



The Missing Persons of Balochistan in Pakistan

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The assassination of leading human rights activist Sabeen Mahmud has brought forth a strange predicament for the Pakistani government. She was killed by armed gunmen on bikes while she was returning home after organising a seminar on human rights abuses in Balochistan. She worked along with Mama Qadeer, father of a missing Balochi, Jalil Reki; Farzana Majeed, sister of a missing Balochi, Zakeer Majeed; and many thousand others, who are fighting to trace the whereabouts of the missing Balochis, which the Pakistani government, sadly, denies to accept; the fight is far from being over.

The issue of Baloch identity is not something that has been superimposed on Pakistani politics, but it is ingrained in it from the time of the creation of the nation, which has periodically turned violent. It has taken various shapes and forms and has been suppressed by the state, whether under a military ruler or a democratic government. Baloch resistance found voice in such movements and activism, which presently is in the fifth phase and is underlined by issues related to forceful tribal divisions, the Baloch-Pashtun divide, marginalization by Punjabi interests and economic oppression.ⁱ

The year started with the discovery of a mass grave in the province, with bodies decomposed beyond recognition.ⁱⁱ Finding such bodies has become common as the

disappearances keep on happening throughout the province. Balochistan represents an unending narrative of incessant conflicts. The long standing resentments, dating back to its merger with Pakistan, have led to the present crisis in the province. The issues and grievances, which gave rise to previous conflicts and present crisis, relate to the demands and aspirations about the economic, ethnic and political rights of and for the people of the province.ⁱⁱⁱ

As per Mohammad Ali Talpur, a senior Baloch rights activist, after the death of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, who was the principal architect, along with Mir Balach Marri, of forging peace in the region, in August 2006, resistance groups strove to preserve the Baloch identity and resist aggression. These included the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA); Dr. Allah Nazar's Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and the Baloch Republican Army (BRA). There was cooperation amongst the three organisations, which created significant trouble for the Pakistani state, but with the death of Balach Marri, the head of BLA, the cooperation between the three withered out.^{iv}

Talpur has mentioned that the Pakistani government adopted a four pronged approach for tackling the rising Baloch insurgency. They adopted covert force to 'physically eliminate actual or suspected Baloch activists, thereby initiating the 'dirty war' against the Baloch. Secondly, they started creating fissures within the existing factions, which were already unstable under new leaders and new recruits. The government also started organising and funding death squads like those of Shafiq Mengal to counter the Baloch nationalists. And lastly, they started sponsoring madrassas (Islamic seminaries) to alter the social and religious fabric of the traditionally secular Baloch society.^v With the influx of money and brute force, cohesion amongst the various organisations working for Balochi nationalism faded away. Social media was effectively used to create confusion and disenchantment through spreading misinformation.^{vi}

During this period of time, the government squarely blamed foreign intelligence agencies for the extra judicial killings and disappearances. Mama Qadeer, while attending a

conference in Karachi University, clearly stated that “India is being more than ever before blamed for supporting us. But where is the evidence to prove their allegations?”^{vii}

The Pakistan Army has taken a serious stand in blaming Indian intelligence agency “in whipping up terrorism in Pakistan”.^{viii} Raheel Sharif, without naming RAW, warned “foreign governments and intelligence agencies” against their involvement in the insurgency in Balochistan.^{ix} As per the Pakistani military, ‘besides Balochistan, RAW’s footprints have been found in FATA and Karachi. Confessional statements of some criminals arrested recently point towards RAW’s growing activities’.^x The Foreign Office had also briefed the Indian media as well as the visiting Indian Foreign Secretary on March 2015, about Indian involvement in Balochistan and FATA. But as all such allegations and accusations are without any base or justifiable proof, Pakistan has been blaming and accusing India for every woe, malady and weak governance that it faced from its genesis.

One should not forget the issue of ‘missing Pakistanis’ over which Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry clashed with President Musharraf, which forced the Chief Justice to challenge the election process of the President, which led to the former’s removal; and later, Chaudhry’s reinstatement and Musharraf’s resignation. If the situation is not kept within control, the civilian as well as the military authorities might face protests from the civil society. That may be the reason why there are so many disappearances happening related to those, who are fighting for the rights of the missing Balochis. Seminars and conferences are being cancelled; peaceful gatherings and protests organised by students and members of the civil society are being moved and cancelled due to concerns with regard to the maintenance of law and order and ban on such activities under 144 CrPC and the like.^{xi}

Recently, a statement made by the Baloch Chief Minister, Abdul Malik Baloch, made it clear that the government has failed to trace the missing persons, which has created a furore in the province and beyond.^{xii} Though a decade has passed since the fifth Baloch insurgency began, there has been no respite from the misunderstanding and suspicion between the federal government and the insurgents and the Baloch government has

miserably failed to address the issues, which have angered the common masses. He also made it tacitly clear that whatever developmental work is going on or will be carried out in the future in Gwadar, must be disclosed publicly to and approved by the local populace. Only then, all such developmental work will have long term benefits.^{xiii} The insurgency is not encapsulated within the tribal hamlets, but has moved into the swathe of middle class, non-traditional Baloch areas, who communicate on social media platforms and are visible in university campuses.

Mutilated bodies surface now and then near areas in and around Gwadar, which strengthen the conviction of the activists' claims about systematic cleansing and suppression through extra judicial disappearances and killings.^{xiv} As the economic and security decisions of the region are mutually shared by the civilian led federal government and army led security establishment, there is practically no role for the provincial government so as to address the issues that are creating significant fissures and frictions within the community. Since the proposed economic trade routes and the development of the Gwadar port have sidelined the indigenous populace entirely, economically as well as politically, there is serious discontent among them. They feel that the benefits of the projects as well as the forthcoming economic corridor have sidelined the needs and necessities of the province, making them view the development projects as a potential threat to their economic interests and security.

Asad Umar of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) posed a pertinent question to the federal government, which they were not able to reply, when he stated, "On one side, you claim that the CPEC is a national project, but you have never invited provincial governments, particularly the PTI-ruled KP, whereas the heads of private companies have been actively engaged throughout the process."^{xv}

The government has to recognise the issues that lie at the core of the conflict regarding the Balochis and the state. Instead of terming activists as miscreants, terrorists or agents of international intelligence organisations, working against the interests of Pakistan, they should be invited for a joint dialogue so that they could be brought in the

loop of any proposed developmental activity that the government has thought about for the province. The government also has to fully abandon the policy of forced kidnappings and disappearances, which have been taking place for more than a decade.^{xvi} The Pakistani government needs to take earnest and necessary measures to bring to justice those, who continue to target and kill Baloch activists, and it should abide by and ratify international covenants aimed at protecting the rights of populations.^{xvii}

The government should also initiate talks regarding the Baloch National question, even if it does not bring forth any immediate resolution, as dialogue remains to be the only avenue through which confidence amongst both the parties can be achieved. Instead of walking on the path of blaming everyone around, the government should take the responsibility of the province of Balochistan, making a sincere attempt at having a uniform development package for all; making the people of the province party in the development projects that have been thought of, and giving them ample opportunity to air their grievances and concerns.

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

ⁱ Mickey Kupecz, "Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency: History, Conflict Drivers, and Regional Implications", *International Affairs Review*, Volume XX, Number 3, Spring 2012, p. 96.

ⁱⁱ Shehzad Baloch, "As Operation Begins, Hazaras Bury Blast Victims", *The Express Tribune* January 25, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/663148/as-operation-begins-hazaras-bury-blast-victims/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Balochistan: Problems and Solutions", Vion21: Global Vision-Local Action, <http://www.portmir.org.uk/assets/pdfs/balochistan--problems--solutions.pdf>.

^{iv} Mir Mohammad Ali Talpur, "Is This the End?", January 04, 2015, *Daily Times*, Pakistan, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/04-Jan-2015/is-this-the-end>.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Maleeha Hamid Siddiqui, "Seminar on Balochistan missing persons held at KU despite curbs and fears", *Dawn*, May 7, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1180406>.

^{viii} Baqir Sajjad Syed, "RAW Instigating Terrorism, Says Army", *Dawn*, May 8, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1180243>.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} "No Sit-ins at Teen Talwar", *Daily Times*, May 11, 2015, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/sindh/08-May-2015/no-sit-ins-at-teen-talwar>.

^{xii} "Missing Persons", Editorial, *Dawn*, May 11, 2015,

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^{xiii} Peerzada Salman, "Balochistan CM Concedes Failure in Tracing 'Missing' Persons", *Dawn*, May 10, 2015,

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^{xiv} "Mutilated Body Found", *Dawn*, May 9, 2015,

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^{xv} Khawar Ghumman, "Special Committee to Oversee CPEC Project", *Dawn*, May 14, 2015,

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1181864/special-committee-to-oversee-cpec-project>

^{xvi} Malik Siraj Akbar, "Pakistani Army Involved in Baloch Kidnappings", *Deutsche Welle* (DW), December 6, 2013,

<http://www.dw.de/pakistani-army-involved-in-baloch-kidnappings/a-17275503>.

^{xvii} "What Future for Balochistan? Global and Regional Challenges", UNPO Report, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), February 2013, Hague, p. 23, <http://unpo.org/downloads/773.pdf>.