

The Dynamics of Baloch Ethno-National Conflicts within the Federation of Pakistan (1948-2012)

Gulawar Khan^{*}, Jalal Faiz[†], Amir Jan[‡]

Abstract:

This paper aims to explore the history of the Baloch ethno-national conflict within the Pakistani federation and its evolving trends over the time. It further examines the strategies of the state in resolving the conflict within the federation of Pakistan. This paper also deliberates whether the ongoing conflict (2002 to date) is about power sharing, self-determination, complete independence, or the failure of the state to address the Baloch problem within the parameters of federation. The paper is qualitative in nature which investigated and analysed different facts and events that displayed flaws in the Pakistani federation which has been unsuccessful to bridge the political differences of the Baloch within the federal structure of Pakistan.

Keywords: Balochistan, federation of Pakistan, ethno-national movement, and conflict.

Introduction:

Pakistan, since its inception, choose federalism as a form of government to run the affairs of the nascent country. Initially, it included the areas of the present-day Punjab, Sindh, North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the British Balochistan, and East Bengal. Later, in 1948 the princely state of Kalat including its feudatories (Kharan, Lasbela and Makran) were also acceded to Pakistan.

The objective behind embracing federalism was to keep united the diverse population that fall into the Pakistan's territorial boundaries. Majority of the scholars on federalism are of the opinion that it is the concept of federalism that keeps united a diverse

* Associate Professor, Department of Political Studies, Faculty of Management & Social Science, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water & Marine Science (LUAWMS), Uthal, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: khan_aw@hotmail.com

† Associate Professor/Pro Vice Chancellor
Department of Political Studies, Faculty of Management & Social Science, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water & Marine Science (LUAWMS), Uthal, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: pvc@luawms.edu.pk and jalalfaiz@yahoo.com

‡ Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management & Social Science, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water & Marine Science (LUAWMS), Uthal, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: amirluawms@gmail.com

population in a single larger whole for the purposes to safeguard themselves from external military threats and to achieve greater economic opportunities (Nickel & Kymlicka, 1996 and Watts, 1966). However, federalism in Pakistan never experienced effectiveness since it has been centralized in nature and therefore, its Eastern part separated in December 1971 and became sovereign Bangladesh. Yet, the level of dissatisfaction did not end with the disintegration of the country but rather the situation is awful because the recent years show that the ethnic Baloch of Balochistan are dissatisfied with the federation of Pakistan and pursuing to get maximum provincial autonomy, self-determination and/or separation from Pakistan.

Pakistan has witnessed five conflicts (1948, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 2002 to date) of the ethno-Baloch nationalists against the excesses of the federation (Cohen, 2005). Each conflict was of different nature and magnitude. To encounter these revolts/conflicts, the federation of Pakistan always prefer to use coercive measures to suppress these conflicts. The state machinery never tried to resolve the Baloch issue within the context of federalism. The next part of the paper covers the nature of conflict(s), its changing pattern, impact of each conflict over the next ones and the reactions of the state of Pakistan towards each conflict.

The First Phase of the Conflict and Its Significance in the Development of Baloch Ethno-nationalist movement

When the ruler of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan signed an agreement to accede to Pakistan on 27th March 1948, his younger brother, Prince Abdul Karim revolted against Ahmed Yar Khan's decision on the grounds that the agreement is signed by the Khan under coercion (Khan, 2014). In fact, the Khan was reluctant to become part of Pakistan, but political circumstances, regional and international demands compelled him to merge Kalat with Pakistan.

The Indian Office Records disclose that the Prince revolted against the agreement of accession and went to Afghanistan along with his men to undo the merger agreement (Mss Eur D971/2 cited in Khan, 2014). According to Harrison (1981) the Prince issued a statement wherein he called upon the Baloch masses to rejected the merger agreement. In the same proclamation, he also demanded fresh talks on the merger of Kalat into Pakistan. Though, the state machinery of Pakistan was not ready to listen to such demands of the Prince but rather compel the Khan to bring his brother down from the mountains to treat him as per law (Khan, 2014). The Prince and his fellows were trying to get support from Iran and Afghanistan. However, they failed to get any support from the neighbouring countries. Finally, the disillusioned Prince, along with his fellows, came to Kalat in July

1948. The Prince and his men were arrested by the Pakistani and Kalat's state forces (Breseeg, 2004). Later, they were sentenced various punishment by a special *Jirga* at Kalat (Kutty, 2009).

Since then, the federation and its bureaucracy had a suspicious eye on the Baloch and considered them hostile and anti-Pakistani. Though, the Baloch have always tried to adjust themselves within the constitutional framework of Pakistan. It is evident from the fact that when the Prince and his close aide, Mohammad Hussain were release from Jail, they formed a political party; *Ustaman Gal* (National Party). The aims of this party were: 1) To get a separate province for the Baloch and 2) to make the federation of Pakistan more representative and accommodative for the ethnic minorities with equal rights (Janmahmad, 1989). Notwithstanding, such federal demands of the National Party were ignored, and the federal government converted western part of Pakistan as One Unit against east Bengal. This move further annoyed the Baloch. The One Unit Scheme (OUS) was not only opposed by the Baloch but equally agitated by the ethnic Pashtuns, Sindhis, and the Bengalis (Khan, 2014). They all stood for the abolition of OUS wherein Ahmed Yar Khan was in the forefront agitating the scheme. Finally, but much later Balochistan was granted a status of a province in 1970s.

The Dynamics of the Second Conflict (1958 to 1960s)

With the merger of Kalat with the Pakistani federation, the Khan lost all his powers and status as Khan/ruler of the Kalat Confederacy. Therefore, to make the Khan happy, the government of Pakistan created Balochistan State Union (BSU) in April 1952 wherein the Khan was awarded a lifelong title as *Khan-e-Azam*, (the Great Khan) of the BSU (Faiz, 2015).

However, after few years West Pakistan including Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, British Balochistan, and the BSU were merged into OUS in 1955. The central government did not take into confidence the Khan and other minority groups such as Pashtuns while converting West Pakistan into one unit. Thus, this move not only ended the BSU, but it also relegated the Khan to an average citizen. Therefore, the Khan, along with other prominent political figures, started a campaign to undo the OUS but all such campaigns remained futile (Mazari, 1999).

According to Mazari (1999) the Khan was accused in pulling out Kalat from the Pakistani federation with the possible support from Shah of Iran on the condition of merging Kalat with Iran as an autonomous region. Likewise, Khan (2014) states that the Khan was asked by the president, Sikandar Mirza to support Pakistan economically and in exchange he (the president) would re-establish

BSU. However, Hasil Khan (late) and Prince Musa Jan opined that Sikandar Mirza was trying to create a situation where he could impose Martial Law on the pretext that the Baloch leadership might split Balochistan from Pakistan (Mir, 2012). Thus, all assumptions turned true and the forces of Pakistan entered Kalat and arrest the Khan on charges of sedition on October 5th, 1957 wherein some of his close associates were also killed (Ahmad, 1992).

The attack on the residence of the Khan was termed as an insult to the Baloch honour and therefore, Nawab Nauroz Khan (aged 90) revolted against the state of Pakistan to restore the Baloch honour. He led a fighting force of some 1000 tribesmen in the mountains around Khuzdar (Ahmad, 1992). Nauraz's demands were: 1) To release the Khan 2) To respect the tribal culture and values and 3) To roll back the OUS (Mazari, 1999). Though, the central authorities instead of paying attention to Nauroz's demands, applied suppressive attitude wherein his residence was raised to ground. Nauroz Khan was arrested and awarded life time imprisonment and some of his comrades were hanged on the charges of treason (Mazari, 1999). Instead of addressing the concerns of Nawab Nauroz Khan within the parameters of federation, the state authorities decided to use military options that further ignited sentiments of the Baloch.

Even so, the Baloch leadership including Nawab Khair Bakhsh and Sardar Attaullah took part in 1960s election and were elected as members of the National Assembly (Kutty, 2009). They both struggled to ensure equal rights for the Baloch within the constitutional framework of Pakistan. Although, they were painted as traitors and hostile towards Pakistan by General Ayub Khan's regime (Khan, 2014).

The Motives Behind the Third Phase of the Conflict

The third conflict was the continuation of the second phase as General Ayub Khan adopted oppressive policies towards Balochistan. According to Baluch (1975), on the eve of Ayub Khan's visit to Quetta in August 1962, the Baloch leadership informed the General to restrain from using military means to resolve the Baloch issue. However, the military general was suspicious of the Baloch leadership and therefore, he removed Attaullah Mengal, Akbar Khan Bugti and Khair Bakhsh Marri from their hereditary titles as Nawabs/Sardars and nominated other government oriented Baloch as new Nawabs/Sardars in their places (Kutty, 2009). Thus, the Mengal, Bugti and Marri tribes joined Sher Muhammad Marri, Ali Muhammad Mengal and Mewa Khan Bugti to fight against the military regime of Ayub Khan (Kutty, 2009). They formed a loose guerrilla organization named as *Pararis* (rebels) in 1963. The rebels were attacking the military personnel,

government installations, and other important places around Balochistan (Kutty, 2009). Sher Muhammad Marri, the prime leader of the rebel's organization once said that:

“In Pakistan, there are four main nationalities i.e. the Sindhis, the Baloch, the Pashtuns, and the Punjabis. Each has its own national identity, culture, and history. Therefore, the ruling elite would have to accept this fact and would have to allow the smaller provinces to enjoy full autonomy and equal share in Central Government” (Junejo, 2010).

The tension between the rebels and government of Pakistan continued till 1969 and ended when Yahya Khan roll back the OUS (Kutty, 2009) and declared Balochistan as a province in 1970. This move of the president was welcomed by the Baloch leadership including the Nawabs/Sardars of Mari, Bugti, and Mengal tribes respectively (Khan, 2014).

The Third Phase of the Conflict and Federation of Pakistan (1973 to 1977)

The first ever general elections were held in 1970. All the prominent Baloch leaders participated in the elections from the platform of National Awami Party (NAP) wherein they won three out of five seats of the National Assembly. Out of the two seats, one clinched by *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI), Maulvi Abdul Haq and the other was reserved for women on which Jennifer Musa of NAP was elected. NAP along with JUI formed coalition governments in Balochistan and KPK. Attaullah Mengal was designated as Chief Minister of Balochistan and Ghous Bakhsh was appointed as the Governor of Balochistan (Khan, 2014).

The NAP was committed to bring prosperity and development to the province of Balochistan. It was a popular party of that time. However, the federal government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has accused the NAP leadership with anti-state allegations (Kutty, 2009). Thus, he dissolved the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan in February 1973 though, it was enjoying the support of majority in the house. He also termed NAP unlawful political party and its key leaders including Sardar Attaullah, Nawab Khair Bakhsh, Ghous Bakhsh, Wali Khan and Ajmal Khan etcetera were arrested on the charges of treason. Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was appointed as the Governor of Balochistan who later resigned in October, 1973 (Siddiqi, 2012).

The dissolution of the NAP government and the arrest of the key leaders sparked the third phase of the conflict. This time the conflict was more severe and bloodiest in nature as compared to the

past ones (Kutty, 2009). It claimed around 3300 Pakistani military personnel and 5300 Baloch guerrillas' lives (Harrison, 1981).

In meanwhile, Bhutto was removed from power via military coup d'état of General Zia-ul-Haq. He (Zia-ul-Haq) pacified the Baloch and released all the arrested NAP leaders and announced general amnesty for those who were caught by Bhutto's government. Though, the Baloch nationalists parted their ways wherein Ghous Baksh stood firm against the martial law while Mengal left for London into self-imposed exile who later came to Pakistan in 1990s and established his own political party, Balochistan National Party-Mengal. Khair Bakhsh Mari left Pakistan's politics forever and settled in Afghanistan who later came to Pakistan but with the ideology of an independent Balochistan until his death in June 2014 (Khan, 2014).

Nawab Khair Bakhsh (late) believed that safeguarding Baloch rights within the constitutional framework of Pakistan is impossible owing to the majoritarian character of one ethnic group in state institutions. He was critical of those who were/are believing in securing the Baloch rights within Pakistan.

Assimilation in Federation and the Politics of Pragmatism: A New Trend in Baloch Politics (1977 To 1999):

From 1977 to 1999, the politics of Balochistan remained extremely calm for four reasons, which are: 1) The Baloch Sardars/Nawabs imposed self-exile on foreign territories, 2) The Marri rebels remained calm and were busy in organizing themselves in Afghanistan for future assaults, 3) The Zia regime along with the support of Saudi Arabia and United States established Madrasas around Balochistan to promote Islamization in Balochistan and later to use the people against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and 4) The political realities of Balochistan remained changed as every political figure of Balochistan confined himself to his personal political interests and parties. This era seen the formation of various political parties in Balochistan such as Pakistan National Party (PNP), National Youth Movement (BNYM), *Jamhoori Wattan Party* (JWP) and Balochistan National Party - Mengal (BNP-M) and many more.

Thus, the political engineering and political realignment in Balochistan divided the Baloch leadership which ultimately undermined the Baloch ethno-national movement. This period witnessed divisions, alliances, and factionalism in Balochistan (Talbot, 2002). Furthermore, history tells us that the Baloch have remained unable to entertain their political affairs the way they want because of the undue interference of the central government into the provincial matters. For example, despite having 2/3rd majority in the house, Sardar Attaullah Mengal's government was dissolved in 1973.

Likewise, Akbar Bugti and Akhtar Mengal ruled Balochistan for two and one year(s) respectively. They did not complete their tenure owing to the weak federal structure and the clandestine role of the security agencies in Balochistan (Majeed & Hashmi, 2014).

The Rise of the Current Baloch Conflict and Its Multidirectional Aspects (2000 to Date)

The Baloch nationalist political parties took part in the election held in 2002 and were determined to work within the federation of Pakistan to safeguard the Baloch rights. Their political participation was meant to ensure provincial autonomy and control over their natural resources. Though, they feared that establishment of cantonments in parts of Balochistan would mean nothing but to have firm control over the resources of Balochistan. Furthermore, apprehensions were there that mega projects in Gwadar would change the demographic realities where the Baloch would be converted into minority in their own land (Bansal, 2008).

However, General Pervez Musharraf paid no heed to Baloch concerns and grievances and kept on going to carry on with his mega projects. Thus, the fifth phase of the Baloch conflict resulted because of General Musharraf approach and policies towards Balochistan. Though, the rape of Dr. Shazia Khalid became the immediate cause which opened the chapter of the fifth conflict of the Baloch with federal Pakistan.

Dr. Shazia's rape was the violation of Baloch traditions and thus, Akbar Bugti demanded the arrest of the accused officer (Khan, 2014) but nothing happened. Thus, attacks on government installations, sui Gas facility and other military personnel by the Bugti tribe created serious rift between Musharraf and Nawab Bugti.

To halt the skirmishes, a committee was formed under the headship of Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain to start political negotiations with the Nawab of Bugtis. The committee reached to a solution and presented its recommendations in the National Assembly in May 2005. However, all such efforts were pointless because the General decided to settle Baluchistan's issue with coercive measures (Fredric, 2013). Owing to the decision of the General, Nawab Bugti went to mountain to fight against Pakistan's army where he was killed on August 26th, 2006. This conflict became so severe that it engulfed the entire Balochistan including Makran division which has never been part of any conflict in the past. During this conflict, the voices of separation from Pakistan also raised publicly while such voices never been heard in the past conflicts.

Since 2006, the soil of Balochistan has been experiencing bomb blasts, target killings, abduction, and insecurity. Baloch youths have been reported to have joined the Baloch separatist groups to set free Balochistan. Those segments of Baloch nationalists who believed in federal politics have been either under attack by the separatists or under criticism by the common public in Balochistan. The federalist political parties such as Balochistan National Party (Mengal) and National Party of Hasil Khan (late) believe in federal politics and they opine that they could safeguard Baloch rights within the federal structure of Pakistan.

Keeping in view the above discussion vis-à-vis the different phases of the Baloch conflict with the federation of Pakistan, it is argued that the Baloch conflict is about more autonomous federating units wherein they could have more control over the resources emanating from Balochistan. However, the federation of Pakistan is failed to address the Baloch issues within the federation rather it always preferred to use force instead of adopting democratic resolution of the issues. Notwithstanding, one could object that why Pakistani federation failed/fails to evolve as other federations around the world such as United States, Canada, Sweitzer, and others. The answer to such assertion is simple as other federations are more democratic and thus are successful while the Pakistani state/federation witnessed more than 30 years of martial rule.

Conclusion

The federal government failed to engage the Baloch nationalists regarding the merger of Kalat into the federation of Pakistan otherwise the Prince would not revolt against the merger. Furthermore, the OUS was also a matter of congenial discussion between the federal government and the minority ethnic groups. However, the federal government did not consult the minority groups including the Khan of Kalat. The Revolt of Nawab Nauroz was meant to restore the Baloch honour and undo the OUS.

The third conflict was also meant to transform Pakistan democratically and safeguard the rights of the smaller ethnic groups around Pakistan. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dissolved Baluchistan's Assembly and arrested the key Baloch leaders on charges of treason then a revolt was expected to be launched against the decision of the central government. Finally, when an agreement was about to be done between the Parliamentary Committee of Chaudhury Shujaat Hussain and Akbar Bugti, General Musharraf opted for confrontation. He warned Bugti and his forces that he (Musharraf) would hit them in such a way that they would not know what had hit them. The same was happened and Nawab Bugti was killed in an army operation in 2006.

Thus, the whole Baloch raised their slogans against the killing of Bugti and majority of them sided the separatist elements in Balochistan, although Bugti was the signatory of merger of the British Balochistan into Pakistan and remained a federalist through his life. Thus, it can be argued that it was/is the failure of the Pakistani federation that fuelled the sentiments of separatism among the Baloch.

Furthermore, the meagre representation of the Baloch in the central parliament viewed by the mainstream political parties as insignificant and therefore, they give no weightage to the politics of Balochistan and the Baloch grievances but rather considered them as traitors. Thus, the undue interference of the establishment, extra judicial killings, missing persons' issue, lethargic pace of development, especially in health and education, transport and communication has ignited unrest in the Baloch mindset. The federation of Pakistan is over centralized and non-democratic in nature and it is often derailed by various military take overs since its inception. It needs to be decentralized, more democratic and with no space for further military coups. Only a decentralized and a more democratic federation with just sharing of power and resources can accommodate the grievances of minority ethnic groups including the Baloch.

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