

Human Rights, Regional Security and Perspectives for Balochistan and Pakistan Post-2014



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countable. And as mentioned, the international community must play an increased role in bringing these conditions to bear.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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“Beleaguered Balochs: Muslim Republics Murdering Muslim Minorities”

If Afghanistan has earned the sobriquet, ‘graveyard of empires’, no less a claim is that of Balochistan, namely, Pakistan’s *qabrastan* (graveyard).¹ The province, geographically Pakistan’s as well as Iran’s largest, has become just that what with more than 14,800 disappearances since 2001, according to the *Voice of Baloch Missing Persons*, and the clockwork regularity with which the establishment’s self-styled *janbaz* (gallant-hearted) custodians ‘pick up and dump’ Baloch corpses, particularly men, but also entire families, students, teachers, journalists and human rights activists.² It brings to mind the

Baloch balladeer’s plaint, *bauf dighari thaht hagant* ‘my pillow was made of the ground’.

Cold comfort, however, to the kith and kin of those slain who, upon securing their remains mutilated by Pakistani forces, are at least able to arrange prayers and make-shift funerals. Iranian Balochs, on the other hand, like other ostensibly equal Sunni citizens of that Islamic republic, cannot pray in Tehran, for that urban conurbation of some fourteen millions, the largest metropolis in West Asia and only Muslim capital city, are prohibited from praying never mind possessing Sunni mosques not a few of which flourish in the bosoms of the ‘Great Satan’ (Washington, DC) and ‘Little Satan’ (Tel Aviv).³ I must, as an aside, confess ignorance of any pre-arrangements for the spiritual needs of the majority of Muslims, namely, Sunnis, at the eighth *Organization of Islamic Conference* (OIC) summit

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein constitute my sole prerogative. They neither imply nor suggest the orientation, views, current thinking or position of the university, school or regional and research study centres with which I hold affiliation.

¹ Matthew Green, ‘Special Report: the struggle Pakistan does not want reported,’ *Reuters*, Karachi, Sep. 24, 2013, online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/24/us-pakistan-disappearances-specialreport-idUSBRE98N00A20130924>; Ahmed Rashid, ‘Balochistan: the untold story of Pakistan’s other war,’ *BBC News*, Feb. 22, 2014, online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26272897>

² *Pakistan 2013 Human Rights Report*, p. 7. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U. S. Dept. of State, online: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220614.pdf>

³ Ahmad Reza Taheri, ‘The Sociopolitical Culture of Iranian Baloch Elites,’ *Iranian Studies* 46/6, 2013, p. 991 and n. 44; Saeed Kamali Dehghani, ‘Sunni Muslims banned from holding own Eid prayers in Tehran,’ *The Guardian* (Aug. 31, 2011), online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/31/iran-forbids-sunni-eid-prayers>;

Houchang Chehabi, ‘The Legal Aspects of Religious Diversity in Iran,’ lecture delivered at the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS, London, May 15, 2013, online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raPWh9XcPr8&list=>

convened in Tehran, December 9-11, 1997. What is common knowledge though is that only six out of 22 Arab heads of state attended.⁴ Further, Sunni diplomats posted to the land of the ayatollahs hold their weekly Friday afternoon prayers in the precincts of the Pakistan embassy school.⁵

On Pakistan's 66th Independence Day, August 14 2013, Raza Jahangeer Baloch, secretary-general of the *Baloch Student Organization (Azad)*, was killed in Turbat. Next day, August 15, it was the turn of Sindhi nationalists of the *Jeay Sindh Tehrik* [Eternal Sindh Movement], three of whom were publicly killed by Karachi police in a park, which runs counter to the later claims of the deputy inspector that they were killed in custody.⁶ The *Tehrik's* moorings were anchored in the musings of the late G. M. Syed (1904-95), who, in the first instance, steered the Pakistan resolution through the Sind assembly in the 1940s, only to regret endorsing this Muslim Zion.⁷ His subsequent detention and house arrest, during the last thirty years of his life, was expended in contrition rather than reflection. Envisaging an independent Sindhudesh in one of his best known tracts, *Heenyar Pakistan khey tuttan khappey* [Now Pakistan Should Disintegrate], was irksome, obviously, to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a fellow Sindhi, sometime Bombay *muhajir (émigré)*, full-time opportunist, all-time

⁴ Martin Kramer, 'Islamic Summit in Tehran: beyond the hype,' Policy Watch 287, Dec. 9, 1997, *The Washington Institute*, online:

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-summit-in-tehran-beyond-the-hype>

⁵<http://www.islamicfinder.org/getitWorld.php?id=108490&lang=arabic>

⁶ *Pakistan 2013 Human Rights Report*, p. 3.

⁷ Long held by those of us in the know within academe, this overdue analogy has now entered general readership with the publication of Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London, 2013).

debauch, and a Sunni⁸, who, along with a Shia Shah reigning across the border, was the architect of the real beginnings of Balochistan's spiral into murder and mayhem. Bhutto was, besides Mujibur Rahman, one of Bangladesh's founding fathers but now squirmed at the thought of siring Sindhudesh or Balochistan 'doing another Bengal'. But Syed, as pointed out, had galvanised his provincial leadership to throw in their lot with the Muslim League. Nobody thought of consulting northern Balochs of British India's Chief Commissioner's Province or their southern brethren represented by an unrepresentative feudal council (*jirga*) if they desired fusing and, in turn, being hosted in the house that Jinnah built.⁹

Neither do the Pashtuns as is borne by the historical record only too well known to be rehearsed here: Afghan refugees, as Pakistani NGOs have reported, find themselves arbitrarily rounded up in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa or NWFP (which I still prefer as an English orientalist), and Balochistan, in February 2013, following attacks on the Hazara Shia domiciled in Quetta. Earlier, a discredited federal administration attempted to burnish its credentials when its Interior Ministry's July 2012 report audaciously attempted an even-handed mention of 868 individuals as having been killed in Balochistan between 2010 and that date, and that the onus of these killings lay with the Baloch Liberation Army and the *Lash-*

⁸ And not a Shia as incorrectly noted, a regrettable *lapsus*, in my 'Yet another Stan? Talibanisation and Islamic Radicalism in Balochistan and Southwest Asia,' *What Future for Balochistan? Global and Regional Challenges*, UNPO Conference Report (The Hague, 2013), p. 26.

⁹ Malik Siraj Akbar, 'From Bangladesh to Balochistan: Pakistan owes an apology,' *The World Post*, Jan. 3, 2014, online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/malik-siraj-akbar/from-bangladesh-to-baloch_b_4534394.html

kar-e Jhangvi, a Deobandist-inspired, ISI-sponsored Sunni militant group among other anti-state separatists undermining Pakistan's territorial integrity.¹⁰ Any lingering doubt regarding integrity was presently dispelled by the *Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances* whose intrinsic reluctance to broach the issue of absconding civilians with Pakistan's domestic intelligence and law-enforcement agencies sharply brought into relief its partisanship among Baloch groups.¹¹ Such enforced disappearances were rampant across the NWFP and FATA. The UN's *Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* visited Quetta, the provincial Baloch capital, in September 2012. In its February 2013 report, the Working Group condemned the striking absence of mention of the state's intelligence organs, which are principally and repeatedly culpable for such disappearances. The Supreme Court, Pakistan's apex judicial body, was stonewalled when its three-member bench held a special session hearing at the Quetta registry of the Supreme Court over two days in August 2013. That bench, led by Justice Chaudhury, demanded that the intelligence agencies, police and stationed Frontier Corps come clean within a fortnight on all missing individuals. The security agencies, in a written judgment statement dated August 28, 2013, committed themselves, 'to hand over any uniformed officers who were involved in the abduction of citizens in Balochistan.'¹² Another September 2013 hearing in that city also led nowhere despite notices issued by the Supreme Court to the inspector-general of Balochistan police and the inspector-general of the Frontier Corps for failing to co-operate.¹³

¹⁰ *Pakistan 2013 Human Rights Report*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Pakistan 2013 Human Rights Report*, p. 7.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Such an infirmity of purpose and culture of lawlessness run through the warp and weft of Pakistani officialdom which, for the record, does not permit the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) to have access to those held at detention sites in Balochistan, NWFP and FATA. The 2009 *Aghaz-e Huquq-e Balochistan* remains a farce, as with so much else with Pakistanis in particular and South Asians at large, for illegal detention of Balochs continues and the panacea package mooted for Balochi woes, social, economic and political, remains a pious proclamation on paper.¹⁴

Post-2014, the Balochi canker continues to fester. Some would claim a tipping point is on the anvil. Yet others that we are well passed it. There are several such tipping points across South Asia where the basic conditions of civil existence have broken down. In the Balochi context, we are dealing with an *insufficiently imagined* nationalist movement.¹⁵ Not all the reasons for it can be enumerated here save salient features. They are, it may be reiterated, posited by an orientalist, not futurist. I can tell you what has happened, not what will. But Churchill soundly forewarned that, 'the further back you look, the further forward you can see.' This could not be truer for the Orient – and Orientals. Muslim Orientals, in this particular case.

Consider then the facts: the Balochs are a non-starter insofar as the Islamic world goes. Why? Because, unlike Palestinians, Kashmiris, Uyghurs, or Moros (Filipino Muslims), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which putatively artic-

¹⁴ *Pakistan 2013 Human Rights Report*, p. 21.

¹⁵ As pointed out by Sushant Sareen, 'Balochistan is no Bangladesh,' IDSA Comment, Jan. 19, 2010, *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, online: http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/BalochistannoBangladesh_ssareen_190110

ulates the aspirations of 57 Muslim polities, is, like the Islamically-inspired Arab League or GCC, a veritable talking-shop. Balochs and Bolors in Pakistan or Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey are disgruntled Muslim minorities with long-standing grievances against oppressive, fellow Muslims – not imperialists or infidels, bluntly put, non-Muslims. Had their abusers been so, it would make for a shrill rallying point among concerned, cynical Muslims who would extract as much political mileage as possible by highlighting their plight and portraying non-Muslims as tormentors and Muslims, yet again, tormented. There is a cognitive dissonance here in that corporate loyalty trumps any and every contradiction, commission or omission. It would be detrimental to Muslim unity, and meddling too, so the thinking goes, by asking fellowmen to put their house in order whether Turks, Pakistanis, Iranians or others, none of who are squeamish about dealing with their recalcitrant denizens hence the stunning, selective silence about such Muslim minorities at the OIC. The hapless Balochs certainly are a common concern to both ‘brotherly’ Muslim republics, Iran and Pakistan, who will stop at nothing to check their ‘anti-national’ or ‘misguided’ insurgency.

Iranian Balochs, like their eastern Pakistani kinsmen, perhaps more ruefully than them, know full well their tenuous relationship with Tehran, a regime whose ideological *raison d’etre* is predicated upon a peculiarly Persian version of Twelver Shia Islam recrudescing after 1979. The Revolutionary Guards, those republic’s Rottweilers, are there to obliterate Balochs among other dissenters, Sunni and Shia, who threaten the ‘victory of the Islamic revolution’. Neither Tehran nor Islamabad would dare to question never mind castigate Beijing over its treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang (Chinese or Eastern Turkestan). For one thing, they cannot

afford to do so. And pretty much most of the OIC would think twice before taking cudgels with the Chinese. No such reservations, however, come into play when criticising Israelis, Indians, Americans or Europeans over alleged mistreatment of Muslims. Had the Balochs, for example, been non-Muslims, both Iran and Pakistan would have finished them off in no time. Ottoman Turkey briskly did so with its Armenian irredentists leading to the 1915 genocide. And so did West Pakistan’s military junta with Bengali nationalists in the eastern wing by practically decimating its Hindu minority which it held responsible for being a fifth column in east Pakistan. It is more difficult, however, to declare fellow Muslims as heretics or infidels. Historically *jihad* would then be justified – as is evinced by the supplying, subventing and sponsoring of fanatics against deemed crypto-Muslims like Assad’s Alawites whose bloodletting is both permissible and promoted – but such is not the case with mainstream Sunni Balochs. But it does not connote the Balochs have not felt the harsh hand of alien rule for most of Pakistan’s existence. Punjabi and Pashtun Sunnis, the rank and file of the Frontier Corps, remain pre-occupied in the ‘pick up and dump’ routine of fellow Sunni, Hanafis or middle-class, politically conscious, alienated, impoverished Balochs.¹⁶ It is they who are paying the price for, as stated above, an insufficiently imagined national movement, un-

¹⁶ Malik Siraj Akbar, ‘Why Pakistan is embarrassed to talk about Balochistan?’ *The World Post*, Mar. 12, 2014, online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/malik-siraj-akbar/why-pakistan-is-embarrass_b_4937159.html?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=WorldPost;

Akbar founded in 2009 the first online English-language newspaper and social platform from his homeland, *The Baloch Hal*. He recently authored *The Redefined Dimensions of Baloch Nationalist Movement* ([Bloomington], 2013).

like their tribal chieftains, whose lack of political direction and imagination is compensated by fractious one-upmanship.

So could a replay of 1973 be possible if, say, Iran and Pakistan jointly decide to tackle the Baloch question once and for all? An increasingly despised Shia Iran, given its support for Syria, lacks credibility in the predominantly (Sunni) Muslim world would that it were to assist Islamabad in any such venture. The Saudis would come down very heavily on those Punjabis running their Pakistani plantation. Any such reprisals, overtly or covertly, by Teheran would have far-reaching consequences for Pakistan's Shia, a besieged, outraged minority which, arguably, more than any other marginalised group in Pakistan today, has reaped a grim dividend for their loyalty to the land of the *Quaid-e Azam*, himself a Shia.

The Baloch separatists have remained non-sectarian and non-confessional in their opposition to the Islamabad establishment.¹⁷ Linguistically, anthropologically, and psychologically, the Balochs do fulfill certain criteria towards being recognised as a 'nation', something which the Pakistan movement, a motley assortment of Muslim Zionists from the minority districts of British India expressly united in animus against a Hindu-dominated Congress, never did, but who, nevertheless, patched together an artifice where Urdu was declared a national language, the mother-tongue of barely 8% of the populace, and, where no two Muslim divines, when queried by the 1953 Justice Munir Commission, could concur on defining Islam. Pakistanis still don't. But they can agree, evidently, on singing *Dil Dil Pakistan* [My Heart is Pakistan], a pop

¹⁷ Peter Tatchell, 'Terror and Talibanisation in Balochistan,' *Ceasefire*, Sep. 13, 2011, online: <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/tatchell-on-balochistan/>

number regarded as Pakistan's unofficial anthem and produced by Vital Signs, the late Miss Bhutto's favourite band. That troupe, like her, has trooped off the stage. But its lyrics endure which the Frontier Corps, Punjabis and Pashtuns to man, force Balochs during stop and search swoops to sing extempore.¹⁸ Would the Frontier Corps or the regular Pakistan army dare compel hardened FATA inhabitants or puritanical *Tehrik-e Taleban-e Pakistan* (TTP) fighters to sing it? If and when so, that day will be a game-changer. Not so much for Pakistanis but its beleaguered Balochs for whom the road winding out of Pakistan's *qabrastan* may meander through Nimruz, Helmand and Qandahar.¹⁹ For now, as Josh Mull baldly observed, '[T]he Taliban's all-important Quetta Shura is in Balochistan, so the Pakistani military can't have any American troops that close to a key military asset. So they instead "clear" Balochistan of "Islamic terrorists" (democratic Baloch dissidents, not Taliban) and remove it from American calculations.'²⁰

¹⁸ Sushant Sareen, *art. cit.*

¹⁹ 'Cementing Pashtun-Baloch unity essential,' *Afghanistan Times*, online: http://www.afghanistantimes.af/news_details.php?id=3879&&cid=4

²⁰ Josh Mull, 'Preparing the American invasion of Pakistan,' *The Huffington Post*, June 3, 2010, online: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/josh-mull/preparing-the-american-in_b_600014.html



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