

Balochistan (From Strategic Significance to US Involvement)

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Abstract:

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of landmass and is the least literate. It became a part of Pakistan, when the British withdrawal took place on August 14, 1947 yet got the status of province after 23 years in 1972. Needless to say that it has been overlooked since the British rule. But it is important to note that the location of Balochistan, connecting Iranian Plateau with South East Asia, Central Asia to its long coast line in the shores of the Arabian Sea, makes it geographically an important place. In the recent months, Balochistan has come into limelight in the international media and the resistance movements have risen to the extent where the Baloch are demanding liberation and separation. It is very much evident that the geo-policies of Balochistan, internal contradictions in Baloch society, state response and the foreign hand have aggravated the problems in the province. This paper is an attempt to focus on the strategic significance of Balochistan and how does it provide an opportunity to Baloch nationalists in order to deal with big superpowers for the liberation of the country. The paper aims at discussing, the real factors behind the US interest in Balochistan and how the foreign involvement can be stopped, particularly at a time when it has reached at the brink of separation.

Key Words: Forward Policy, British Rule, Khan of Kalat, National Security Syndrome, Machkinder's Rim Land, Gwadar Port, Rickodek, Great Powers, Great Game, Greater Balochistan

Introduction:

Balochistan is a mountainous desert area, consisting of 3.5 lakh sq. kms. It borders Iran, Afghanistan and its Southern Boundary is the Arabian Sea with strategically important port of Gwadar on the Makran Coast, commanding approach to the Strait of Hormuz. Its total population is 7.5 million. Balochistan occupies 43.6 percent of Pakistan's total area and is least populated (5

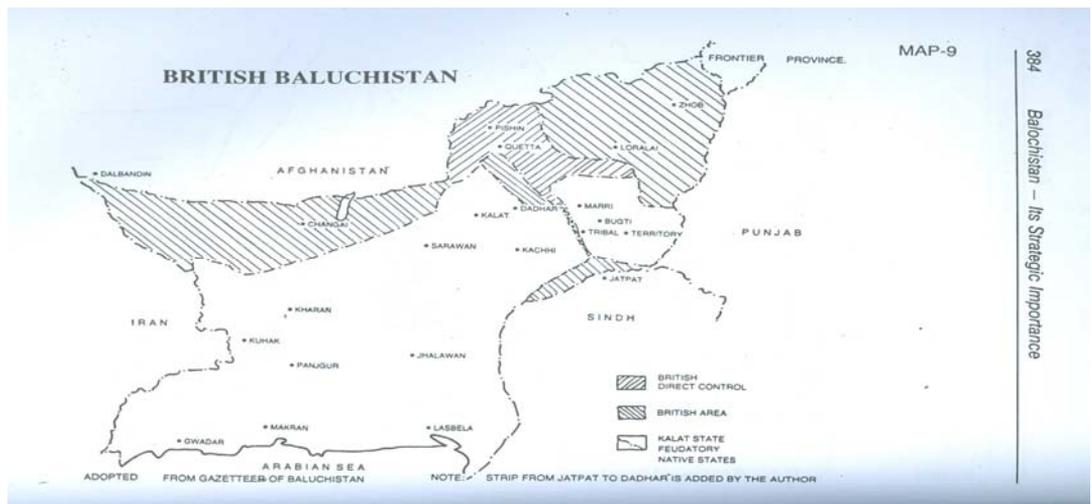
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percent of the total population). Though the poorest, yet it provides gas and coal (consisting of 200 coal mines) to the industrial infrastructure of the country. Around 60 percent of Pakistan's domestic and industrial requirements are met through the gas obtained from Dera Bugti (Wassan, 2008: 112).

Balochistan contains the twin character as ecologically, it is connected with Central Asia while politically with South Asia. Through out the history, it has played the role of a junction for the Superpowers which moved ahead along with their dogmas and ultimately set up their domination in the region. Ahmad (1992) writes that "Let it be in a context of Moscow's Central Asian question, the Erstwhile British Forward Policy or the US Doctrines to contain Communism (Dulles-Carter-Reagan), In so far as they relate to South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf (Ahmad, 1992: 148).

Historical Context

American President while dealing with Afghanistan during Russian invasion had called Balochistan, "Zone of Instability" (Nixon, 1980: 90). When Afghanistan was invaded, it was the time when British became conscious about the significance of Balochistan. Therefore, it was thought that it could be helpful strategically in order to defend the "Supply Line in Afghan Wars". While keeping in view this state of affairs in mind, "Forward Policy" was applied by England and the control of British Balochistan was attained. Resultantly, it weakened the powers of Khan of Kalat (Wassan, 2008: 118). It is another story that the hundred years of British Rule could perhaps be called a "Black Period" in the history of Balochistan (Ahmad, 1992: 101).



Source: Balochistan: Its Strategic Importance, by Lt. Col. Syed Iqbal Ahmad, 1992, Page 384

Balochistan had been backward and far flung before independence. Though it had its first elected government in 1972, yet was not given the status of the full-fledged province with a government responsible to an elected legislature. It was a Chief Commissioner's province and its Chief Executive, the agent to the Governor General (AGG), acted on the behalf of the Central government in Karachi. The Shahi Jirga was a nominated body of elders whose usefulness as an institution was diminishing with urbanization (Ahmad, 1992: 138). During the times of President Ayub Khan, the efforts were made to develop the province economically but as the time passed, it became obvious that Balochistan "suffers not only from the economic problems but essentially, it has to put up with the political ones too". The Baloch had opposed the idea of "One Unit" as Ayub Khan was a staunch supporter of this. As a result, certain Baloch nationalists sought help from the Communist Block, as they believed that they would not get it from any other (*Outlook*, 1973, March 10). In 1969, Ayub Khan died and it gave rise to mainly two issues of Balochistan:

- One Unit (Later dissolved by Yahya Khan)
- The provincial status of Balochistan (Later raised to Governor's province)

Strategic Significance

A place could be strategically important for different reasons like:

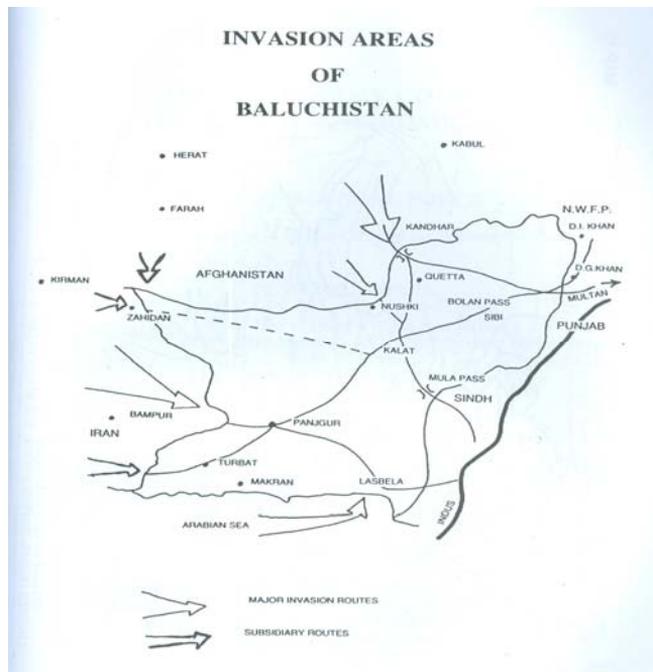
- Owing nearness to strategic location, such as choke points on major sea route
- On crossroads of great Powers
- Immediacy to mineral rich areas
- May be reservoir of strategic minerals, like oil, Iron, Uranium Ores etc.
- Large dealer of food.

The great powers always design striking strategies and plans; and in order to accomplish their policies, they use small powers, sometimes for a solo role and at times for numerous ones. Another thing, regarding the policies of the great powers is that they do not always use their terrain for clashes, so they choose the small powers as "Subject", in order to resolve their differences. Resultantly, it leads to the conception of "National Security Syndrome", because those small powers do not in every case help in achieving the objectives of those great powers; rather at times become "Bone of Contention" among the major powers. Sullivan (1986) writes, "Geo-politics is the study of the geography of relations between wielders of power, be they rulers of nations or of transnational bodies (Sullivan, 1986: 2).

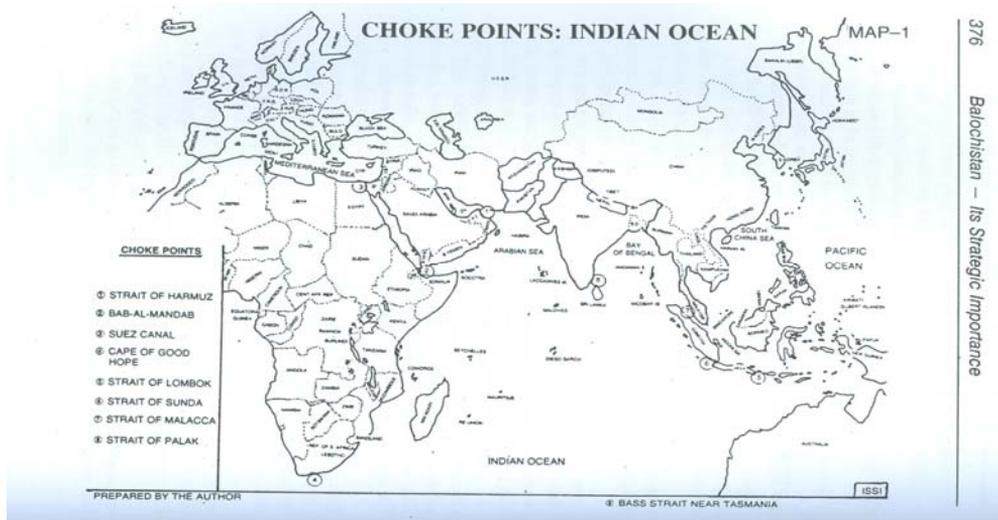
The global situation has transformed a lot much today. Many areas that were earlier had carried significance geographically, at the moment have become

insignificant; while on the other hand, many unimportant areas have gained importance. Though for a long period of history, Balochistan occupied a “fluctuating position” sandwiched between “insignificance and importance”, yet it has never lost its geo-strategic significance and value. The event that added value to Balochistan is the “Russian intervention’ in Afghanistan on December 27, 1979. Consequently, on one hand, the national and international politics of Pakistan had deep impact; while on the other hand, it influenced the world history, in the days to come. Furthermore, Balochistan, being not an exemption, turned into a “Hot Bed” of power politics between two “Superpowers” and their “Partners, Proxies and Surrogates”. Strategically, Balochistan is unique in terms of the following factors which are crucial in its strategic calculations:

- Largest in terms of size
- Having largest coastline
- Sensitive borders
- Arm of Arabian Sea
- Lying under the lines of Machkinder’s rim land, Western and North Eastern portions (Wassan, 2008: 118)



Source: Balochistan: Its Strategic Importance, by Lt. Col. Syed Iqbal Ahmad, 1992, Page 387



Source: Balochistan: Its Strategic Importance, by Lt. Col. Syed Iqbal Ahmad, 1992, Page 376

Placed extremely next to the oil lanes of the Persian Gulf and covering a common border with “Iran and Afghanistan”, Balochistan is strategically too significant; commanding almost the entire coast of the country-470 miles of the “Arabian Sea and boasting of a deep sea port”, completed with Chinese support at Gwadar (Balochistan). Ahmad (1992) writes, “Serious observers of the contemporary scene can not miss the importance of certain new, or tainted, geo-political realities vis-à-vis Balochistan which will impinge upon and help shape the future history of Pakistan and the region” (Ahmad, 1992: 248-249).

The following factors have made Balochistan strategically very much valuable.

- **Gwadar Port**

Gwadar is an important district of Balochistan, having 600 Kilometers long border. Until 1958, it had been a part of the State of Oman. On December 1958, Pakistan bought it with an amount of 550 million Rupees. It was suggested as a suitable sight for port in 1964 and thus in 2002, the construction of the port was initiated with the help of China. The Gwadar Port, being the third largest port of the world, is situated at the doorway of the Persian Gulf (180 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz through which 40% of World’s Oil passes) and at the largest trade route of the world. It is due to this fact that makes it geo-strategically more important to the world powers. In addition to that, due to Iraq-Iran War, Gulf War and Russian disintegration, that led to the emergence of new Central Asian Republics (CARs) has added to its value, as it will provide the shortest route (Quetta to Chaman) to Central

Asia. America has an eye on Gwadar as being its future “Potential Military Base”, and the UAE considers it undesirable contest. The potential of Gwadar is not new, but the geo-economics of today and even of tomorrow has converted a national potential treasure to an international potential treasure.

- **Rickodek**

Rickodek, the part of Chagi (Tehsil of Balochistan), means “Hillock of Gold”. Pakistan and International media has highlighted a new discussion on ‘Rickodek’. It is the world’s 4th largest deposit of gold and copper. It has dawned that the mountains of Balochistan are filled up with much costly reservoirs of mineral. Nevertheless, it has also been proved that the gold and copper reserves of about \$260 billion are buried under the Rickodek. But it is unfortunate enough on the part of Pakistan that in this developed age; Pakistan is dependent upon foreign companies for their exploring, mining, surveying and refining. The borders of Iran and Afghanistan are also not so far from here. The decision of the Supreme Court about Rickodek has exposed that “under and around this hillock of gold, there exists 10 billion kilo gram copper and 370 million gram gold”. In order to attain this wealth, the international powers are being exposed under their agendas. And so are Baloch being mislead. Some of the foreign agencies which have shown their interests for exploring these reserves, belong to Israel. While few foreign mining companies have contacted Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) that if they cooperate in exploring and taking away these reserves safely, they would be given enough compensations. Therefore, in this backdrop, the US and India wants to deteriorate the situation in Balochistan so that Pakistan can not get benefit out of this; and they keep on blaming that Pakistan is giving shelter not only to Al Qaeda members but the Riggi Brothers are also in Balochistan (Shahid, 2011, January 20).

Foreign Involvement

The international colonial powers crave to open the stage of hostilities against Afghanistan and Iran, by exploiting Balochistan. “Taking Hostages and Target Killing” of Chinese engineers, workers and investors is interrelated to it. The international players have raised the issues like:

- Durand Line
- Pushtoonistan (by setting apart Pushtoon Area and Balochistan)
- Watchwords of “Greater Balochistan”
- Economic and financial aid in the name of “Terrorism”
- Encouraging the rebellious movements
- Drone Attacks by making allegations about “Quetta Shura”

But these are all false pretexts to control the natural resources, oil and world economy and nothing else (Baloch, 2010, January 19).

Balochistan has always been under the tyrannical rules of Sardars (Tribal Chiefs) who have been a major factor in keeping Baloch people diffident, uneducated and underprivileged. Therefore, it has induced greatly the attention among the “players of the regional politics”. Not only, it is in American interest but also in the interest of Russia and India too, if “Balochistan might become an independent state. Ahmad (1992) writes that, “Balochistan acts as a common denominator to them. Infact no policy of any of the countries competing for power in the region could be called comprehensive and practical unless it considers Balochistan in its defence plans. The conflicting interest of the Great Powers in the region-ranging from peripheral to central, converge in Balochistan, in a way that they subject to political pressures of varying degrees at various points of time and space”(Ahmad, 1992: 148). It has been observed through out the history that, “the location of Balochistan has enticed foreign powers to venture its latitude”.

Russia-Back in old days, both Superpowers had focused their interest on Balochistan because they wanted to make Pakistan a weaker state. It is due to this fact that Soviet Union encouraged the “Secessionist Movement of Sindhu Desh, Pakhtonistan or Azad (Independent) or Greater Balochistan” (Najmuddin, 1984: 60). As the shortest way for Russia to reach Indian Ocean is Balochistan, therefore, it was considered “whether Russian loose their interest in Afghanistan, yet in Balochistan and Indian Ocean its interest would not die down” (Ahmad, 1992: 253).

Soviet Interests in Balochistan can be seen under following points:

1. It wants to control the Gulf oil (60% of world's known reserves) (The Economist Intelligence...1986/87) and thus the natural resources of the Indian Ocean and Antarctica will be under its influence.
2. Transportation of fish catch (1/3rd of total fish catch), from Indian Ocean (particularly from Arabian Sea) to Central Asia Republics over lands would be trouble-free, speedy and economical (Ahmad, 1992: 256).
3. It will have the shortest route to Antarctica for mineral resources (the world's largest untapped mineral resources.)
4. Russian economy will boost up.

China-China is keen and has a focused eye on Balochistan. The Gwadar Port has been completed with its help because China wants to import raw material and oil from Middle East and Africa and export goods through a land corridor that would extend from Gwadar to China's Sinkiang Province. Strategically,

this port is situated near the Straits of Hormuz, “A Major Oil Shipping Lane” and China wants entrée to the sea for its land-locked western provinces.

America- Pakistan is important for America due to Balochistan. In order to counter Iran, America has already given the signals of attack to Israel and US Congress has agreed over it. The main factor is “China”. The experts are of the opinion that in the next 30 or 40 years that there are chances that the natural resources of China and oil of the Arab world will eliminate and after that the US will be dependent of Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan; and for which the US would have to cross Balochistan and its Coast. Therefore, it would not be an easy job, owing to the interference of China. Though America, being an economic giant of the world; yet it would not be able to sustain its position in next 25 or 30 years. It will be replaced by China. In this regard, Gwadar Port and coastal line of Balochistan will play a key role. That is the main reason behind US annoyance over the contract of Gwadar Port that was given to China (Asghar, 2011, March 24).

It is being said that American Black Waters have hired more than 100 homes in Quetta (Satellite Town and Cahman Housing Scheme); and American embassy has been directly involved in this activity. In this backdrop, they might be getting training to demolish Madressahs through drones (*Express*, 2010, February 23). US, being part of the international conspiracy, has proved the fact that India was leading the insurgent movement in Balochistan from the front to get liberated from Pakistan. Reports on “Greater” Corridor Conspiracy, “Greater Balochistan Maps” and “September 2009 Design” are available on the internet and in Stratfor Forecasts.



Source: Greater Balochistan: U.S. Military Agenda (Report Analysis)
<http://metaexistence.org/usagenda.htm>

Current Scenario

Balochistan today has been divided among Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. It has been overlooked since the times of the British Rulers. It is that part of Pakistan that consists of different linguistic and ethnic groups. The issue of Balochistan is not novel. The minerals have hoisted its global significance in every market. Consequently, it has finally tuned the stakes, making it a focus to the manipulation by regional and great powers.

Ahmad (1992) writes that, "Every state has a power base, small or big, to extent itself to its capacity in domestic and world politics. The elements of geography and politics, or the geo-politics deeply influence the policy-making and conditions of a state in international affairs. The geo-politics and geo-strategy are best applied to evaluate the strategic importance of a state" (Ahmad, 1992: xiii).

While looking into history, it becomes evident that whenever these Baloch rose to power, their governments were not permitted to work like:

- In Bhutto' era, the government of Sradar Ataullah Mengal was dismissed in 1973
- Later on his son was killed
- Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed in Musharraf government

These events have aggravated the situation. The people there have been demanding for their rights since old days. The Indian government and government of Zahir Shah also supported the separatist elements in Balochistan. The flag of Pakistan was taken down after Bugti's assassination. Now the situation has risen to the point where they have adopted the course of brutality and aggression. It is due to these very facts that at present inferiority complex and many reservations among its people prevail. Today the movement taking place in Balochistan is the result of these injustices made in the past. The international level conspiracies have raised the issue so violently. These intrigues of internal and external forces are even active to this date. At international level, the debates are going on for holding Referendum in Balochistan. Leaders are asking for pardon. Gwadar Port has raised Pakistan's geo-strategic position. Perhaps this is the reason that efforts are being made to destabilize Balochistan. The uprising is so deeply affecting Balochistan that the Baloch are obsessed with anti-Pakistan feeling. The children in schools have rebuffed to hum the "National Anthem of Pakistan" and "Fly Its Flag". Even their women have become the part of the rebellion struggle. Universities have become breeding ground of nationalist outlooks (Walsh, 2011, March 29).

Since being a linkage between South Asia, Middle East, Africa and Central Asia politically and strategically, Balochistan occupies the chief position, in terms of safeguarding Pakistan. It has boost up the geo-political significance of Pakistan. Therefore, if there is any kind of thrashing on Balochistan, it would make vulnerable the regional security arrangements with aftershocks and irregularity further than the confines of India Ocean. Two things are very much obvious when one talks about problems of Balochistan:

- Foreign intrusion
- National problem within Pakistan

Kidnapping, murder of non-Balochis, especially after Bugti's murder, 50,000 people have left Quetta. Non-Balochis have applied for transfers. More than half of the educational institutions have been closed. Several hospitals are without medical staff. On the other hand, efforts are underway to internationalize Balochistan issue. Today its situation has become very much complicated and complex. The ignorance by governments, bad governance and incapability of law enforcing agencies, which work for the "Writ of the State", failure in stopping foreign involvement; are the factors of all this state of affairs in the province. Though NFC Award was announced yet nothing remarkable developmental project has been initiated so far.

Now in the Sub-Committee of the Congress, there has been a public hearing over human rights violation and now a resolution of "Independent Balochistan" is under consideration. Dana Rohrabacher through out the history has been making anti-Pakistani moves. While reading his paper, Selig Harrison (a renowned American think-tank and South Asian Expert) said that:

- US is ready to recognize Independent Balochistan
- It serves American interests
- Its accession to Pakistan was not legitimate
- Pakistan Army is the suppressing force
- Zardari government's policies have further ignited the separatist movements
- Therefore, 6 million insurgent Baloch people want an independent state of Balochistan (<http://www.usip.org/events/turmoil-in-balochistan-implications-the-pakistani-state-and-the-region>)

US had earlier proposed to hold this seminar in Quetta but it was rejected by Pakistani government. This resolution could have been made due to following factors in order to enhance pressure over Pakistan:

- It could be a reaction of closing NATO supply on behalf of Pakistan
- America had to vacate Shamsi Airbase on Pakistan's pressure

Balochistan

- US was not allowed to open its consulate in Quetta
- Iran-Gas Pipe-line
- Pakistan's overt support to Iran in case America attacks Iran

It is the time when some annoyed Baloch leaders have gone in different countries. Though having an effective representation in the Senate, there is complete lawlessness in the province. When Nawab Akbar Bugti was assassinated in 2006, a strong resentment rose among Balochs and henceforth, the Bugti tribe, all of sudden became much significant. Sha Zain Bugti has given 8-point agenda, related to human rights' violation: few among them are

- Musharraf to be arrested under law
- Missing persons may set released
- FC and military operations be stopped
- New cantonments and "No Go Areas" be closed
- Mutilated corpse be stopped
- The murderers of Mir Bakhtiar Domki's wife and daughter be arrested (Qureshi, 2012, March 8)

The Deputy Chairman Senate, Jan M. Jamali has resigned so that he may openly discuss and speak over the issue. Trust deficit between Baloch and Pakistani establishment-which is wary of the external, primarily Indian influence on Baloch separatists- is the main hurdle in making them talk to each other for a possible deal in managing Balochistan affairs. This is not the only challenge, Balochistan is confronting; rather there are many other issues too:

- "**Quetta Shura**" of Afghan Taliban, which the US without providing any evidence; is insisting to operate out of the Balochistan Capital to attack NATO forces across the border in Afghanistan;
- **Jundullah**, the Baloch Sunni militant group, responsible for terrorist attacks in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan Province and based according to Tehran, in Pakistani Balochistan. US is the main factor behind Jundullah (Yusufzai, 2009, November 12). The politics of Balochistan have had some distinct phases of intense activity. The most important was in 1970s, in the wake of the radical change in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. This period is significant as it brought into limelight the growth of the dissident Baloch Nationalism, the question of Greater Autonomy, germination of seditious activities, a galore of foreign agents and greater rift between Baloch and Pashtoon sections of population. It also attracted the attention of greater powers to perceive it from their overall global strategic view point in so far as it related to this region, particularly Balochistan (Ahmad, 1992: 300). The bombings in Quetta's most

protected Security Zone indicate that the War on Terror has transformed into War on Pakistan (WOP), entering into next phase on the sidelines of Karachi and FATA, and now US administration says that, “America has special interest in Balochistan” (Khan, 2012, March 29).

Conclusion

The issue of Balochistan has been intermingled with the “affirmation of an ethnic group on its individual political identity”, along with the “financial matters”. As the young Bloch are offensive on “Balochistan Package” since they think that they are the possessor of their assets, then why to get packages? They desire for complete power and in this effort want the international organizations to facilitate them in attaining autonomy and for that reason, have an aversion to mega projects like Gwadar Port because according to them, those developmental projects are not a solution for their troubles, as they will change them into minority. It is the time for Pakistan to decide in the light of the “warnings” being given by Selig Harrison and later on by Ambassador Munton. The ball is in Pakistan’s court, whether it stands firm and prevent the evil plans of its enemies or get separated and ruin itself. It is the right time for a break through in order to work out and resolve the matter on concrete basis.

At present the sphere of “Great Game” is being enlarged by Great Powers because of the long coast, minerals and natural resources of Balochistan. However through 18th Amendment, the provincial autonomy has been given and Balochistan got authority over its underground resources. In NFC Award, Punjab and Center have given their share. Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan Package has provided employment to people. Nonetheless it is the point to re-examine the things and identify the actual wrongdoers at the back of curtain who have created the separatist organizations. The situation where Pakistan has arrived today, demands how to impede foreign interference and how to bring Baloch into the stream line. Here are few suggestions which if adopted practically, can normalize the matter in a real sense.

1. The centripetal and centrifugal forces must be deactivated in Balochistan.
2. Its gigantic natural resources may be urbanized in order to perk up the economic and social life of the country, failing which; it may become a hot bed of foreign maneuverings and insurrection which would ultimately ease their way rather than to prevent them.
3. Right through the times gone by, the US has been giving the economic assistance to Pakistan, rather than doing anything in terms of renovating the economy and agriculture of Pakistan into an industrialized one so that it may become free of foreign economic aid in different areas.

4. The connected issue of language is imperative which works as a haul to national unity and growth.
5. Pakistan should work on building up its institutions, create better national solidity and produce a vibrant modern society that it may develop better relations with its neighbors.
6. In order to address the problems, the strategy should be multi-dimensional.
7. Trust-deficit has to be brought back.
8. CBMs must be guaranteed.
9. Funds should be made available.
10. The supply of grenades to the belligerents by aliens should be sterilized.
11. Illiteracy should be counteracted through opening schools and colleges, like Military Sui College has been established (the earlier cantonment), and BITE (Balochistan Institute of Technical Education), which was established in 2007.
12. The constructions of roads should be made. In the coastal areas of Balochistan, plants may be fixed in order to provide the dirt free water and power production.
13. Policies should be made for "Strong Pakistan", and not for the "Strong Center".
14. The para-military Frontier Cores should work for building up the socio-economic infrastructure.
15. The function of regional powers and cooperation may be enhanced.
16. Media should play its role optimistically.
17. If the national interest remains the main concern, no foreign hand will be flourishing.
18. Action is needed and not the round table conferences.
19. Paraphernalia has to be developed for the political dialogue and reconciliation because dialogue is the only option to get rid of the "lack of confidence". The dialogue strategy should be engaged and must be continued.
20. Last but not least, there is a dire need of change in thought and practice.

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