

## Book Review

# Pakistan The Baluchistan Conundrum

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Tilak Devasher, retired special secretary to the Indian government in 2014, is an author of book which is under review: Pakistan The Baluchistan Conundrum. His expertise is in security issues. He has also served as member of National security Advisory Board in India. Book was published on June 30, 2019. The central focus is Baluchistan which is the largest province of Pakistan situated in the western Pakistan where many civil riots have taken place since the formation of Pakistan. In his whole writing, he criticized the attitude of Pakistan's government and army toward Balochs with a conclusion that Baluchistan is suppressed by oppression and power. He also made a comparison with Bangladesh which separated in 1971 from Pakistan. Author highlighted the cultural aspects of Baluchistan, historical crises, issues regarding the Gwadar development and Chinese interests and lastly the Balochs revolts against the authorities. He claims that the discrepancy originated before the formation of Pakistan when Baluchistan was just annexed even though Balochs were reluctant to join Pakistan. The central focus remains on the insurgencies and revolts in Baluchistan and their causes.

Mujhe jang-e-azaadi ka maza maloom hai,

Balochon per zulm ki intheha maloom hai,

Mujhe zindagi bhar Pakistan mein jeenay ki dua na do,

Mujhe Pakistan me in saath(60) saal jeenay ki saza maloom hai

Opening from above couplet shows the critical perspective of author who is may be partially biased toward Pakistan's government. This Book is divided into six

major parts, ancient Civilization, history, the roots of alienation, Chinese gambit, relentless persecution and enduring insurrection. The central emphasis remained on the last four topics.

Baluchistan, which was created in July 1970, remains the most anomalous province of Pakistan, given that it is the largest with a land area that is 44% of the country but has a total population that is less than 6% of the whole nation. Its demographic density — estimated to be 19 per sq km while the national average is 281 — is much lower than the more populous Punjab and Sind provinces.

He claims that Balochs have a sense of disloyalty toward Pakistan as their rights are overlooked albeit it is rich with resources and those resources are being consumed in other provinces like Punjab, Sindh. The Baloch have an acute awareness of this economic exploitation. They also fear that the influx of Punjabi and other non-Baloch populations into their province will turn them into a minority in their own homeland, leaving the loss of their identity. Consequently, Baloch regards themselves as victims of economic exploitation and social marginalization. The construction of Gwadar Port and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has made the situation more aggravated and even the local people are not consulted for their fates.

The first conflict took place when Baluchistan contained a Chief Commissioner's province along with 4 princely states under the British rule. The province's Shahi Jirga and the non-official members of the Quetta Municipality voted for Pakistan as a whole on June 1947. After independence, 3 of the princely states, Las Bela, Makran and Kharan also acceded to Pakistan in 1947. But the ruler of the fourth princely state, the Khan of Kalat, Ahmad Yar Khan, who used to call Jinnah his 'father', declared Kalat's independence when British prime minister himself declared legal.

The further disloyalty was triggered by aggressive involvement of Pak-military in this province which targeted the influential members of the state. The brutal action of military against the Baloch has led the peace to catastrophe. Insurgencies by Baloch nationalists have been fought in 1948, 1958–59, 1962–63 and 1973–1977, with an ongoing low-level insurgency beginning in 2003. Separatist groups include Lashkar-e-Baluchistan and the Baluchistan Liberation, United Front. It has also engendered a realization that the Pakistan Army controls everything in Baluchistan.

Consequently, Balochs are not happy to reconcile and rather they prefer to stand against the violation. Historically, many revolts have taken place against Pakistan's government. The ultimate goal of Baloch remained the freedom from Pakistan as a separate country.

Another major cause is the establishment of the Gwadar megaport, which began in 2002 under the governance of federal. Baloch complain that construction of the port relies mainly on Chinese engineers and labourers, and few Balochs have been employed. On the other hand, there has been little improvement in living standards for Balochs in the area. A parallel town for workers at Gwadar is being built close to the old one to segregate Balochs from the growing influx of outsiders. Government officials illegally sold much of the land around Gwadar, making massive profits at the expense of local Balochs. The Pakistani government responded to the Baloch's increased resentment and resistance to their economic marginalization in Gwadar with a hardline approach, stationing soldiers in the area to secure it from insurgent attacks.

The construction of CPEC project resulted in the employment of a large number of non-Balochs, especially Punjabis, albeit there is abundance of unemployed Baloch technicians and engineers which is also a great concern of revolt.

A further element is the alleged role played by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the break-up of Pakistan. His motive is supposed to be his ambition to rule. By not signing up to Sheikh Mujeeb's Six Points, Bhutto is accused of having paved the way for separation. Of course, this narrative suits the military as it absolves it of the responsibility for a humiliating surrender in Dhaka on Dec 16, 1971.

This, however, is not true of Baluchistan where a low-level insurgency has been simmering for years. Apart from the crucial advantage of geography, there is no country willing to fight for an independent Baluchistan. Regional powers might be aiding nationalist groups, but unlike 1971, there is simply no threat of an invasion from a neighboring country.

After the Bangladesh crises, Pakistan realized that provincial autonomy promotes to disestablishmentarianism. Consequently, even reasonable demands of Balochs are sacrificed and unlikely to be fulfilled even in future. The lesser population is a factor determining the extent of insurgency's influence. However, the costs of the conflict are not borne by the Baloch alone. At present, one is witnessing the fifth

phase of insurgency in Balochistan. Since the time of Pakistans creation, almost every successive generation have risen in revolt, having lost interest in the political system. Each time, they have been suppressed militarily without an attempt made to disclose their issues and giving them an equal opportunity to become stakeholders in Pakistan. As a result, political grievances have festered and erupted whenever the Baloch have thought that they were in a position to assert their rights.

Author claims that Baloch insurgents are not in a position to defeat Pakistan army but their stand against the army has increased the cost for army to sustain the stability in that locality. Pakistan army powered up by the technical weapons can put down the Baloch insurgents completely because of its geo-strategic location where Pakistan has full control.

Devashar concludes that the revolt by Baloch is considered by Pakistan as the law and order problem. It negates the political interest involved which are at the core of this issue. Military tactics only intensify the deep roots of Baloch resentment and alienation. The decision to continue seeking a military solution to a political problem may make sense tactically for Pakistan but it can never be a long term solution. These tactics may be beneficiary for the time being but in long run, the element of disloyalty will grow mature and tendency to defeat Pak army will remain a preference. I recommend this book for those who have interests in research over the causes of revolt in Baluchistan.