) is the author of books - Security and Defence Related Treaties of India; Tibetan Conundrum; Encyclopaedia of Indian Army (9 volumes); Pakistan-Threat Unique; and Terrorism and Counter Terrorism in South Asia and India.