

Balochistan, Power Politics and the Battle for Oil

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Since 1947, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Land of the Pure), a military dictatorship, has been a fragile entity perpetually on the brink of internal civil war, and constantly at loggerheads with India over contested Kashmir. It is a destabilizing factor on the Asian continent. The recent sacking of Pakistan's Supreme Court Justice by President Pervez Musharraf in March of 2007 is just another one of many straws weighing on the central government's back in Islamabad, a portent of what more is to come.

The Sunni dominant country is a nation-state in name only being held together by the force of its military and with the Machiavellian support of the USA. It is a powder keg of conflict pitting Pakistan's ruthless military against tribal factions in the North along Afghanistan's border and, in particular, against the Baloch in the South whose homeland is resource rich Balochistan.

In many respects, Musharraf's Pakistan resembles the US puppet regime of Hamid Karzai in Kabul, Afghanistan. There, the central government has little influence beyond its seat of government in the capital city and any authority it does have comes from the barrel of a gun or the bomb rack of an American made military aircraft. And, in rather depressing respects, Islamabad's handling of the Baloch and their homeland is seems a mirror image of the US treatment of local Iraqis in the ongoing US misadventure in Iraq. But, one must have hope that the USA will learn.

PAK has NUKE: Anyone Care?

The *CIA Factbook 2007* paints an even grimmer picture of the Land of the Pure. It garners a "high risk" mark for food and waterborne diseases such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever. It suffers from water pollution from raw sewage, industrial wastes, and agricultural runoff. Pakistan has limited natural fresh water resources and a majority of the population does not have access to potable water. It's a transit country for opium. Yet, this military dictatorship overseen by Musharaff maintains a nuclear arsenal and each year, in the face of its internal strife, manages to find the funds to purchase weaponry from an assortment of international military contractors—among them the USA. But the hard reality for the USA is that Pakistan, or whatever may become of it, will remain a chess piece for the geopolitical machinations of the USA, China, India and Russia.

If the National Security Policy of the USA makes any sense at all, then it's Pakistan that the USA should be looking to target with UN sanctions or economic/military pressure, perhaps in conjunction with India and in consultation with China and Russia. After all, *Pakistan is a failing state that already has nuclear weapons*. And it is worth stating again that the country

is a military dictatorship whose intelligence service—the ISI—is known to have a lot of animosity towards the USA, and has continually lent support to the Taliban—if not Al Qaeda. Moreover, US oil and natural gas concerns own 30% of the finds in Balochistan. It would be in the USA's best interest to court the local Baloch rather than sit by and watch the government in Islamabad crush the Baloch. Lessons-learned in Iraq should have taught the leaders in Washington, DC something (anything?) about how not to make enemies out of local populations.

Strategic Interests Served

Balochistan is in the southwest portion of Pakistan and borders Iran, Afghanistan, and India. The province is rich in oil & natural gas and its mostly 800 miles of underdeveloped coastline is flush with an abundance of ocean resources. A portion of Balochistan resides in Iran and is known as "Sistan and Balochestan", an Iranian province bordering on the Sea of Oman and Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is Iran's poorest province and is home to roughly 400,000 people. Could the US and Iran find some common ground for an independent Balochistan? Why not link the issue to current US and Iranian grievances with each other? Perhaps Iran cedes some territory for US concessions and economic aid. Once the troublesome Pakistani military is out of Balochistan on the Pakistan side, and the Baloch become independent and negotiate fair treatment for their people, and worthy prices for their land and resources, the Baloch might agree to stop attacking commercial interests.

The Baloch view themselves as an occupied territory and have done so since March 27, 1948 when the Pakistanis invaded Balochistan. Quoting Dr. Wahid Baloch, "Balochistan was a free sovereign independent state with its own parliament, the Dar-ul Awaam, the House of Commons, and Dar-ul Umraa, House of Lords. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, Pakistan invaded Balochistan and forcefully annexed it into Pakistan. From 1977-2005, Pakistan continues its crime against the Baloch people. Thousands of Baloch political activists and students have been arrested and are being tortured in secret jails. Many are missing, including Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, Goher Baloch and Akther Nadeem Baloch. Pakistani military, paramilitary and security forces are given the task to arrest, kidnap or kill any Baloch who talks or thinks about freedom. More than 600 military check [points] have been established all over Balochistan to control the activities and movements of the Baloch people.

There are 60,000 Pakistani troops stationed in Balochistan and more are on the way. Balochistan has been turned into a military occupied war zone. Baloch people are living in fear and in hopelessness. They are desperately looking to the world community...for their help and rescue against the tyranny of Pakistani and Iranian regimes."

Just so.

According to a recent report by Forum-Asia; Asian Legal Resource Centre, INFID; and Pax Romana; in Pakistan's Balochistan province, more than 4000 people have reportedly disappeared as the result of military operations between 2001 and late 2005. They have not been produced before a court by the military intelligence agencies—such as the notorious ISI—and their whereabouts remain unknown.

China, through Islamabad, has already gotten a piece of the action in Balochistan. China's Harbour Engineering Company recently helped Pakistan complete Phase II of the mammoth deep sea Port at Gwadar and it is open for business for all, it seems, except Baloch locals. Associated with that development effort are dozens of opportunities that are destined to cut-out the local population: resorts, casinos, and the letting of commercial fishing rights are among those listed by the Pakistan Board of Investment that are, worldwide, normally associated with corruption. The PAKBOI showed its contempt for the Baloch when it indicated on its website (pakboi.gov.pk) that "...Balochistan can provide land on easy terms."

In 2003, the South Asian Analysis Group (www.saag.org) noted the many ways in which the Musharraf government has exploited the Baloch.

1. Military authorities have bought most of the prime land at throw-away prices.
2. Large-scale influx of Pashtuns from the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan and Afghanistan, officially encouraged by the Pakistan Army, and re-settlement of Punjabi ex-servicemen in order to reduce the Balochs to a minority in their homeland.
3. Non-payment of adequate royalty to the people of Balochistan for the gas found in their territory, which has contributed to the economic development of Punjab, without any economic benefits for the Balochs; the displacement of a large number of poor Balochs by the construction of the Gwadar port and town with Chinese assistance without adequate compensation; the re-settlement of a large number of Punjabi and Pashtun ex-servicemen in Balochistan to work in the Gwadar port and Mekran coastal highway projects, in violation of the Government assurances that preference would be given to the sons of the soil for work in the projects; violation of the labour rights of the people employed by the Chinese construction company which is building the port; and the setting-up of three new cantonments by the army in Balochistan.
4. The anger over the non-payment of adequate royalty for the gas being supplied to Punjab and Sindh has led to a number of incidents of sabotage of the gas pipelines and attacks involving the use of explosives and landmines directed against the staff employed for the protection of the pipelines.
5. The construction of the Gwadar Port and the Mekran coastal highway has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Balochs from their ancestral land and the forcible acquisition of their land by the Government without paying them adequate compensation and without giving them suitable land in return. Moreover, fearing Indian attempts to sabotage the projects, the Government has forcibly removed the Hindus and many of the Balochs, whose loyalty was suspected, from the area, which has been declared a sensitive defence zone.
6. Balochs, who are suspected of being sympathetic to India, have been removed far away from the site of the Gwadar port. A large number of Punjabi and Pashtun ex-servicemen, whose loyalty to Islamabad is beyond doubt, have been

re-settled in the Mekran coastal area to work in sea port projects.

Washington, DC! Hello! Listen to This!

According to Shaukat Baloch, here's what would happen if the Baloch got their shot at nationhood. "If a referendum under the supervision of UN is held in Balochistan and the people are asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question 'whether Balochistan should be declared to be an independent country,' it is certain that this question would be answered in the affirmative by a large majority of people. If the international community seriously puts its pressure on Pakistani generals—who are the de facto rulers even during civilian governments—they would agree to it. Gas and minerals would be sold to Pakistan and India on rates fixed by Balochistan. In this regard no artificial problems would be created for the people of remaining Pakistan. Pakistan would be treated as a friendly country. Foreign companies would be invited to invest on further research of oil, gas and minerals.

Balochistan would be a secular, democratic country with freedom of faith, religion, thought and expression in a peaceful manner. There would be complete freedom of worship for all. No person would be allowed to preach hatred. Under the constitution, slogans based on religion, sects, etc. would be excluded from election campaigns. There would be a parliamentary system of government accompanied with an independent judiciary and a free press. Religious extremists would be asked not to meddle in politics. However they may keep their views with themselves. Unlike today, religious extremists will not receive funds in millions of dollars from ISI and other sources. Consequently they would remain peaceful. A Nation of Baloch of about 7 million will run and flourish in a way similar to Switzerland and Scandinavian countries. Professors, scientists and experts in other fields from the West would be invited to work in the universities and labs of Balochistan."

The Baloch Nation wants Independence not just because they are being persecuted and cheated by both Iran and Pakistan with regards to their natural resources, said Shabir Ahmed. The primary reason is that they want to be free to govern themselves. Whatever the reasons for the creation of Pakistan, the illegal annexation of Balochistan by Pakistan is a bitter pill to swallow.

According to Ahmed, "Simply put the Baloch Nation will never accept Pakistani or Iranian rule. It is inhuman and cruel to expect people of different races and languages to become 3rd class citizens in their own land, and to be governed by aliens. With regards to what shape a future Baloch Government should take, the best role model in that respect is the British political model we have today. The House of Commons and the House of Lords. This particular system was up and running in 1947, and then brought to an abrupt end by the illegal annexation of Balochistan by Pakistan. The Baloch are very different from their more fanatical immediate neighbors. Baloch society is naturally secular and very tolerant of other religions and races. However it must be noted that history shows us that the Baloch love their freedom and will never tolerate interference from outsiders, or alien rule. There are many a Widows sons who will fight to the bitter end to bring about an Independent Baloch State."

An independent Balochistan is inevitable (as is an independent Kurdistan) and essential to peace on the Asian continent. The sheer will and tenacity of Baloch freedom fighters makes

this outcome certain.

As anonymous said, "Dear Baloch friends. 90% of Balochistan is controlled by real sons of soil-meaning Baloch Liberation fighters. Pakis and their cronies control few cities and towns in Balochistan. Bravo! Baloch Fighters. Victory belongs to Baloch warriors! "

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