



## Pakistan's India Fixation on the Issue of Balochistan

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The issue of extra judicial incarcerations, killings and disappearances is not something new in Pakistan's discourse. During the regime of Musharraf, there were hundreds of such disappearances that still remain unaccounted for. As per a report by Amnesty International, "In 2010, the Ministry for the Interior admitted to 965 disappearance cases for which there were some records, although there are differing claims on figures made by families, human rights groups and the state, ranging from 200 to 7,000."<sup>1</sup> But the situation in Balochistan might not only threaten the domestic peace and stability of the nation, but also disturb its immediate and extended neighbourhood.

However, in the last two weeks, the Pakistani government has reinvigorated its accusations regarding the role of the Indian external intelligence bodies, in supporting and carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistan, especially in Karachi and the Balochistan province.

### **The Balochistan Issue**

Balochistan enjoyed a semi-autonomous status before the creation of Pakistan, a region which was distinctly proud of its language and culture. The Balochi population is spread throughout a region, which covers areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan as well as Iran. Most of the Balochi population living in Pakistan had been voicing their protest against the high handed governance of the federal government from the beginning of the 1950s. Initially, they even

demanded an independent state of Balochistan. But with the passage of time, their demand has been for more autonomy and economic independence. Balochistan province has a population of around 13 million (55% are Balochis), where only 23 per cent of the people are based in urban centres, the rest being associated with a mix of nomadic pastoralism and settled agriculture. Most of the economy is handled by non-Balochis, and areas outside Quetta mostly remain underdeveloped and impoverished in spite of being a resource rich province. As the province shares borders with Afghanistan, small arms trafficking is rampant, making decentralised Balochi armed independence groups a serious threat to regional peace. But government inaction and suppression has led to the marginalisation of the populace, having the highest illiteracy rate and inequalities in the country. They are grossly underrepresented in the bureaucracy, government as well as the military. It is also contended by some that only two per cent of the earnings from Gwadar, which has been in the limelight for some time, will benefit the Balochis, while the rest will be shared by the Chinese and the federal government.<sup>2</sup>

One would recall that the fifth surge of Balochi movement initiated in 2005 was triggered after the rape of a Balochi doctor in Sui, Balochistan by someone from the Pakistani Army, who was never arrested. The attempted cover up triggered large scale violence against the Defence Security Guards and the Frontier Constabulary.<sup>3</sup> At that time, the Pakistani authorities presented the conflict as the creation of greedy *Sardars*, local tribal leaders fighting for a greater share of provincial resources, who opposed development in order to preserve their own power, the outdated relic of a feudal system.<sup>4</sup> Today, they are squarely blaming it on international intelligence agencies, especially those from India in providing assistance to the agitation and the insurgency.

### **Pakistan's Policy of Suppression and Amblyopic Vision**

Political analysts have stated that "Pakistani security establishment proved relatively efficient in destroying Baloch social structures, but it has been unable to impose its writ on the province, much less propose viable alternative structures. Meanwhile, the security establishment has exacerbated ethnic tensions. Insurgents have begun to attack ordinary citizens of non-Baloch ethnic background, not just Pakistan's federal agencies, and allegedly,

the security establishment has lost control of its radical proxy groups.”<sup>5</sup> Presently, most of the local officials fear that their phones are being tapped by Pakistani intelligence,<sup>6</sup> and the number of assassins on bikes has been on the rise, where the targets are not random, but judged on the basis of how active they are in the Balochistan movement. If the assassination of Sabeen Mahmud is taken as a case, then many analysts and human rights activists clearly accept the role of the ISI in silencing Mahmud.<sup>7</sup> It had been clearly stated that “Baloch political and human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and student leaders are among those, who have been targeted for enforced disappearance, abduction, arbitrary arrest and torture and other ill-treatments. The violence takes place in the context of increasing political unrest and Pakistani military operations in Balochistan.”<sup>8</sup>

Over the years, the government’s repressive tactics in Balochistan has changed.<sup>9</sup> Military operations were stopped, but across the province, people were abducted, killed and their bodies abandoned; such acts were widely referred to as “kill and-dump” operations. These operations are attempts to keep the province under control and reinforce the power of the state. The exact number of enforced disappearances perpetrated in Balochistan by the Pakistani military is unknown. Baloch nationalists claim that there are “thousands” of such cases. In 2008, the Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, mentioned at least 1,100 victims, but in January 2011, Balochistan Home Minister, Zafrullah Zehri, said that only 55 persons were missing.<sup>10</sup> An editorial dated September 11, 2012 in the Express Tribune indicated that the bodies of 57 missing persons had been found since January 2012. However, other papers mention the figure of over 100 for the same period. In its August 2012 report, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan indicated that it had verified 198 cases of enforced disappearances in Balochistan between January 2000 and May 12, 2012, and 57 bodies of missing persons were found in Balochistan in 2012 alone.<sup>11</sup>

Although the military and intelligence agencies refute such accusations, the Pakistani press also reports the use of death squads, composed of Baloch guns-for-hire, resembling the Al Shams and Al Badr militias that the Pakistani military employed during the Bangladesh war.<sup>12</sup> The intelligence agencies allegedly created the death squads operating in Balochistan today to counter the Marris, Mengals, and Bugtis by creating confusion and disrupting their activities.

They would possibly even replace tribal leaders with representatives of a Baloch nationalism that would become totally subservient to Islamabad.<sup>13</sup>

The Interior Minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan made it clear in a statement in Sindh recently when he said that since June 2014, more than 10,000 intelligence-based operations had been carried out, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, in which some 36,000 persons accused of serious crimes, including terrorism and extremism, were arrested and these operations were conducted jointly by the police and other civil forces.<sup>14</sup> The government agencies that Human Rights Watch found to be the most involved in enforced disappearances in Balochistan are Military Intelligence (MI), the Frontier Corps (FC) and, to a lesser extent, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB).<sup>15</sup>

The prince of the defunct Kalat state and chief of the Baloch Rabita Ittefaq Tehreek, Prince Mohyuddin Baloch stated, "Today we see use of force, mutilated bodies dumped in deserted places, even I could have got killed, but let me make it clear that at present Baloch people are not at war, but are staging protests and even those, who have climbed to mountain tops are not engaged in fighting."<sup>16</sup> Some senior Balochi leaders have clearly stated that if the Pakistani government fails to meet the aspirations of the Balochi people by December 2015, there is a chance that the situation might go fully out of control.<sup>17</sup>

### **Allegations against Indian Intelligence Agencies**

It is certainly a strange fact that allegations are being made by senior Pakistani army and political leadership that Indian Intelligence Agencies are directly involved in the killing and disappearances of those activists, who have been blaming the Pakistani government for using illegal force; overlooking and suppressing the needs of the citizens of the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; and throttling a legitimate insurgency movement against the Pakistani government. When activists made attempts to organise peaceful gatherings in Karachi, the law enforcement agencies banned such gatherings on the ground of threat to security, which was not clarified.

Pakistani security establishment's Indo-phobia has become visible once more, when India is making a serious attempt to extend and strengthen bilateral relations with its immediate and

extended neighbourhood in Asia. Starting from government officials, ministers, as well as ex military generals, Pakistan has made it an agenda to blame India in every possible way.<sup>18</sup> Rather than adapting policies that totally sideline the development of Balochistan and its people, which might have brought the province into the process of serious dialogue, they continue following the policy of isolating the Balochis and squeezing out as much resources from the province as possible.

General Raheel Sharif has steadfastly taken a stand against advancing any peace brokerage with India. Losing his brother in the 1971 war, who remains to be the only recipient of both the Sitara-e-Jurat and Nishan-e-Haider, he has maintained an anti-Indian stand from the very beginning. He has also been an overt supporter of the various extremist and violent groups functioning within Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>19</sup> Though he was instrumental in giving a final shape to Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*, he too has started making direct allegations against Indian intelligence organisations.<sup>20</sup>

The Pakistani establishment has argued many times that the ongoing insurgency could not have continued without the tacit support of foreign governments. The Baloch Republican Army (BRA) is composed of fighters from the Bugti tribe. Nawab Akbar Bugti or the 'Tiger of Balochistan' himself belonged to this community, who was one of the main protagonists of fighting for the Balochi identity. He was assassinated by the Pakistani security forces while the then Governor of Balochistan stated that 'the government had no intention of harming Nawab Bugti as he was a respected figure and too old to be punished'.<sup>21</sup> It has been alleged that Bramdagh Bugti, the grandson of Nawab Bugti, chief of the Balochistan Republican Party, is getting covert support from Indian intelligence agencies. General Musharraf stated clearly that "I know that they finance him, they give him weapons to create trouble and stab us in the back in Balochistan."<sup>22</sup>

It has been alleged that the BRA was created with the help of external governments, particularly Afghanistan. The Afghan government, it is argued, offered safe havens to the BRA leadership; helped in arming and training the militants; and provided money for the fifty BRA camps within Balochistan.<sup>23</sup> The Chief Minister in Balochistan, in 2014, declared that India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) sponsors low-intensity conflict within the province by

operating forty training camps for militant operations. However, not a single Indian agent has been arrested in the province, and India does not share a contiguous land border with Balochistan, making it unlikely that RAW supplied the militants with smuggled heavy weapons.<sup>24</sup>

However, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif asked Afghan authorities to prevent RAW from creating unrest in Pakistan. Earlier, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, also told reporters after a function that RAW was involved in creating unrest in Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> The assertiveness that has been adopted by the Pakistani government shows the Pakistani army's growing willingness to be seen as dictating the country's foreign and national security policies. It also indicates toughening of Pakistan's position against India at a time, when the Pakistani army is emerging as one of the chief guarantors of peace in Afghanistan in partnership with China, while India is widening its sphere of influence, strengthening bonds with countries beyond its usual gamut of bilateral relations.<sup>26</sup>

However, in respect of the problem of insurgency in Balochistan, there does not seem to be an easy resolution. Media analysts in Pakistan, themselves, state that the civilian as well as military leaderships in Pakistan have no clear vision regarding terrorism. "The civ-mil leaderships are now on the same page... regarding terrorism. Unfortunately, that same page seemingly is a blank page or at least an abbreviated one, as a clear, unified response remains elusive."<sup>27</sup> The ethno-nationalist insurgency will continue in the future, as Pakistan has demonstrated little interest in addressing the conflict's underlying root causes and, in all probability, it will continue to pursue eradicating Baloch Nationalism in all its forms.<sup>28</sup>

With the ongoing suppression of Balochi interests and aspirations, draining their economic resources without including the indigenous people of the province in the regional economic developmental activities that the nation is pursuing and blaming international and regional intelligence agencies for the agitation, the Baloch movement will deepen the fissures within the Pakistani community, rather than unifying an already fledgling nation.

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*Disclaimer: Views expressed are of author and do not reflect the views of the Council.*

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> “The Bitterest of Agonies”, Amnesty International, Security with Human Rights, September 2011, p. 2, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/.../asa330102011en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “Balochistan 2012”, Country Indicators for Foreign Policy, Carleton University, The Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, 2012, <http://www4.carleton.ca/cifp/app/serve.php/1397.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas D Kristof, “Another Face of Terror”, Op Ed, *The New York Times*, July 31, 2005, [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/opinion/31kristof.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/opinion/31kristof.html?_r=0)

<sup>4</sup> Frederic Grare, “Balochistan: The State Versus the Nation”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, South Asia, April 2013, p. 3, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/balochistan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Samira Shackle, “The Secret War in Balochistan”, *New Statesman*, January 29, 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2013/01/secret-war-balochistan>.

<sup>7</sup> Mugdha Variyar, “Was Sabeen Mahmud, Activist Shot Dead in Pakistan under ISI Watch for Balochistan Issue?”, *International Business Times*, April 25, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/was-sabeen-mahmud-activist-shot-dead-pakistan-under-isi-watch-balochistan-issue-630351>.

<sup>8</sup> The Bitterest of Agonies”, Amnesty International, Op. Cit. p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Mir Mohammed Ali Taipur, “Winning the Battle of Algiers,” *Daily Times*, April 25, 2010, <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/editorial/25-Apr-2010/analysis-winning-the-battle-of-algiers-mir-mohammad-ali-taipur>.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, “We Can Torture, Kill, or Keep You for Years: Enforced Disappearances by Pakistan Security Forces in Balochistan”, Pakistan, July 2011, 12, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/pakistan0711WebInside.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “Hopes, Fears and Alienation in Balochistan”, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Report of an HRCP fact-finding mission (May 15-19, 2012), Lahore, pp. 59-71, <http://hrqp-web.org/hrqpweb/wp-content/pdf/ff/12.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Akram, “Baloch Leaders Made Their Points Well. Is Anyone Listening?” *Dawn*, September 28, 2012

<sup>13</sup> Frederic Grare, Op. Cit. p. 14

<sup>14</sup> “Govt Very Close to Arresting Safoora Goth Culprits: Nisar”, *Daily Times Pakistan*, May 19, 2015, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/19-May-2015/govt-very-close-to-arresting-safoora-goth-culprits-nisar>.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, Op. Cit, p.25

<sup>16</sup> “Govt may Soon Lose all Control over Balochistan”, *Dawn*, February 27, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1166129>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Pakistan Army 'Caught India by Throat' During Kargil War: Pervez Musharraf”, *The Economic Times*.

<sup>19</sup> Niaz Murtaza, “A Flaileed State”, *Dawn*, May 17, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1182400>.

<sup>20</sup> “Raw Whipping Up Terrorism In Pakistan: Gen Raheel”, *Pakistan Observer*, May 06, 2015, <http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=263275>.

<sup>21</sup> “Pakistan: The Worsening Conflict in Balochistan”, International Crisis Group, Asia Report, No 119, September 14, 2006, p 23.

<sup>22</sup> “Musharraf Blames RAW for Unrest in Balochistan”, *NDTV*, November 27, 2010, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/musharraf-blames-raw-for-unrest-in-balochistan-440413>.

<sup>23</sup> B. Muhammad, “Dynamics of the Nationalist Insurgency in the Balochistan Province of Pakistan”, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, 2014, p. 69, [http://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/puty\\_miru/2014/April/06BilalBeludzhan](http://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/puty_miru/2014/April/06BilalBeludzhan).

<sup>24</sup> A Bansal, “Factors Leading to Insurgency in Balochistan”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 19, issue 2, 2008, pp. 182-200.

<sup>25</sup> “RAW must not Use Afghan Territory against Pakistan, Asks Pak Foreign Ministry”, *Business Standard*, May 15, 2015, <http://www.business-standard.com/video-gallery/world/raw-must-not-use-afghan-territory-against-pakistan-asks-pak-foreign-ministry-20756.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> M Ilyas Khan, “What Lies behind Pakistani Charges of Indian Terrorism”, *BBC News*,

<sup>27</sup> Niaz Murtaza, “A Flaileed State”, *Dawn*, May 17, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1182400>.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel J. Lebowitz, “Why has the Ethno-Nationalist Insurgency in Balochistan Endured for 66 Years?”, *Geostrategic Forecasting*, <http://www.geostrategicforecasting.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Balochistan.pdf>.