

Changing Contours of Baloch Nationalist Movement

Abstract

Since early 2000 Balochistan is yet again embroiled in a cobweb of violence. The presence of rudimentary representative institutions during the democratic interlude in the 1990s had afforded a semblance of medium to nationalist elites to articulate their grievances within the institutional mould. However, the abrupt rupture of institutionalised medium in concomitance with a repressive state apparatus during the dictatorial regime of General Pervez Musharraf signified not only the emergence of violent politics as the medium of contestation but a paradigmatic shift in the morphology, objectives and geography of the Baloch nationalist movement. Resultantly, current movement differs from many of its iterations in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This paper attempts to identify such diacritical markers. It argues that the present movement is undergoing a process of leadership transformation with the participation of young and more articulate middle class setting off a process of 'de-tribalisation' with non-tribal nationalists taking over the reins of leadership. The undergoing leadership transition is being paralleled by ideological propensities supplanting age-old tribal loyalties as the primary determinants of participation. The movement is also witnessing a gradual spatial expansion of nationalism which has brought forth a change in nationalist objectives too, with demands for provincial autonomy giving way to an idea of independent Balochistan. . Through discourse analysis of the writings and discourses of intellectuals, activists and political commentators from within Pakistan and outside, this paper identifies the above-mentioned diacritical markers of the on-going iteration of Baloch resistance and in the process highlights the rapidly changing nationalist landscape of Balochistan.

Baloch national movement has had a chequered history, marked by intermittent bouts of armed hostilities and interludes of protracted lull. Before Balochistan was to engulf yet again in the flares of nationalist insurgency in the early 2000, the province had previously witnessed four minor to major insurrections against the Pakistani state. The current iteration began after a hiatus of nearly three decades following Musharraf's militaristic handling of protests over better political and economic rights. It has been more than a decade since the

resumption of hostilities in the province and there appears to be many continuities and discontinuities between the 1970s and the present movement. Developments at domestic, national and regional levels since the Soviet invasion in late 1970s to American intervention in Afghanistan in early 2000 afforded a fecund geo-political context which breathed a new life into a hitherto dormant Baloch nationalism. The resurgent movement is markedly different from its earlier manifestations in terms of its morphology, geography, objectives and modus operandi. This chapter deals primarily with these diacritical markers that add some unique dimensions to Baloch national movement.

Changing Forms of State Violence: ‘Missing Persons’ and the Policy of ‘Kill and Dump’

Though use of force by successive rulers of Pakistan to subdue Baloch nationalism is nothing new, the sheer scale of repression unleashed by Musharraf on Balochs is characterised by what Selig Harrison terms as “slow-motion genocide” (Harrison 2006a). Repression during Musharraf was more widespread in terms of the geographical reach and in the scope of its potential targets. Earlier activists were arrested on formal charges and sentenced to fixed terms in prisons known to their families. This time there were large scale kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, torture and disappearances as Pakistani forces rounded up hundreds of Baloch youths on unspecified or trumped up charges and dragged to unknown locations only to be never found again.

A new pernicious trend emerged during Musharraf’s regime, wherein the security forces would abduct and kill the activists in custody with their bodies dumped shortly thereafter- in what is now being widely referred to as the ‘Kill and Dump’ policy. Armed separatists popularly known as Sarmachars [Balochi word for an activist who fights for one’s rights regardless of risk], activists, sympathisers or any other potential ‘threat’ would be apprehended by security agencies and held incommunicado for weeks and months together. Often those detained would be subjected to torture¹ and other inhuman treatment and the bodies of those killed thrown and dumped on the roadsides or at garbage sites. Inscriptions of *‘Pakistan Zindabad’* [‘long live Pakistan’] are carved on many bodies, apparently to teach

¹ Various reports by local, national and international human rights organisations like Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, Human Rights commission of Pakistan, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International etc. provide horrifying accounts of the pervasiveness of torture in Balochistan. For instance in its 2006 report, HRCP notes that “people are threatened to remain silent, they are blindfolded and handcuffed and tortured through various means, including the injection of unknown chemicals, humiliation and stripping” (Human Rights commission of Pakistan 2005-2006: 16).

‘anti-national’ Balochs a lesson, many a times Pakistani flag is found protruding from the pierced bodies (Hashim 2013). Mutilated corpses of nationalists and activists are turned both into objects of official nationalist projections as well as symbols of state’s despotic power.

Extrajudicial measures remains trusted modus operandi of security agencies because of its opaque nature which allows the personnel involved to evade any legal scrutiny or accountability. Though the majority of ‘missing persons’ are from Baloch Student Organisation –a student nationalist group, the list of missing, tortured and persecuted is a broad one and includes doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, human rights activists etc. While the actual number of disappearances during Musharraf’s period is a matter of intense contestation with Musharraf vehemently rejecting any accusation against his regime’s culpability,² his Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Sherpao is on record to have admitted in December 2005 in the national assembly the abduction of 4000 Balochs by Pakistani forces since 2002. Of this number, less than 200 people were presented before the courts, which implied that the rest were either detained incommunicado and/or have disappeared (Murthy 2007).

Musharraf’s thrust on militarization turned Balochistan into a garrison city with hundreds of check-posts dotting the province. US-supplied fighter jets and Cobra attack helicopters were used to bomb and strafe Baloch villages, killing civilians and destroying houses, crops and livestock. Intelligence sources in the United States put the number of troops involved in the operation at around 25,000, which included six Pakistan Army brigades and paramilitary troops (Harrison 2006b). Musharraf’s last military offensives in Balochistan were launched in December 2007 and February 2008. These involved the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and the mass slaughter of livestock, which was deliberately designed to inflict maximum damage by starving the people in pro-nationalist towns and villages (Tatchell 2008). Contrary to the public outcry over the use of disproportionate force against Balochs, Musharraf refused to admit any possible damage. Blaming the Sardars for the humanitarian crisis in the province, he declared that “There is no collateral damage” in the province and that the people “are happy with the operation against their chiefs” (Chakma 2006).

² In his article Musharraf denied all allegation of human abuses during his regime, calling them as a propaganda orchestrated by Sardars along with their foreign patrons (Musharraf 2012).

Journalists reporting the rampant abuses in Balochistan by security forces were hounded, threatened and expelled from the country.³ To keep the world in dark about the realities in Balochistan, even United Nations and other humanitarian organizations including the local non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) were barred from entering and working in the region. Media was denied the access to the displaced people and their homes in the conflict zones (International Crisis Group 2007: 6). Musharraf's warning that "It isn't the 1970s when you can hit and run and hide in the mountains. This time you won't even know what hit you" epitomised his military approach to the conflict.

Pakistan's much celebrated transition to democracy in 2008 heralded no discernible change in the situation in Balochistan. Worse, democratic period witnessed an intensification of the human rights abuses. Numerous reports from multiple organizations ranging from HRCP, HRW to Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, corroborate the fact that even after the transition of Pakistan to democracy, the decision making powers still remain in the hands of elements in command before the election. The democratic government in Balochistan referred to as the 'fiction of civilian rule' has been rendered dysfunctional and discredited in critical areas by an oversized cabinet and the absence of popular leaders. The political vacuum created as a result has been "filled by civil-military bureaucracy" and "the army has practically taken over the power" (HRCP 2009: 5). One moderate nationalist expressing his views on the state of democracy in Balochistan laments that 'establishment' "have allowed a controlled democracy only to cool down the tempers of the masses. They have never allowed a democratic government to stay in power" (quoted in HRCP 2009: 12).

According to the Human Right's commission's report between July 2010 to May 2011, 140 bodies of missing persons were found, from 2008 to May 2012 the commission documented 135 cases of enforced disappearances with 57 bodies of missing persons found till the

³ Intelligence agencies have tormented and persecuted scribes, scholars, human rights activists and anyone they think would expose Pakistan's underbelly. The cases of Declan Walsh, Carlotta Gall, Hamid Mir, and Sabeen Mehmud are emblematic. Walsh, then Islamabad based correspondent with the British national daily *The Guardian* was expelled from the country following a scathing report on human rights abuses in Balochistan. Gall, who was then working for the *Times*, was roughed by people claiming to be from Pakistani police for being in Quetta without permission. Mir, a well-known media personality in Pakistan was shot at and seriously wounded after he ran several programs on Baloch 'missing persons.' Mehmud, director of The Second Floor (T2F) a tea house-cum-book store in Karachi and a human rights activist, was gunned down barely an hour after hosting a talk on the plight of Balochs.

commission completed its field visit.⁴ In a 2012 briefing, Amnesty International noted that “at least 249 Baloch activists, lawyers, journalists and teachers have disappeared or been murdered between 24 October 2010 and 10 September 2011 alone, many in what have been called as ‘kill and dump’ operations.” Some of the missing persons have been abducted in the broad daylight either from their homes, shops or the courts. In one of the high profile cases of such operations, three prominent nationalist leaders Ghulam Mohammad Baloch -Chairman of the Baloch National Movement, Sher Mohammad Baloch - vice chairman of the Baloch Republican Party and Lala Munir Baloch - general secretary of the Baloch National Front were abducted from their lawyer’s office after the Anti-Terrorist Court of Turbat had dismissed all cases against them. Six days later their decomposed bodies were found in a mountainous area some 40 kilometres away from the city. The home and tribal affairs department of Balochistan revealed in 2013 that 592 mutilated dead bodies mostly of Baloch political workers were found in the years between 2010 and September 2013 from different parts of the province (Shah 2013).

No other issue could probably generate such passions and hatred among the Balochs against the state than the sight of mutilated bodies strewn across the rugged terrain of Balochistan. If the nationalist sentiments in the province are becoming more strident, the seething anger over arbitrary abductions and killings remains one of the primary drivers of this radicalised politics. The alarming human rights situation has caused disquiet even among the pro-Pakistan parties. Akhtar Mengal’s statement in a court, asking "whether an amicable divorce was not preferable to a bloody parting if dead bodies continued to be handed to Balochistan" (The Express Tribune 2012) signifies just how far regular scenes of death and disappearances have pushed Balochs towards separatism.

The issue of 'missing persons' and, importantly, the precise number of disappearances, is a leitmotif of Baloch nationalist discourse. There exists an enormous gap between the numbers proffered by the state and Baloch nationalists. Judicial interventions have been instrumental in bringing the issue of enforced disappearances in the public discourse. Former Chief Justice

⁴ A detailed account on ‘missing persons’ is provided in some of the well documented reports by Human Rights commission of Pakistan (2005-2006, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013), Human Rights Watch (2011) and Amnesty International (2011).

Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry⁵ made several efforts to address the case of missing persons. In 2009 inquiry cases into disappearances were reopened by the Supreme Court and in May 2010 a Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances was constituted by the Supreme Court to furnish a comprehensive list of enforced disappearances and provide recommendations for eliminating this practice. Supreme Court Justice Javed Iqbal's comments on the establishment of the Commission underlined the fact that judiciary is cognisant of how abductions and disappearances fuel the conflict in Balochistan. "Disappearances of people of Balochistan are the most burning issue in the country. Due to this issue, the situation in Balochistan is at its worst" (Human Rights Watch 2011: 1). The commission was not however, empowered to file criminal charges. Baloch activists boycotted the Commission for its inability to register the majority of disappearances. It claimed to have traced 290 disappeared persons of which 78 were recovered from the custody of the various intelligence agencies (Samad 2014: 296). The commission failed to bring any perpetrator to account.

In 2011 Federal Ministry of Interior established a new Commission on the Inquiry of Enforced Disappearances'. To the chagrin of many Balochs it put the total number of missing persons as low as 621. Official figures generate instant indignation among Balochs who put the number higher than 23,000, out of which 14,000 are claimed to have disappeared during the democratic regime of Zardari alone.⁶ The exact numbers of missing persons remains unknown, official numbers of the disappeared, to quote Human Rights Watch "are wildly contradictory". In 2008 Rehman Malik, Pakistan's interior minister admitted at least 1,100 victims (Human Rights Watch 2011: 4). In 2009 the provincial Ministry of Home and Tribal Affairs issued a list of 992 missing persons from the different areas of the province (Amnesty 2010). However, in January 2011 Mir Zafrullah Zehri, Balochistan's home minister, claimed that only 55 persons were missing (Human Rights Watch 2011: 4). While both these actors have a direct stake in skewing the numbers, given the passions they arouse, the government's figures however, betray an attempt at downplaying the reality and a failure of various state institutions in taking effective remedial actions against the continuation of enforced disappearances. Even the non-governmental organizations like Asian Legal Resource Centre,

⁵ In 2007 Chaudhry was ousted by Musharraf, in part over his proactive role in dealing with the case of missing persons. His removal plunged the whole state in crisis, which eventually led to the overthrow of military regime.

⁶ According to Nasrullah Baloch, the chairperson of the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, as of March 2013, the number of registered cases equalled to 23,000 (The Express Tribune 2013).

in their self-professed conservative estimates, put the total number of enforced disappearances at between 10,000 and 15,000 (Asian Human Rights Commission 2014).

The recent discovery of mass graves in the Khuzdar district seemed to prove many of the worst nightmares of human rights activists. That many of those ‘missing’ Balochs might be buried under unknown and unmarked graves. Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) claimed that 169 bodies were recovered from the graves (Shams 2014). The Home and Tribal Affairs Department, however confirmed to have retrieved only 17 dead bodies (Shah 2014). Sarfaraz Bugti, the provincial Interior Minister was quick to blame the Indian spy agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and its local ‘proxies’ for the killing and dumping of corpses in the Khuzdar mass graves (Shams 2014). The judicial commission established to probe the mass graves exonerated the armed forces and intelligence agencies of any culpability. Critics have castigated the commission’s report for what they claim is “disappointing and consistent with the blatant pattern of shielding the actual masterminds of the mass grave scheme” (Akbar 2014).

In a rare instance of a meaningful judicial intervention, seven ‘missing persons’ were produced in the Supreme Court by Military Intelligence (MI) and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) on the order of the higher court. Reprimanding them for being the biggest violators of the law of the country, the Chief Justice in a scathing tone told the intelligence agencies that “You are an arsonist. You have set Balochistan on fire” (PILDAT 2012: 25). While there is no ambiguity in the identity⁷ of the perpetrators, the state has until now failed to take any tangible step towards releasing the abducted persons or punishing those guilty of extrajudicial killings and torture. Indeed on many occasions state officials have rejected the figures of Baloch disappearances as propagandistic, they deny any involvement of either federal or provincial agency in enforced disappearances (Hashim 2014). Frontier Corps (FC) has been at the forefront of the conflict in Balochistan after army withdrew from direct involvement in 2006. FC however, continues to operate under the direct command of Army. Though its main role was border patrolling and help police maintain law and order, it gradually appropriated the policing power, defying the authorities and undermining the civilian institutions. Nearly half of the 80,000 strong, Balochistan Frontier Corps (FC) has been deputed on internal

⁷ In a hearing on the issue of missing persons in the province, Chief Justice of Pakistan’s Supreme Court, Iftikhar Chaudhry on May 14, 2012, observed that Frontier Corps was involved in a whopping 95%, cases of the ‘missing persons’.

security. Scattered throughout the province, FC as one writer puts it has assumed the role of "the judge, the jury and the hangman." It is accused of "running an organised racket to smuggle oil worth billions of rupees", besides "conniving with the smugglers of various goods, vehicles, arms and even drugs" (Mateen 2012). In a bid to subdue the nationalists FC relied on a wide range of extra-judicial methods which included abduction, torture and target killings. Resultantly, FC became probably the most dreaded force in the province so much so that National Party leader Mir Hasil Bizenjo once said if FC are withdrawn from Balochistan half of the provinces problems would be addressed within days (CRSS 2012).

Operating under the shadow of army, FC has emerged as a power house in Balochistan, as its power increased it "alarmingly deviated from its constitutional role of operating on the border and assumed the role of a community police" (The Baloch Hal 2010). FC maintains scores of check posts in several districts which have irked Balochs because of the humiliating treatment meted out to them at these posts. There are countless incidents of FC whisking away Balochs nationalists or their sympathisers during day light and then dumping their tortured or bullet ridden bodies across the unpopulated areas.

Problems with FC are not only restricted to the locals even provincial authorities are at odds with them. Powerless to take any action against them, many mainstream politicians have complained to the federal government about the transgressions of FC. The 18th amendment made FC a provincial subject, however, it had no impact on its functioning as it continued to operate independently of the provincial government. The impunity with which security establishment operate has undermined the authority of successive elected governments in the province.⁸ The then provincial Chief Minister Nawab Mohammad Aslam Raisani accused "the FC of running a parallel government in Balochistan" and of sabotaging every attempt of reconciliation with the rebels. FC's arbitrariness was even recognized by the federal government as then Prime Minister Gilani intervened on behalf of the provincial authorities and admonished FC "to respect the mandate of Balochistan Government and help it restore law and order in the province" (PILDAT 2012: 21-22). Many analysts consider FC and Army to be the "two faces of the same coin" in Balochistan. It is the interlocking of these two forces that no serious attempt was made to bring FC under the effective control of provincial

⁸ The response of a security personnel to one Baloch nationalist leader while in illegal captivity is telling, Even if the president or chief justice tells us to release you, we won't. We can torture you, or kill you, or keep you for years at our will. It is only the Army chief and the [intelligence] chief that we obey (Human Rights Watch 2011: 1).

government, considering that “any attempt to rein them in would be considered a literal clipping of the army’s wings in the province” (Jahangir 2012).

Dismayed over years of waiting, pleading and unenforced judicial orders relatives of abductees embarked on a near 3000 kilometres historic march from Quetta to Islamabad on 27 October 2013. Lead by Abdul Qadeer Baloch fondly known as Mama Qadeer (Urdu for "uncle"), founder of the advocacy group, the International Voice for Baloch Missing Persons. The march was as much an attempt to highlight state's abysmal record of arbitrary abductions and killings as it was meant to create public awareness. As a message of defiance, Qadeer and other marchers chose not to approach unyielding state authorities and instead intended to petition United Nations (UN) asking for help and attention. They claimed to present a list of 18,000 missing individuals from various parts of the province to the UN and European Union officials (Shahid 2015). However, despite the long march, the cases of disappearances continue unabated, mass graves containing hacked bodies have surfaced, further whipping up the passions against the state.

The De-tribalisation of Nationalism

The geography of resistance is changing through the growing participation of people from regions where tribal structures are either non-existent or least dominant. Makran division is currently one of the hotspots of militancy despite the fact that “the districts of Gwadar, Kech, and Panjgur are relatively urbanised” and “well-connected to” various metropolitan cities (Ahmad 2012). Participation of people from middle-class and non-tribal backgrounds has initiated a process of de-tribalisation of Baloch nationalism. The parochial and tribe-centric demands of sardars are giving way to “national” politics. As one commentator writes, the likes of Brahamdagh Bugti and Hairbyar Marri, scions of the extremely popular sardars Akbar Bugti and Ataullah Mengal, might “be in the vanguard of the movement, or are at least poster boys of the separatists”; “the ballast for Baloch nationalism is coming from the middle-classes” (Sareen 2010). The emergent educated cadre is represented by the rise of popular leaders like Dr. Abdul Hai Baloch, who heads the National Party representing the non-tribal urban middle class in the Makran Division in the southwest, near Gwadar. Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, who like Hai is a medical doctor, is currently among the most popular non-tribal nationalist leader. However, what separates Nazar from Hai is the former’s unequivocal support for an independent Balochistan. While Hai is part of the mainstream

nationalist politics that seeks provincial autonomy, Nazar is an ardent proponent of guerrilla warfare. Earlier a chairman of a radical student outfit, the Baloch Students Organisation (BSO-Azad), he founded the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) to organize an armed struggle.

Baloch Students organisation is an important player in the political landscape of the province. It largely fills the void left by the absence of a significant middle class.⁹ The assertion of lower middle-class political activists in challenging and wresting the control of Baloch national politics from powerful tribal chiefs of the province has been in no measure attributed to the instrumental role played by BSO (Rehman 2014). Formed on 1967 in Karachi as a cultural cum political forum for Baloch students, BSO's stated objectives included "Promoting Balochi language, literature and debating political conditions." However, with rising tensions among the ranks, it splintered among many factions along ideological lines. It was at the forefront of the struggle against abolition of the one-unit scheme and the demand for provincial autonomy. Many guerrilla leaders emerged within its ranks during the 1970s insurgency (Jetly 2004: 16). BSO helped revive Baloch Liberation Front –a separatist guerrilla outfit active during the 1962 Baloch insurgency, with the escalation of the conflict another guerrilla outfit called Baloch Peoples Liberation Front emerged from within the BSO. Nazar's association with BSO started at a very young age, shaping much of his political ideology. Disenchanted with the politics of BSO, he broke away to form a separate organisation, Baloch Students Organisation-Azad (BSO-A). It is committed to the idea of independent Balochistan and advocates armed struggle against Pakistani state. Various factions of the BSO¹⁰ came together in the aftermath of Bugti's death to spearhead the protests that swept the province against Islamabad. Despite the fragmentation all the factions profess a secular and socialist ideology, and in the words of one commentator "almost all of its [BSO's] factions remain to be perhaps the most articulate and consistent factors in the volatile politics of Balochistan" (Paracha 2012).

⁹ Harrison

¹⁰ BSO has historically splintered into many factions. After Bugti's death many factions came together under the single umbrella of BSO-A (Azad) to remain independent of political parties and struggle for independence. However the two major mainstream parties, Mengal led Balochistan National Party (BNP-M) and National Party (NP), disagreed with the merger and formed their student organisations. BSO-Mengal subscribes to radical nationalist ideology seeking Balochistan's secession from Pakistan but works closely with Balochistan National Party (Mengal). BSO-Pajjar has the largest following and is the most mainstream faction of the BSO. It focuses on the ideological and educational domains of Balochistan and aims to impart "Baloch nationalist ideology and history" to Baloch students. It is affiliated with the National Party (NP), the ruling party in Balochistan (Paracha 2012).

BSO-A has taken over the mantle of student leadership in the province. Its radical stand and non-affiliation with any established political party has made it popular among Baloch youth. Many analysts maintain that “BSO-A is the most influential political group in the province” and exercises “influence in all Baloch districts and colleges and universities in the province” (Rehman 2014). Malik Siraj Akbar –a US based Baloch analyst argues that BSO-A is “a very unique organization that does not have any parallels in Pakistan” (Zurutuza 2015). Its chairman Zahid Baloch was allegedly abducted by security forces in 2014, Karima Baloch took over the lead role in his absence. Her rise to the leadership of one of most popular political organisations in the province signifies the growing participation of women in Baloch national movement. In 2016 she was chosen as one of the BBC's 100 Women. Despite its non-violent methods of protest it was proscribed as a terrorist organisation on 15 March 2013.

BLF is the only militant separatist organisation headed by a leader from a non-feudal background. Nazar belongs to a middle-class family from Mashkay in district Awaran. His hard-line politics has found resonance among many educated Balochs disillusioned by the repressive policies of the state. To quote one Pakistani journalist, Nazar “enjoys greater popularity than even Brahamdagh Bugti and Hairbyar Marri” (Haider 2010). The fact that Nazar is currently the only prominent separatist leader fighting on the ground contributes to his growing popularity. Other leaders like Brahamdagh Bugti and Hyrbyair Marri are self-exiled in Europe.¹¹

Other nationalist leaders from middle-class backgrounds, like Wahid Qambar Baloch and Abdul Nabi Bangulzai, are also emerging as influential actors in the nationalist landscape of the province. With an educated leadership in the vanguard, ideological propensities are vastly outstripping tribal loyalties in influencing participation in the movement. Despite the state's repeated allegations of sardars being the troublemakers in the region, there are few doubts that this time the movement is being led by young educated people from diverse strata. The current movement includes doctors, lawyers, students, traders, and teachers. As the International Crisis Group puts it, “they can all make a living but they have chosen to fight because they see their rights violated and their resources plundered” (International Crisis

¹¹ Brahamdagh found refuge in Kabul after the assassination of his grandfather. But later sought asylum in Switzerland after one local journalist revealed to have been approached by “Pakistani spooks” to “eliminate” the young leader (Wahab 2012).

Group 2007: 13). With the increasing popularity of these leaders, many sardars have either stayed away or acted in cohort with the rising non-tribal leadership.

Beyond middle class–led militant outfits like Nazar’s BLF, various disparate tribes are coming together in a unified struggle against the state. This phenomenon is particularly conspicuous in the cadre base of the BLF and BLA (Baloch Liberation Army). Through a series of violent attacks against the Pakistani security apparatus and various symbols of the Pakistani state, the BLA emerged as a fierce guerrilla outfit in the early 2000s. In its formative years it included solely Marri tribesmen, but it developed into a plural outfit with members drawn from diverse tribes such as the Mengal and Bugti, and also from the educated middle class. BLA’s tactics found a sympathetic constituency among the disillusioned Balochs. One American journalist who travelled widely in the province captures the outfit’s growing popularity by paraphrasing Mao’s famous metaphor; “the BLA could increasingly swim wherever they wished because the sea of people supporting them was deepening” (Schmidle 2009: 74). Similarly, the Baloch Republican Party (formed in 2006 by Nawab Brahamdagh Khan Bugti after the death of his grandfather, Nawab Akbar Bugti) has attracted support from Balochs across the tribal divisions. Many young Balochs share Brahamdagh’s principled rejection of all offers of negotiation and reconciliation. He is considered a “national hero,” and “the massive popular backing for Brahamdagh himself is palpable on the ground” (Babbar 2009). It is the changing reality of diversification and pluralisation of erstwhile mono-tribal nationalist formations that defines the distinctiveness of the contemporary Baloch movement. The unprecedented collaboration of major tribes in waging a joint struggle provides a sharp contrast with the 1970s, when only Marris led the armed insurrection and Bugtis chose not to participate. The present conflict in Balochistan has also “for the first time, united the educated Baloch with the tribesmen” (Hussain 2006). Baloch nationalism, as one veteran Pakistani journalist observes, has “come of age on the basis of a tribal and middle-class unity that had long eluded it” (Sethi 2011). Comparing the earlier periods of nationalist insurrections with the ongoing movement, the noted expert on Baloch nationalism Selig Harrison sees the big difference as the military regime’s inability to play off feuding tribes against each other, signifying their growing cooperation. Equally important, he writes, is the sympathetic Baloch middle class, which did not exist three decades ago, and a more disciplined, politically aware, and better armed and trained fighting force in the BLA (Harrison 2006). As an obvious indication of coordination, all the major nationalist parties and student organizations, with the exception of Abdul Hai Baloch of the National Party,

openly support guerrilla warfare against paramilitary forces, regularly issuing statements in the press (Zulfiqar 2004). While growing inter-tribal coordination and communication is an evolving reality necessitated by the perception of a common threat and the imperatives of collective response, the movement still abounds in debilitating internecine tribal rivalries. The state has capitalized on this to extend its writ. It has either manufactured intra-tribal divisions through co-optation and inducements, or instrumentalised extant schisms to enervate the movement and prevent the formation of a unified front. However, despite internal fissures and state's divisive attempts, the unity demonstrated by nationalist parties on various issues concerning the movement reflects what Fredrick Grare calls "the larger reality of Baluchistan, where the tribes are in conflict with one another but are united in the defence of a territory they believe they own jointly" (Grare 2006: 9)

The Grand Jirga (traditional Assembly) held in the aftermath of Bugti's 2006 killing exemplifies the movement's gradual progression toward a united stand. Convened by the khan of Kalat Sardar Suleman Daud, the Grand Jirga was attended by around 85 sardars and 300 important personalities from Balochistan and other provinces. The high percentage of sardars present in the Jirga was a clear repudiation of Musharraf's claim that only three Sardars were opposed to his regime.¹² The Jirga condemned the killing of Akbar Bugti in the strongest terms and called for a probe into his death by the International Human Rights Commission. The Jirga simultaneously decided to file a case before the International Court of Justice in The Hague against the "violation of their territorial integrity, exploitation of Balochistan's natural resources, denial of the Baloch right to the ownership of their resources and the military operation in the province" (Akbar 2006). The leaders were well aware that the court cannot adjudicate on their behalf, as such intervention would go against the Statute of The Hague Conference. But the mere reference to the International Court of Justice conveyed a symbolic message that, as put succinctly by a Pakistani newspaper, the Daily Times, "there is no overarching framework of constitutionality or legitimate institution available to them within this country that can be called upon to address their grievances" (Daily Times 2006).

Spatial Expansion of Baloch Nationalism

¹² Musharraf often denounced Nawab Akbar Bugti, Nawab Khair Bux Marri, and Sardar Ataullah Mengal as the rabble-rousers and linchpins of the present insurgency (see his "Understanding Balochistan").

The manner in which he [Akbar Bugti] was eliminated not just immortalised him as a hero, but fuelled the fires of Baloch nationalism and separatism (Ansari 2006).

Unlike previous insurgencies, which remained confined to a few districts and were driven primarily by demands for provincial autonomy, the present insurgency displays pervasive violence and deepening nationalist fervour. This insurgency marks both the emergence of a middle class sympathetic to the nationalist cause, and the territorial expansion of Baloch nationalism. What was initially a localized movement, limited to the regions dominated by Marri, Mengal, and Bugti population groups, was diffused to other nontribal areas like the southern Makran belt. After Nawab Akbar Bugti's death, there was a pronounced shift in the geography of insurgency from the traditional bases of Dera Bugti and Kohlu toward Quetta, Mastung, and Khuzdar in central Balochistan and to Awaran, Turbat, Panjgur, and Gwadar in the south (Hasan 2014). The sphere of nationalist insurgency extended from Chagai in the west, between Iran and Afghanistan, and Gwadar, on Balochistan's southern coast, to Hub, the southeastern industrial city that borders on Sindh, close to Karachi. With substantial numbers of Baloch residing in Sindh and Punjab, the conflict also spilled over into these provinces, affecting three of Pakistan's four federal units (International Crisis Group 2006: 9). Not only did nationalist activity extend beyond the traditional strongholds of dominant Baloch tribes, its support base also grew, both geographically and numerically, with people from other tribes either aligning with the movement or joining it as active members. BLF's area of operations stretches largely across Awaran, Panjgur, Washuk, Turbat and Gwadar districts in southern Balochistan, the part of the province where the sardari system holds least sway. BLF's cadres include large numbers of Zikris¹³, as members of this sect are concentrated in the Makran belt (Ali 2015). BLA is mostly active in Bolan and Khuzdar districts. According to one NGO, a majority of Balochs now support one of the four of the prominent nationalist parties: the Balochistan National Party, the National Party, the Jamhoori Watan Party, and Baloch Haq Talwar (International Crisis Group 2006: 10). As educated middle-class residents gradually assume the mantle of nationalist leadership, the movement's territorial support base grows, stretching well beyond traditional tribal constituencies (with the exception of the Northern Pashtun belt and the border areas adjoining Afghanistan that were incorporated into Balochistan in 1971, which the Baloch do not consider part of Balochistan). It is therefore hardly surprising to find that the insurgency is

¹³ A small community with a global population of around 750,000, majority of Zikris reside in Balochistan. They are predominantly Balochs, settled mostly in the Makran division. Considered as a heretical sect by Sunni extremists, Zikris fail to fit in the established binary of Shia and Sunni.

most in areas like Turbat district where literacy rates in comparison to other Baloch majority areas are higher (Ali 2015). This educated class is more articulate in their assertions of self-determination, which has won them a much wider support base, including nationalist sardars whose positions they appropriated.

From Autonomy to Secession: The Radicalisation of Nationalist Politics

The separatist cause has gained unprecedented strength in the past few years, in reaction to corrupt governance but primarily through unabated numbers of forced disappearances and killings of nationalists and politically engaged youth, all within the context of a narrative of historic and systemic mistreatment (Brohi 2013).

Identity is both an elusive as well as a fluid concept changing constantly over a period of time. As a social construct it tends to be dynamic and malleable, forged and re-forged in response to certain forces in the realm of economic, political and social. Owing to the intangibility and fluidity of identities, it becomes extremely difficult to accurately determine the degree of nationalist attitudes present among the populace in a particular time and space. The case of Balochistan with its sparsely located communities, unfavourable mountainous terrain as well as the minimal presence of modern communication systems only exacerbates the problem. Therefore, the discussion presented below draws largely from the writings and discourses of intellectuals, nationalists and prominent media personalities. By carefully examining the discourses, a relatively fair estimate of national sentiments can be made.

It has been more than a decade since the eruption of fifth Baloch uprising. However, there are many questions that intrigue anyone studying the current iteration. The basic question as to what exactly are Balochs striving for is still a riddle? Are they fighting for provincial autonomy or outright secession? And if they are fighting for autonomy what kind of autonomy do they want or what is the extent of powers they want delegated to the province? Even among the melange of pro-secessionist voices, rhetoric of an independent Balochistan gets enmeshed with an idealistic vision of 'Greater Balochistan' that includes the territories inhabited by Balochs currently under three separate nation-states.

There are no easy answers to these questions, an assortment of motley Baloch nationalist formations with variegated objectives obscure the real demands. There is a broader division in the nationalist ranks between the 'radical' nationalists who use militant tactics to achieve

their goal of independence and ‘mainstream/moderate’ nationalists who demand provincial autonomy and participate in the occasionally held but frequently rigged electoral exercises. Nonetheless, all groups claim themselves to be Baloch nationalists. They stand united in their memories of perfidy and persecution. Both "paint a picture of forced agreements, promises made and broken, of power brokered and un-shared, and of deep poverty amidst great wealth" and activists across the divide “agree that Balochistan has gotten a raw deal from the beginning” (Ahmad 2012). They are vociferous in their demands for Baloch self-determination. However, the idea and meaning of self-determination is interpreted differently by different Baloch nationalist groups depending on their ideology and objectives.

Self-determination in common parlance is often conflated with secession and as such gets imbued with overt connotations of territorial dismemberment. Since the present political order sanctifies territorial integrity, votaries of self-determination have earned the ire of host states. Being the first country to disintegrate after the World War Second, notion of self-determination is particularly anathematic to the Pakistani ruling establishment, whether civilian or military. It centralised state has persistently regarded any demand by Baloch nationalists to whittle down the unitary state structure as subterfuge towards secession. However, not all nationalists clamouring for their right to self-determination seek secession from Pakistan.

Many nationalist groups seeking federal or con-federal restructuring of a state in which the province is conferred with more powers but without compromising the territorial integrity of a state fall within the category of internal Self-determination. Contrariwise proponents of secession fall within the purview of external Self-determination. Pakistani establishment has lumped together the nationalist adherents of these two different strands of self-determination as one ‘state-dividing’ category, which ought to be extirpated by force.

It is in the context of internal self-determination that demands of Baloch nationalist parties like NP (National Party) can be put whereas the militant secessionist groups like BLA and BRA (Baloch Republican Army) fall within the domain of external self-determination. Parties like Balochistan National Party (BNP) headed by former Chief Minister Sardar Akhtar Mengal have fluctuated in their rhetoric from internal to external self-determination depending upon the rigidity of political structures and the availability of political opportunities. For instance during Musharraf and later Zardari period Mengal was vocal in his demands for (external) self-determination of Balochs and also boycotted the 2008

elections demanding end to human rights abuses and investigations into Bugti's killing.¹⁴ BNP-M supports all forms of Baloch resistance including the armed struggle, but has not quit the path of parliamentary politics (Wahab 2009). Once the incumbent government completed its term BNP shunned the 'separatist' politics and participated in the 2013 elections.¹⁵

As a result of state's 'force only policy', many erstwhile moderate nationalists felt compelled to recalibrate their pro-Pakistan positions and adopt a rigid stance against the state. The failure of moderates to pressurise state into accepting its autonomy demands and bring forth any positive change has fuelled the seeds of disillusionment among the masses, many of whom are now looking towards *sarmachars* for change. The relatively intransigent attitudes and virulent rhetoric against the state has allowed radicals to appropriate the popular space once occupied by the moderates. Moderates find themselves discredited and *sarmachars* exalted in the popular Baloch discourse. The unambiguous political positions adopted by separatists like Brahamdag and Hyrbyair has pushed pro-federation Baloch parties to the point where they "find negotiations with Islamabad more hazardous than ever" (Rehman 2012). Resultantly, a deeper wedge is starting to develop between the two groups with the latter claiming to be the real representatives of Baloch aspirations. The polarisation between moderate and radical nationalists has reached many influential tribal families. While Akhtar Mengal electoral politics after boycotting the 2008 elections, Javed Mengal, his elder brother, returned from self-imposed exile to join the armed separatists. Javed now heads Lashkar-e-Balochistan, a splinter group of BLA. Similarly Hyrbyair Marri is the alleged self-exiled leader of armed guerrilla group BLA, but his brother, Changez Marri contested and won the Provincial Assembly election as a member of Pakistan Muslim League (N) in 2013. And the largest tribe in the region, the Bugtis too have members on both sides of the nationalist divide (Hussain 2013).

The New breed of radicals reject parliamentary route denouncing elections as a tool to legitimise the "exploitation of the [Baloch] resources" and "legalize the occupation of the Baloch land" (Nazar Baloch 2013). Separatists upbraid Baloch nationalist parties partaking in elections; they "use the language of nationalism but want to remain part of Pakistan" (Ahmad 2013a). Various separatist groups united under the banner of the Balochistan National Front

¹⁴ In his appearance during a hearing by the Supreme Court on the law and order situation in the province, Akhtar Mengal startled many by asking for an amicable divorce from Islamabad (The Express Tribune 2012).

¹⁵ Months before the elections were held in 2013, Akhtar Mengal in an interview to Dawn stated that "I have no faith in our killers. I have no expectations from the institutions that have spilt the blood of our young, or shed the tears of our mothers and sisters. I expect little — or nothing — to change" (Ahmad 2013a)

and called for a complete boycott of the 2013 elections. Voter turnout remained historically low and in one case it was as low as one per cent – after separatist groups announced a shutter-down strike on the day of the polling (Ahmed et al. 2016).

The moderates have found themselves in a precarious position incongruous with the rapidly changing political realities. State's highhandedness in the province is breeding cynicism. Scepticism among the masses against political engagements with Islamabad through parliamentary channels is pervasive and palpable. Akhtar Mengal's statement that any "public reference to the parliament or rule of law meant political suicide for him in the eyes of his supporters whose anti state feelings hardened day by day" is instructive (Schmidle 2009: 75). One of the younger and popular leader, Brahamdagh Bugti – chief of pro-independence Baloch Republican Party asserts that were he to compromise with the Pakistani establishment, as the moderates did, his "own followers will definitely desert, replace and kill" him (Akbar 2011: 305). Brahamdagh's position is reflective of changing contours of nationalism that veteran journalist Ahmad Rashid also observes, when he notes that "there has been a hardening of the Baloch attitude and a widening and deepening of the revolt" (Rashid 2012).

However, beyond the rhetoric of Brahamdagh who claims that 99% of Balochs want independence (Gall 2011) and people of his persuasion, the reality lies somewhere in between the 'radicals' and the 'moderates'. If surveys are any indicators of Baloch aspirations then according to one Gallup survey around 37% of Balochs favour independence while majority of the population i.e., 67% demand greater provincial autonomy (Abbasi 2012). However, the fact that only 37% seek separation does not quite reflect the changing realities in Balochistan, considering that in early 2000 Balochs were not fighting for autonomy or independence rather their main demands revolved around an increment in gas royalties, greater representation in jobs and opposition to military cantonments. That by the latter half of the decade, Balochs were fighting a war of independence, was a result of unabating exploitation and unrelenting use of force by the state to quell the movement initially meant for better economic rights.

Demands for secession generally emanate when demands for autonomy or devolution of power are spurned or met with force by the ruling elites. Many autonomist and minority rights movements metamorphose into separatist movements following violent treatment by unaccommodating states. As Pakistani state represses dissenting voices across the spectrum

of self-determination, many Balochs are making a transition from internal to external self-determination. Commenting on the link between military repression and the radicalisation of Balochs, Fredrick Grare -director of Carnegie's South Asia Program, in an interview points out that in its early phase the conflict appeared artificial, but the "army launched an operation against a so-called separatist insurgency with no separatist claims" (Akbar 2013). The use of force to resolve what appeared essentially as socio-economic grievances engendered a separatist movement where there was apparently none.

While the movement towards secessionism was steadily gaining ground since early 2000, it became more pronounced after the death of Akbar Bugti. The killing of this frail nearly octogenarian tribal chieftain, formerly the Governor and Chief Minister of Balochistan marked a critical point in the nationalist transition. As former Pakistani High Commissioner Akbar Ahmed in an op-ed observes that Bugti's death "acted as a catalyst" and "gave the Baloch independence movement a much needed second wind" (Ahmed 2012). In the post Bugti phase even the moderates "have lost faith in the Pakistani government and do not see any engagement with the Pakistani government as productive" (Ryan 2013). His death as Akhtar Mengal put it "drew a line between Balochistan and Pakistan" (Zia 2010). Consequently an idea of separate homeland is finding greater resonance among the Balochs. The movement which was "still striving for provincial autonomy" owing to "continuous suppression by the federal government" prompted a drift towards a "quest into a separatist movement" (Shahid 2016). The case of Ataullah Mengal is instructive. The province's first Chief Minister, Mengal became a prominent nationalist struggling for provincial autonomy after his democratically elected government was overthrown by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Asked whether he sought autonomy or independence, he minced no words in stating that "Provincial autonomy is a closed chapter" and fights for the "complete independence of the Baloch people" (Himal Southasian 2007).

I. A. Rehman, secretary general of the HRCP Secretariat on a field visit to the province observed that supporters of secession who earlier constituted only a tiny minority have increased considerably and that "a casual remark that independence may not immediately solve the people's problems is greeted with indignation" (Rehman 2009). Even Pakistan based human rights organisation acknowledges in a report the rise of separatist tendencies which are particularly manifest in the younger generation who see dialogue or negotiations as irrelevant in the present context and want self-determination to be part of any political discourse on Balochistan (Human Rights commission of Pakistan 2011: 8).

Baloch nationalism may not have yet reached a point as to threaten the territorial disintegration of the country but due to the sustained military onslaught by the state it is certainly maturing into a potent movement. As Madiha Tahir affirms that Pakistan's "feckless, incoherent policies have amplified a strident Baloch nationalism," the proponents of which reject all Pakistani peace overtures "as a ploy to muffle and then quash this resurgent Baloch nationalism" (Tahir 2010). Kaplan too observed that repressive policies were engendering "a new and better-armed generation of Baluch warriors....hardened into an authentic national movement" (Kaplan 2009). For many observers mere economic incentives or the release of victims of enforced disappearances would not be enough to douse the flames of separatism in the province, considering "The desire for an independent Balochistan has already spread across the province from its fishermen to its middle class and well-to-do youth" (Tahir 2014).

An indication of the deepening of Baloch nationalism is that women traditionally secluded in conservative tribal society are becoming active participants in the movement. They as Rehman puts it, are "adept in taking the floor" and passionate in their articulations of independence sentiments (Rehman 2009). In the schools "children still refuse to sing the national anthem at assemblies, instead breaking into a nationalist Baluch song championing the armed struggle for independence. Graffiti daubed on walls around this town call for independence and guerrilla war" (Gall 2009). Universities in the province "have become hotbeds of nationalist sentiment," many young leaders of the struggle are being produced here (Walsh 2011). Pakistani flag is a rare sight in Balochistan, found either at the provincial assembly or near the FC checkpoints, contrarily "flags of Azad Balochistan are a dime a dozen" dotting every nook and cranny of the province (Zia 2010).

The secessionist movement received an unexpected stimulus after the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs convened a hearing on Balochistan on 9 February 2012. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher who chaired the committee introduced a non-binding resolution calling for Baloch people's "right to self-determination and to their own sovereign country". Human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch participated in the hearing and testified against Pakistan's misuse of US military assistance in Balochistan to suppress the nationalists. The US State Department mindful not to offend its ally was quick to distance itself from the hearing; Pakistan government immediately denounced the resolution as an unwarranted external meddling in its internal affairs. This resolution apparently did not

stem from any genuine concern for Balochs and as Christine Fair, former senior political scientist with the RAND Corporation argues, it had “much more to do with partisan politics, and possibly resource-grabbing, than with any interest in the on-going human rights crises in Balochistan” (Fair 2012b). Notwithstanding its doubtful intentions the resolution generated euphoria among separatists since “the fact that the Balochistan issue has made it to the legislature of the world’s most powerful country is no mean development” (Siddiqi 2012b: 171). The whimpering of soul-searching in the civilian government found no resonance in the security establishment. They continued with their old ways. Days after the hearing Jan Muhammad Marri, the right hand man of veteran Baloch leader Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri was abducted from Karachi. Later his hacked body was found in the Hub area of Balochistan (Wahab 2012).

Though the idea of independence is increasingly capturing the imagination of Balochs, Balochistan has not yet reached a point of no return or as one writer puts it “is only a little short of the point of no return” (Rehman 2012). The fact the majority of Balochs demand autonomy indicates that there is still some room for negotiations and the possibility of compromise still exists (Grare 2013: 19). However, given that majority still demand a solution within the constitutional framework of Pakistan guarantees in no way a certificate of goodwill to the state. It does not take much long for the opinions to change and attitudes to harden. As Malik Siraj puts it lucidly,

No matter how small is the percentage of the Baloch who publicly state their support for free Balochistan, one thing is incontrovertible: Never in Balochistan’s history have so many people, particularly young people, so publicly asserted their support for independence. So, it is imprudent to underestimate the anger of the Baloch youth and the possibilities such disillusionment can lead to (Akbar 2013).

A cursory look at the writings and discourses of and on Balochs makes it vividly clear that Balochistan is witnessing something remarkable and unprecedented. Never in its history has there been a movement the geography of which was so diffuse and the constituency so diverse. The journey towards secession which commenced at the turn of this century is following a linear and seemingly inexorable path. Unless some remarkable changes occur in the polity and strategic thinking of the ruling clique in Islamabad, there is currently little happening that can halt this precipitous slide.

Conclusion

Balochistan today is a different place. Nawaz Sharif's previous stints as Prime Minister saw a more 'calm' province. The symbolic attack on the Quaid-e-Azam Residency also known as Ziarat Residency, in Ziarat, Balochistan by armed separatists immediately drove home the message to Sharif; that he faces a stiff challenge from what became the country's most troubled province. Islamabad's feckless which included militarisation and aggressive resource exploitation of provincial resources policies engendered widespread discontent in the province, which reshaped the contours of Baloch nationalism. Unlike the 1970s the current movement is not limited to Marri dominated regions, but encompasses most of the province's Baloch majority areas from the Bugti and Marri tribal heartland to non-tribal parts like Southern Makran belt. The period since the onset of the armed insurgency in the mid-2000s has also witnessed the hardening of nationalist sentiments. A new educated middle class unswayed by tribal allegiances is joining the ranks of separatists thus providing an alternative leadership to the age old dominance of Sardars. The two major militants groups, BLA and BLF constitutes of members from diverse tribes. The consequent pluralisation of nationalist formations is leading towards a geographical expansion of nationalism. Parts of the province hitherto unaffected by the movement like the central and southern Balochistan have emerged as new hotspots of Baloch militancy.

The return of democracy in 2008 saw no noticeable transformation in Balochistan, as security and intelligence apparatus refused to alter their modus operandi. Absence of major nationalist parties like BNP-M and NP from the democratic process had eroded the legitimacy of the provincial government. The parties that come to power -PML-Q, JUI-F and BNP-Awami in Quetta were seen as more corrupt and pro-establishment and hence lacked both the will and power to ward off federal pressures. More persons were disappeared and more bodies found dumped during democracies. Civilian regimes betrayed eerie similarities to dictatorial practices initiated during Musharraf's rule. The result is the perpetuation of status quo in Balochistan. The status quo is spawning further anger against the establishment, which bodes ill for Islamabad. Caught off guard by a reinvigorated nationalist uprising, Pakistani state has responded by a slew of ad-hoc measures containing uninhibited coercion, skewed development packages and a plethora of accusatory rhetoric lampooning Baloch dissidents as sponsored agents and proxies. State's coercive power will ultimately overpower insurgents, but it looks very unlikely to stymie the rising tide of Baloch separatism in the province.

However, different Baloch parties are yet to reach an ideological and operational consensus, which can bring coherence to the actions of myriad separatist groups. The movement lacks a

single platform or a joint forum that can clearly articulate Baloch nationalism. Existing tribal divisions, infighting within and among various groups and a scramble for power has prevented the formation of a united front. State has further leveraged the divisions within the separatist camp to its advantage. The rising xenophobic violence against other ethnic groups labelled as ‘settlers’ in the province by separatist groups have also undermined their credibility. Punjabis in particular are bearing the brunt of this violence. As a dominant ethnic group, militants see them as the face of the state they are battling with. Xenophobic violence has alienated other ethnic groups settled in the province. Resultantly, the present movement seems to have drifted away from its earlier position of high moral high ground to become more exclusionary. In the 1970 students affiliated with the Pakhtun Students Federation had taken to the mountains along with the Balochs to wage an armed struggle. Many progressive groups across the country extended their support to Baloch struggle. Punjabi and Urdu speaking leftist leaders had joined hands with armed rebels (Ayaz 2015). While many nationalists condone such killings as action against ‘collaborators’, other express indignation over what they find an undue emphasis on settler killings at the expense of routine violence against Balochs. If Baloch nationalism is to reclaim its high moral ground, humanism needs to be an inalienable part of the struggle for justice and dignity.

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