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TRANSFORMATION IN BALOCH INSURGENCY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Baloch insurgency has continued throughout the history with Pakistan, sporadically. This insurgency, which started with the accession of Kalat state to Pakistan, is in its fifth phase. The previous insurgencies and the current one are different in many aspects. The earlier insurgencies were controlled and managed mainly by Baloch Sardars, and three main tribal leaders, namely, Marri, Bugti, and Mengal, were held responsible. In contrast, the well-educated middle class mostly manages the contemporary insurgency. It is generally believed that there is a shift in the insurgency movement from the North to the South of Balochistan. Another aspect of the current insurgency is suicide bombing, which has completely changed the face of this insurgency movement. The inclination of well-educated people toward suicide bombing is of great concern for the government and the state. Besides this, the attack on workers associated with the CPEC project is alarming. The use of social media as a platform by insurgents to show their activities and encourage the youth to join the insurgency is a quite disturbing aspect of this transformation. This paper is an analysis of these transformations in the Baloch insurgency.

INTRODUCTION

1. Historical Perspective of the Baloch Problem

After the accession in 1948, the first insurgency movement was started by Abdul Karim Khan, the brother of the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan. He was accompanied by other prominent Baloch leaders, including Gul Khan Nasir and Muhammad Hussain, and some ex-troops of Kalat state (Titus and Swidler, 2000). Abdul Karim kept the insurgency movement alive, however, persuaded by the Khan to surrender with a safe-conduct agreement with the authorities in Quetta. Breaching the agreement, he was arrested in May 1950 along with his fellow men on their way to Kalat (Harrison, 1981). This arrest after an agreement widened the mistrust between the Baloch leaders and the Pakistani authorities which enhanced the sense of alienation among the Baloch people.

The second wave of insurgency in Balochistan is considered an output of the implementation of the One Unit system in Pakistan. The Khan openly resisted this system by starting a noncooperation movement against the government. He was arrested on the pretext that he was planning with the Afghan authorities to instigate a full-scale revolt against the Pakistani government. In 1958, the Khan palace was besieged, and everything was taken in military control (Khan, 1975). This ignited the situation, and Nawab Nauroz Khan led the insurgency with his 500 men and put up a stiff resistance to the military. However, in May 1959, Nauroz Khan, along with his fellow men, surrendered after the authorities swore on the Quran to accept their demands, including the withdrawal of the 'One Unit' system and amnesty for his men (Harrison, 1981). After the arrest, they were tried and were

given the death sentence to his eldest son with six others. In the meantime, Nawab Nauroz Khan also died in prison on December 25, 1965, which widened the gulf of mistrust among the Baloch insurgents and the state authorities. The story ended with the start of the third spate of insurgency, a result of the 'Basic Democratic system' introduced by President Ayub Khan to "teach" the common people of Pakistan about the western system of Democracy. After the election, several Baloch nationalist leaders were elected; however, the government showed displeasure when these nationalists propagated their stance. In order to reduce the influence of these Baloch nationalist, the government nominated some other Sardars, but some of them have been assassinated. This lead to another spell of insurgency led by Sher Muhammad Marri. With the support of Khair Bakhsh Marri, he established the first *Parrari* (in Balochi means a person whose grievances are not resolved through talks) camp to challenge the Pakistan army. The conflict between *Parrari* and the Pakistan army continued till General Yahya Khan dissolved the 'One Unit' system and announced new elections in the country.

After the General Elections of 1970, Attaullah Mengal of the National Awami Party (NAP) formed his government in Balochistan on May 1, 1972. However, the government of nationalist leaders was dismissed just after 10 months by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, on the pretext that they were planning to form an independent Balochistan (Khan, 1975). NAP leadership was arrested and tried for high treason, which led to the bloodiest insurgency in Balochistan that continued for almost four years. This insurgency was more widespread than the previous one and caused more damage on both sides. According to Harrison (1981), there were almost eighty thousand troops deployed in Balochistan during this insurgency. The spell of insurgency ended when Bhutto government was thrown away by General Zia ul Haq in July 1977. There was an elongated calm up to 1999 when a new spate of uprising started with the installation of a new military regime under General Pervez Musharraf, who took over the charge of Chief Marshal Law administrator in October 1999 after toppling the elected government of Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). General Musharraf took many decisions to improve the financial position of the country which also included the construction of Gwadar Port. The Baloch people criticized the project due to the exclusion of the local people and their representatives from the planning and execution of the project. Also, the Baloch feared that it would change the demography of the Makran region due to a large influx of people from other parts of the country. Additional concerns were irregularities in the settlement of land titles, neglect of the traditional interest of the fishing community, and local community fears of being swamped by settlers from other parts of the country (Titus and Swidler, 2000).

Chinese engineers and workers were attacked by the insurgents in Gwadar at regular intervals to show their displeasure regarding the construction of the port. The federal government considered that some Baloch nationalists are behind these attacks and therefore decided to take action against them. Meanwhile, the situation in Dera Bugti deteriorated, which led to the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2005, who had remained Governor and Chief Minister of the province, triggering the security situation in Balochistan. Hence, Akbar Bugti became a symbol of resistance throughout the province where Baloch have shown severe resistance. Over time, the issue of missing persons increased, which caused more disappointment among the Baloch people. A commission formed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan investigated that 122 people were missing by 2013. However, the Baloch representative claims that the number is in thousands (Devasher, 2019). The issue of enforced disappearance and missing persons has adverse effects on the measures taken for the betterment of the common Baloch. Pakistan People's Party took over its charge in federal government in 2008 and announced a general amnesty for all the insurgents along with financial and economic development of the province. Thousands of jobs were announced for the people of Balochistan and other relaxations were given in governmental jobs.

However, on the other hand, the same situation of missing persons and military action continued. The Baloch people considered it a carrot-and-stick policy of the federal government. The number of missing persons increased in the elected government of PPP in Balochistan. The Baloch people claim that they are not considered as equal citizens of this country, as they are deprived of their basic facilities as compared to others. It is important to note here that Baloch people throughout history have shown dissent to the policies of the federal government. Starting from the accession of the Kalat state to the construction of Gwadar and the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti. The things could be resolved easily through negotiation rather than taking military action. This has developed a misunderstanding in the minds of Baloch people that the central government wants to subdue them. This hatred and inferiority complex among the Baloch people have shifted from one generation to another. Once the insurgency was related to some Baloch Sardar has transferred to well-educated Baloch youth. Several educated Baloch persons, including Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, Sana Baloch (M.Phil scholar at Allama Iqbal Open University), Shahdad Baloch (Master student at Quaid-e-Azam University), have been involved directly in the insurgency movement against the state (BBC, 2020). Due to this situation, several educated people are expected to join the contemporary insurgency. What is the need of the time that the federal government should be involved directly and seriously in eradicating the grievances of Baloch youth, while taking the Baloch representative into confidence.

2. Transformation in Baloch Insurgency

Previously, all insurgent movements were dominated by tribal leaders from various tribes. All the previous insurgencies in 1948, 1958, 1963, and 1973 were area-specific, mainly limited to the Bugti and Marri tribes; however, the contemporary insurgency is spread over the vast area of Balochistan. And it has been tied with them that the Sardars are the only hurdles that motivate the people against the state. They were considered to keep their people ignorant and compel them to fight against the state. However, the current phase of insurgency gained more ignition after the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti. However, it's not the only factor that worsens the situation in Balochistan. It was the decades-old problem that got the favorable condition, and the masses expressed their anger. The grievances of the people of the province are as old as Pakistan, and many times they have shown their reservations on the exploitation of resources and grievances. According to Akhtar Mengal's statement, "every inhabitant of Balochistan is the owner of Balochistan's resources and I will raise my voice for the rights of Baloch people on every forum" (Zafar, 2018). The contemporary insurgency is different from the previous phases in many aspects.

2.1 Transfer of Insurgent Movement from Tribal leaders to Middle Class Baloch

First is the transfer of insurgent leadership from Sardar to the common man of Balochistan, i.e., the middle class. Although it is not clear who is leading the insurgency, however very unknown personalities have come to the scene. Previously, it was all dominated by the few Sardars, and they were leading from the front. Even the killing of Akbar Khan Bugti and Balach Marri could not stop the insurgency in the province, which means that it has support at the grassroots level. Also, the insurgents' activities are increasing day by day (Grare, 2013). There is an almost shift of the insurgent movement from the north to the South. In the south, the district of Awaran, Panjgure, Lasbela, Kharan, Kech and Gawadar are the centers of insurgents in the current wave of insurgency. The elections show a very turnout in all these districts as compared to the other elections. The turnout in election 2013 is seems to be low. With fourteen provincial assembly seats ten faced low turnout as compared to the last election in 2008. Dr. Malik, who was elected chief minister of Balochistan in the 2013 election, was the first non-tribal chief minister of the province. Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch's constituency showed a 42 percent decrease in the 2013 election (Ahmad, 2013). There are many factors in it, such as polling booths being far away and non-registration issues. However, the insurgent considers it a clear

message to the state that people are not interested election process (Devasher, 2019). Also, Dr. Malik also showed his reservations about the low turnout of voters. All these districts are considered as a tribal structure comparatively. As the northern and central parts of Balochistan are more strictly attached to the tribal structure. This means that the middle class is taking part in this insurgency movement (Ahmad, 2013). Allah Nazar Baloch, who is the leader of the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) belongs to the district of Awaran in the south of Balochistan. Allah Nazar also belongs to a middle-class family, which is a main part of Baloch liberation. Harris Gazdar, who is a social researcher and has deep insight into the social structure of Balochistan, agrees that "there is no significant Sardari system in Mekran region. This area is relatively urbanized and more connected to Karachi and Gulf. There are almost fifty thousand troops deputed to control the area" (Ahmad, 2012). Harrison (2006) is of the view that Marri and Bugti are popular leaders; however, the middle class joins them, developing a broad base of influence in the Baloch insurgency. According to Sareen (2010), the middle class is upholding Baloch nationalism.

2.2 Joining of insurgency movement by well-educated people

The joining of more educated people in the insurgent movement is a great concern for the state of Pakistan. This gives impetus to the insurgency movement. It has been noted that the educated middle class of Balochistan is inclining toward secession, especially those students who are attached to Baloch Student Organization- Azad (Ahmad, 2012). The author also noted the same sentiments of interviewing a student in the University of Balochistan. They were complaining about the injustice carried by the federal government and security agencies. Recent events show that well-educated Baloch are taking part in the insurgency movement. A two-decade-old insurgency movement is entering a new phase, which is posing a greater challenge to the state. Shahdab Baloch and Ehsan Baloch, two graduates of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, were killed in an encounter with the security forces, which has shaken the intellectuals in the country. Besides this, Allah Nazar Baloch, who is heading the BLF, is a doctor by profession. An unfortunate incident that killed a Chinese professor at Karachi University was carried out by Shari Baloch, who belongs to a well-educated and well-established family. The Shari Baloch suicide bombing is unique in Pakistan. Because for the first time, a female suicide was used. She was a school teacher and research scholar at the same time (Nisar, 2022). This kind of bombing has never been used in the history of Pakistan. Such type of bombing was used by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. This aggravating and complex situation as educated people are using insurgency to achieve their demands, needs the federal government to realize the situation and put an end to this.

2.3 Social Media and Baloch Insurgency

The development of social media is helping the insurgent groups to communicate in a free environment with the people inside and outside the Pakistan. With expanding information technology, the insurgent groups continue to leverage social media to disseminate propaganda, foster anti-state sentiments, and recruit new members. Social media is a fast communication tool that affects the lives and minds of people. Social media in the form of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, etc. has been deeply rooted in the lives of common people who are attached to the internet. The insurgents use social media platforms to motivate the masses against the state. Through social media, the insurgent highlights the cause of their movement and appeal to the masses to participate in it. The development of the internet and its availability everywhere have enhanced the significance of social media (Metz, 2012). The insurgent groups use social media and public outreach efforts to build support and create a narrative of resistance against the state. As the BLA continues to challenge the state's authority, and develop mistrust between the state and the Baloch people. Social media is a fast source of communication and reaches millions of people in a few minutes. The young generation is using the internet and social media regularly. The insurgents use these social media platforms for their agenda

and highlight their grievances to their people and the international community (Tanner, 2019). What is done as counterinsurgency may include some collateral damage. The insurgents use this collateral damage as a tool to convince the international community. Abdul Iqbal (2011) has analyzed the impact of the internet and social media in the mobilization of the Baloch insurgency. He argues that the insurgents are spreading their agenda not only in Balochistan but also to the people outside Balochistan. During his study, he gives an extensive list of Facebook pages that are used by the insurgent to propagate their cause. For the educated middle class, online and social media is a great tool for the mobilization of the masses (Iqbal, 2011). Malik Siraj Akbar, editor of Baloch Hal, an online newspaper, which is now banned, argues that the supporters of the Baloch insurgency are fighting for their cause with the media. They are showing their political activism using different social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. He also argues that the federal government is "likewise engaged in a full-scale encounter with Baloch media" (Ahmad, 2012). However, social media is full of fake and misleading news. Different sites run by various people and organizations encounter opponents. A large number of people follow these sites. One of the great problems that the common man faces is the credibility of the news spread by these sites. The same problem occurs with the author. Hani Baloch, one of the members of the Baloch Student organization, died on September 09, 2021. The Baloch News is a site that claims she died because of the tear gas shelling and baton charge by the police. She was shifted to the hospital, where she breathed her last. Later on, the provincial Chief Minister, Jam Kamal Khan, shared a video in which Aurangzeb, the central information Secretary of BSO, clearly rejected the point of view that Hani lost her life because of shelling by police. He pointed out that her death was due to natural causes.

Conclusion

The current spate of insurgency in Balochistan seems to be different in various aspects. The participation of more educated people has transformed this insurgency movement. These educated people have taken control from tribal chiefs, whom they claim have diluted their movement for the rights of the Baloch people. The suicide attack has opened a new dimension, which is very dangerous for the stability of the state. One can see that now the insurgency has seen a shift from North of Balochistan to South. The insurgents' attacks are increasing in the south, especially in Gwadar, the backbone of CPEC.

Now, what is the need of the time for the state of Pakistan to bring the Baloch people into the mainstream? Provide them with more opportunities and facilities. Improve their living standard and bring industrialization to the province. Industrialization will bring Baloch youth to jobs, and they will not fall into the hands of insurgents. The people of Balochistan must be allowed to elect their political leaders at the provincial and federal levels to resolve their problems. The insurgent groups use collateral damage as a tool to distance the Baloch people and the state, which should be considered seriously to avoid it. The Baloch people must be given more relaxation in government jobs. Also, the state and its agencies should have checks and balances on social media, especially on those websites that are spreading fake news to develop hatred between the Baloch people and the state of Pakistan.

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