

Pakistan: The Forgotten Conflict in Balochistan

I. OVERVIEW

Violence continues unabated in Pakistan's strategically important and resource-rich province of Balochistan, where the military government is fighting Baloch militants demanding political and economic autonomy. President Pervez Musharraf's government insists the insurgency is an attempt to seize power by a handful of tribal chiefs bent on resisting economic development. Baloch nationalists maintain it is fuelled by the military's attempts to subdue dissent by force and the alienation caused by the absence of real democracy. Whether or not free and fair national and provincial elections are held later this year or in early 2008 will determine whether the conflict worsens.

Instead of redressing Baloch political and economic grievances, the military is determined to impose state control through force. The killing of the Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti by the army in August 2006 was followed by the incarceration of another, Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal, who has been held on terrorism-related charges without due process since December. Law enforcement agencies have detained thousands of Baloch nationalists or those believed to be sympathetic to the cause; many have simply disappeared. With the nationalist parties under siege, many young activists are losing faith in the political process and now see armed resistance as the only viable way to secure their rights.

Relying also on divide-and-rule policies, the military still supports Pashtun Islamist parties such as Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Deobandi Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) in a bid to counter secular Baloch and moderate Pashtun forces. The JUI-F is the dominant member of the six-party Islamist alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), Musharraf's coalition partner in the provincial government since October 2002. It is also a key patron of the Afghan Taliban. Using Balochistan as a base of operation and sanctuary and recruiting from JUI-F's extensive madrasa network, the Taliban and its Pakistani allies are undermining the state-building effort in Afghanistan. At the same time, U.S. and other Western support for Musharraf is alienating the Baloch, who otherwise could be natural partners in countering extremism in Pakistan.

Although the military has retained control through force, it is fast losing the campaign to win hearts and minds.

The insurgency now crosses regional, ethnic, tribal and class lines. Musharraf appears oblivious to the need to change course if the insurgency is to be contained and political stability restored. Islamabad has yet to implement any of the recommendations on Balochistan's political and economic autonomy made by a Senate (upper house) committee in November 2005. The federal government has also disregarded the Balochistan provincial assembly's unanimous resolutions against unpopular federal development plans. The government's inadequate response to the cyclone and floods that devastated the area in June and July 2007 has further worsened alienation.

Although the crisis in Balochistan is assuming threatening dimensions, it is not irremediable provided the national and provincial elections are free and fair. The restoration of participatory representative institutions would reduce tensions between the centre and the province, empower moderate forces and marginalise extremists. In the absence of a transition to meaningful democracy, however, the military's strong-arm tactics are bound to further fuel the insurgency, at great cost to the Baloch people and Pakistan's enfeebled federal framework.

II. THE MILITARY'S POLICY

The conflict in Balochistan, as in the past, is rooted in Islamabad's unwillingness to cede political and economic autonomy to the resource-rich but most neglected and under-developed of Pakistan's four federal provinces.¹ Again as in the past, the attempt to crush the insurgency is feeding Baloch alienation.²

¹ For previous reporting on Balochistan, including the rebellions of 1948, 1958, 1962 and 1973-1977, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°119, *Pakistan: The Worsening Conflict in Balochistan*, 14 September 2006; also Crisis Group Asia Reports N°137, *Elections, Democracy and Stability in Pakistan*, 31 July 2007; N°123, *Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes*, 2 November 2006; and N°95, *The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan*, 18 April 2005. The other three federal provinces are the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), Punjab and Sindh.

² See "Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan", Senate of Pakistan, Report 7, November 2005.

A. TARGETING THE SARDARS

Almost two years after the military operation was launched in Balochistan, President Musharraf and his army insist they must, in the national interest, eliminate the handful of “terrorists” who are attempting to “hamper the developmental efforts of the government”. His rhetoric has been uncompromising: “These elements should be wiped out of the country.... Nobody will be allowed to challenge the writ of the government. This would not be allowed at any cost”.³

In July 2006, out of Balochistan’s 77 sardars (tribal chiefs), Musharraf identified “only three [Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and Sardar Ataullah Mengal]” as “anti-development and anti-democracy; they do not want democracy, rather they want to exercise their complete dictatorship and control in their areas”. Ruling out dialogue, he declared, “we have to go for an operation to change this situation. We have to establish the writ of the government, and end the writ of [these] sardars”.⁴

The 79-year-old Akbar Bugti, the head of the Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP), was killed by the military at his mountain hideout in Kohlu district in August 2006. By some accounts, this action was taken because the intelligence agencies and the head of a gas company believed that Bugti, whose home base of Dera Bugti contains the country’s largest gas fields, was head of the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)⁵ and hence a main impediment to gas exploration. If the intention was indeed to clear the way for such exploration, it has not succeeded.⁶

The Oil and Gas Development Corporation Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan’s state-owned energy company, was granted an exploration license in December 2004 but

prevented from using it because of Bugti’s conflict with Islamabad. In February 2007, a senior government official reportedly said his death would open Kohlu district’s untapped reserves for exploration. These are estimated at 22 trillion cubic feet, with a potential commercial value of \$110 billion over 100 years.⁷ Akbar Bugti’s death, however, has made him the most visible symbol of Baloch resistance to the military, and as the insurgency continues to rage, Islamabad’s ambition to exploit Balochistan’s energy riches is unlikely to be achieved.

Bugti’s grandson and chosen heir, Brahamdag, was with him when he was killed but escaped and is reportedly leading the insurgency. The dead man’s sons are now targets of the government’s wrath and have not been allowed to inherit his property. Two days before his death, a handpicked jirga (tribal assembly) of rival tribesmen declared Bugti a “proclaimed offender”, removed him as chief of the tribe and took over his property.⁸ With state support and protection, his tribal rivals have been resettled in Dera Bugti district, including Sui, the site of Pakistan’s largest gas fields. The Baloch opposition says that intelligence agencies are “propping up” the leaders of the rival Bugti sub-tribes, Kalpars and Masuris, “and providing them millions of rupees to run tribal affairs in the region”.⁹

A Bugti son, Jamil Bugti, was arrested on treason charges for “speaking against the army and the government” at a press conference in October 2006 at which he had said that the “fighters on the mountains” were waging a war for the Baloch people, and “it is the responsibility of every Baloch to support them according to his capability”.¹⁰ Female members of the family have not been spared; in November 2006, two granddaughters were accused of links with the BLA and their bank accounts frozen.¹¹

The two surviving sardars that General Musharraf vowed to “fix” in mid-2006,¹² Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and Sardar Ataullah Mengal, are no longer politically active and only issue occasional statements denouncing the military’s policies. However, as veterans of the Baloch nationalist movement since the 1960s and having led the

³ “President’s Address at Groundbreaking Ceremony of Labour Colony (Gwadar Port Operation)”, 17 November 2006, at <http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk>; “President Musharraf urges Balochis to resist those against development”, 3 September 2007, at <http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk>.

⁴ “President General Pervez Musharraf’s Address to the Nation”, 20 July 2006, at <http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk>.

⁵ Banned in April 2006, the BLA has claimed credit for most attacks on government installations and personnel. While Bugti may have sympathised with the BLA’s objectives, he denied being a member. Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit.

⁶ Three weeks before Bugti’s death, senior military officials reportedly decided to “eliminate all troublemakers”, including Bugti and his two grandsons, so that the province’s oil and gas reserves could be tapped. Shahzada Zulfikar, “Trapped in Balochistan”, *The Herald*, September 2006, p. 72; also Massoud Ansari, “The Battle for Balochistan”, *Newsline*, September 2006, pp. 23-24.

⁷ Khalid Mustafa, “Plan in the offing to tap Kohlu gas reserves”, *The News*, 26 February 2007.

⁸ Ansari, op. cit.

⁹ Crisis Group interview, Baloch nationalist politician, Karachi, May 2007.

¹⁰ “Bugti’s son backs ‘resistance’”, *Dawn*, 30 October 2006.

¹¹ Noshad Ali, “Bank accounts of Bugti’s kin frozen”, *Daily Times*, 21 November 2006. In July 2006, bank accounts of 42 “BLA members”, 25 from Akbar Bugti’s family, were frozen. Also included were Khair Bakhsh Marri’s sons, granddaughters and daughters-in-law. Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., p. 23.

¹² Ihtasham ul Haque, “Rebel sardars ‘to be fixed’: Musharraf praises role of agencies, criticises media”, *Dawn*, 21 July 2006.

insurgency in the 1970s,¹³ they remain influential in nationalist circles and a source of inspiration for militants.

Marri and Mengal have ceded their political authority to their sons, Mir Balaach Khan Marri and Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal, who, as leaders of the nationalist cause, are now the military's primary targets. Balaach Marri, a member of the Balochistan provincial assembly, is in hiding. The government accuses him of heading the BLA and spearheading the insurgency from a sanctuary in Afghanistan. "It is alleged that the government is pressuring people to incriminate Balaach Marri. It is a fact that [he and the BLA] are carrying out activities of sabotage", a government spokesman said. "Please don't deny the reality".¹⁴

Akhtar Mengal, who heads the Balochistan National Party (BNP) and is, like his father, a former Balochistan chief minister, was imprisoned in November 2006. He is being tried by an anti-terrorism court in camera within the premises of the Karachi Central Prison, charged with kidnapping and confining two security men for several hours, whom, he says, his security guards temporarily detained after they tried to abduct his children in April 2006.¹⁵ An anti-terrorism court convicted four of his security guards in December 2006, a month after he was arrested on the eve of a BNP protest rally against military operations and the illegal detention of Baloch activists. Initially placed under house arrest in Balochistan, Mengal was handed over to the Sindh police in December.

The first court hearing took place on 8 January 2007. Iqbal Haider, secretary general of the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), who was initially allowed to witness, said Mengal was kept in an "iron cage" inside the courtroom, apart from his counsel, and not permitted to meet with family members. On 19 January, the judge barred HRCP from the hearings.¹⁶ "Why should Mengal be tried inside a prison? Why is

an anti-terrorism court hearing his case when he has committed no act of terrorism? This is simply yet another instance of political victimisation and harassment of the Baloch leadership", Haider said.¹⁷ Demanding "an open, free and speedy trial", BNP Senator Sanaullah Baloch said, "in the last five years, the Baloch people have not been treated according to national or international laws, and neither constitutional guarantees nor courts have helped them in the protection of their fundamental rights....Misuse of power and use of force [will only] broaden the gap between the province and the central government".¹⁸

B. DISAPPEARANCES

The military government's coercive tactics extend beyond the nationalist leaders and their families. Security agencies have targeted hundreds of Baloch dissidents, including political activists, students, doctors, lawyers, journalists and even shopkeepers. In 2006, HRCP cited numerous instances of intimidation, arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances¹⁹ and extrajudicial killings by security forces and intelligence agencies.²⁰ As the insurgency continues, these practices have worsened.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend is the sharp rise in disappearances of those suspected of nationalist sympathies or links with the militants.²¹ While hundreds allegedly

¹³ On Marri's and Mengal's roles in the 1973-1977 insurgency, see Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 3-6.

¹⁴ Quoted in Mazhar Laghari, "Balochistan: Anatomy of the Current Crisis: A Report of the National Dialogue, Islamabad, 11 December 2006", Islamabad, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁵ Senator Sanaullah Baloch, "Intimidating Baloch nationalists", *The Nation*, 8 August 2007; see also S. Raza Hasan, "Guards and driver of Mengal arrested", *Dawn*, 6 April 2006.

¹⁶ Mengal's guards were sentenced to life imprisonment. Fourteen of his staff members and guards also "disappeared" after he was moved from Balochistan to Karachi in December 2006. Two surfaced in Karachi in February 2007 and testified before the Balochistan High Court in Quetta in April that they and twelve others had been detained, tortured and held in solitary confinement by intelligence agencies. "Mengal's guards tell BHC they were tortured in custody", *Daily Times*, 6 April 2007; "HRCP barred from Akhtar's trial", *Dawn*, 21 January 2007.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Iqbal Haider, Karachi, May 2007.

¹⁸ Baloch, op. cit.

¹⁹ Amnesty International defines the "disappeared" as persons "who have been taken into custody by agents of the state, yet whose whereabouts and fate are concealed, and whose custody is denied". Its "14-Point Program for the Prevention of Disappearances" recommends the highest authorities adopt a zero-tolerance policy, prosecuting police, military and other responsible security personnel; give families, lawyers and courts accurate information about and access to detainees and places of detention; make judicial remedies available; maintain up-to-date registers of all prisoners at recognised places of detention; require legal authority for arrests; produce prisoners before judicial authorities in a timely way; compensate and support disappearance victims and their families; ratify treaties containing safeguards and remedies against disappearances, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and its first Optional Protocol; and that international pressure be put on governments responsible for disappearances. www.amnestyusa.org/What_We_Fight_For/14PointProgram_f_or_the_Prevention_of_Disappearances.

²⁰ "Conflict in Balochistan - A report of the fact-finding missions: December 2005-January 2006", Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Lahore, 2006.

²¹ The 1973 constitution states: "(1) No person shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest, nor shall he be denied the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. (2) Every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced

linked to terrorist activities have disappeared countrywide, Baloch dissidents have been the main victims of what the HRCP secretary general describes as a “barbaric and inhuman practice”.²² According to HRCP figures, 69 of 92 reported disappearances countrywide in 2006 were in Balochistan. As of December 2006, there were 242 persons on HRCP’s list of the disappeared, 170 from Balochistan.²³ Other sources cite 600 disappearances in 2006.²⁴

In a constitutional petition filed before the Supreme Court of Pakistan in March 2007, HRCP submitted a verified list of 148 missing persons, the overwhelming majority from Balochistan, and asserted that the law enforcement and intelligence agencies were responsible. The petition stated that some who had disappeared but were subsequently released had told HRCP they were held incommunicado and physically and mentally tortured by intelligence personnel to extract confessions and other evidence against themselves, their family or friends. Some were allegedly coerced into spying for the intelligence agencies. The mistreatment was said to have included sleep deprivation, severe beatings, electric shocks and humiliations such as being stripped naked.²⁵

At a hearing on the petition in July, the government informed the court that it had traced 113 of a total of

before a magistrate within a period of twenty-four hours of such arrest to the court of the nearest magistrate, and no such person shall be detained in custody beyond the said period without the authority of a magistrate”. While the constitution makes exemptions for persons detained under any law providing for “preventive detention”, it adds: “No such law shall authorise the detention of a person for a period exceeding three months, unless the appropriate Review Board has, after affording him an opportunity of being heard in person, reviewed his case and reported, before the expiration of the said period, that there is, in its opinion, sufficient cause for such detention, and if detention is continued after the said period of three months, unless the appropriate Review Board has reviewed his case and reported, before the expiration of each period of three months, that there is, in its opinion, sufficient cause of such detention”. The Chief Justice of Pakistan would appoint the Review Board for persons detained under federal law, and the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned would appoint the Review Board for persons detained under a provincial law. Part II, “Fundamental Rights and Principles of Policy”.

²² Crisis Group interview, Iqbal Haider, Karachi, May 2007.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, HRCP officials, Lahore, Karachi and Quetta, May-July 2007. Of the 22 disappearances recorded by the HRCP thus far in 2007, eleven were from Balochistan. Most others were from Sindh, where resentment against the Punjabi-dominated military government is high. Bordering on Balochistan, Sindh also has a substantial Baloch minority.

²⁴ Laghari, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁵ The full text of the petition was provided to Crisis Group by HRCP.

254 missing persons, and efforts were underway to locate the rest.²⁶ HRCP asked that the government’s figures be verified and that the court hold it accountable for breaking the law. According to Haider, it also insisted that the court demand sworn affidavits from officials, so that on that basis they “could be charged with perjury if the information they provided turned out to be false....What they have presented so far are mostly oral statements and occasionally a few written ones but they have yet to file a formal affidavit”.²⁷ Already in May, the Supreme Court had ordered the government to submit affidavits identifying the recovered persons, the locations where they were detained, the charges filed against them, whether they had been brought before a court and whether they had been released.²⁸ But, Haider said, “the authorities have filed no such affidavits to date, and the Supreme Court has yet to compel them to do so”.²⁹

The courts have, however, pressured the executive into releasing some of the missing persons. In an unprecedented display of judicial activism, the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, has also taken the intelligence agencies to task for violating constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights,³⁰ asserting that there was “incriminating evidence...to establish that they [missing persons on the list] were in the custody of the intelligence agencies”.³¹ In August, two missing persons were released after the court threatened to have the director general of the Federal Investigation Agency arrested if he failed to produce those on the list.³²

In August, Chaudhry, who comes from Balochistan, issued notices to senior government officials in the province to explain why hundreds of political workers had been “picked up by intelligence agencies in violation of the law”.³³ While this judicial activism is promising, it has yet to restrain the intelligence agencies. For instance, Munir Mengal, director of a proposed Baloch television

²⁶ “SC warns those behind illegal detentions”, *Daily Times*, 5 July 2005.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

²⁸ Nasir Iqbal, “SC seeks affidavits on freed people”, *Dawn*, 5 May 2007.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

³⁰ Musharraf unsuccessfully attempted to dismiss Justice Chaudhry in March 2007. In July, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the suspension of the chief justice was “illegal”. Crisis Group Report, *Elections, Democracy and Stability*, op. cit., p. 11.

³¹ Nasir Iqbal, “Apex court orders release of the missing”, *Dawn*, 5 September 2007.

³² Muhammad Kamran, “Missing persons case: produce detainee or face jail, SC tells FIA chief”, *Daily Times*, 21 August 2007.

³³ “CJP takes notice of disappearances in Balochistan”, *Daily Times*, 2 August 2007.

channel, was illegally detained in April 2006, was released in September 2007 on orders of the Balochistan High Court after he was exonerated of all charges but, according to his family, is again being detained by the intelligence agencies at an unknown location.³⁴

Baloch nationalists claim that 8,000 to 12,000 Baloch dissidents have disappeared. "The interior minister himself admitted to having arrested around 5,000 Baloch a couple of years ago. Since then, another 7,000 males have been picked up and around 200 to 300 women", said a Baloch politician.³⁵ While the HRCP believes these numbers are inflated, it concedes that its own figures are likely much too low, since many cases have not been reported. "The problem we face while trying to get to the actual number of disappearances is that when the government bans access to information and creates an atmosphere of fear, very few people have the courage to come to us with their stories", said Ejaz Ahsan, program coordinator of HRCP's Karachi chapter.³⁶

Denying any responsibility of the intelligence agencies, Musharraf placed all blame on jihadi organisations that "lure innocent people to fight for their misplaced causes in Afghanistan, Kashmir and beyond".³⁷ He did not explain why secular Baloch and Sindhi nationalists with no affiliation to any religious group constitute the majority of missing persons. "The Baloch are not and have never been jihadis", said a Balochistan Students Organisation (BSO) activist.³⁸ Only two religious radicals have been detained from the Baloch majority areas of the province, and both were subsequently released, yet scores of Baloch nationalists are still missing, said Zahoor Shahvani, head of HRCP's Balochistan chapter, who described the role of the intelligence agencies as "diabolical".³⁹

According to HRCP's Ejaz Ahsan, "all those who are raising their voices [against the government] are in

danger". Saleem Baloch, senior vice-president of the Jamhoori Watan Party, who was arrested in Karachi, detained for eight months and released in October 2006, was picked up again and is still missing after he told a press conference he had been tortured. "What jihad did Saleem Baloch undertake?", Ahsan asked. "These are just lame excuses made by the government to cover up its own iniquities".⁴⁰

C. CONFLICT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT

Since December 2005 when military operations began, at least 84,000 people have been displaced by the conflict in Dera Bugti and Kohlu districts alone. According to a UNICEF internal assessment in July-August 2006 that was leaked to the press, the displaced persons, mostly women (26,000) and children (33,000), were living in makeshift camps without adequate shelter in Jafarabad, Naseerabad, Quetta, Sibi and Bolan districts.⁴¹ 28 per cent of five-year-old children were acutely malnourished, and more than 6 per cent were in a state of "severe acute malnourishment", with their survival dependent on receiving immediate medical attention. Over 80 per cent of deaths among those surveyed were among children under five.⁴²

The government initially dismissed the UNICEF assessment as exaggerated, claiming that almost all the internally displaced (IDPs) had gone home.⁴³ However, it denied aid agencies and media access to the areas to which they had supposedly returned.⁴⁴ In December 2006, in the first official acknowledgement of the gravity of the

³⁴ Malik Siraj Akbar, "Munir Mengal not released despite court order", *Daily Times*, 14 September 2007.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Zafar Jan, member of central committee, Jamhoori Watan Party, Karachi, May 2007, referring to the interior minister's 5 December 2005 statement before the National Assembly. In July 2007, the Baloch Women's Panel, a newly formed support group for victims' families, accused the security forces and intelligence agencies of illegally detaining hundreds of Baloch political workers and harassing family members. "Baloch women to observe hunger strike", *Dawn*, 29 July 2007.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

³⁷ Inamullah Khattak, "Jihadi groups blamed for disappearances", *Dawn*, 28 March 2007.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007. For a detailed description of the BSO, a nationalist organisation representing the educated Baloch middle class and students, see Crisis Group Report *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁴¹ "Assessment of the Nutritional Status of Children and Women among Temporary Migrant Population in the Districts Naseerabad, Jaffarabad and Quetta", UNICEF, July-August 2006, in Crisis Group possession; also Gretchen Peters, "New aid crisis in Pakistan", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 December 2006; Abdul Wahab, "The Politics of Displacement", *Newsline*, January 2007, pp. 32-33.

⁴² UNICEF report, op. cit.

⁴³ Peters, op. cit.

⁴⁴ The media is not only denied access to the conflict zones but also discouraged from covering opposition activities. A journalist said, "each time the opposition holds a rally, the government issues instructions to the newspapers on how to or not to cover the event. Sometimes such instructions specifically underscore the need for not publishing photos of opposition rallies.... And there is a reward for following the instructions. Reciprocating the 'cooperation' by the newspapers, government will give special advertisements – sometimes even supplements – about the benefits of the mega projects being carried out in the province. These advertisements 'displace' the news of opposition rallies.... Newspapers in Balochistan are 'free' to publish a single column news about opposition rallies provided it is placed on the back page". Quoted in Laghari, op. cit., p. 15.

humanitarian crisis, the government gave UN agencies permission to conduct relief efforts, albeit with preconditions, including that aid would have to be disbursed under the supervision of local authorities.⁴⁵ UN officials were also reportedly told not to speak to the media.⁴⁶ Soon after, the government reportedly backtracked and blocked access to the UN and other aid agencies. Local non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) efforts, including that of the Edhi Foundation, were also halted.⁴⁷

In May 2007, addressing a public meeting in Sui subdistrict of Dera Bugti, President Musharraf claimed that 65,000 of a total of 90,000 IDPs from Dera Bugti had returned home.⁴⁸ A regional human rights organisation, however, believes some 200,000 persons are still displaced. Local estimates are even higher. Abdul Wahab Baloch, head of the Baloch Rights Council, an NGO, insists that more than 200,000 have been displaced from Kohlu district alone, and government neglect has resulted in many deaths. "You don't hear a word about them but the fact is that whole caravans simply disappeared. If and when a fact-finding mission is sent to the area, it may well discover mass graves".⁴⁹

The media is denied access to the IDPs and their homes in the conflict zones, so it is impossible to verify the conflicting claims.⁵⁰ "The father does not know where the son is, the sister does not know where the brother is and the wife does not know where the husband is", said a nationalist leader in Karachi. "Only when [the areas are reopened] can real figures emerge".⁵¹

Conditions at the makeshift camps remain a concern. The absence of clean drinking water and medicines, for instance, has reportedly resulted in the deaths of hundreds of children from diseases.⁵² "This is all part of the government's

overall campaign to convey to the Baloch that they are second-rate citizens", claimed the HRCP's Haider.⁵³

III. DIVIDE-AND-RULE TACTICS

By rigging national elections in 2002 to marginalise its civilian opponents, the military government facilitated the rise to power of the six-party Islamist alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), not just in Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) but also in Balochistan, where elections were manipulated to sideline secular Baloch and Pashtun nationalist parties. Musharraf's Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q) formed a coalition government with the MMA in Balochistan.⁵⁴

Jam Muhammad Yusuf, Balochistan's chief minister since 2002, has had little control over a cabinet in which most of the important portfolios were given to Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), the MMA's largest component.⁵⁵ On 2 October, JUI-F parliamentarians resigned from the provincial assembly, ostensibly to protest Musharraf's re-election. Coming so close to the end of the provincial assemblies' terms on 15 November, however, this was more likely the opening salvo of the Islamist party's election campaign, a bid to reestablish democratic credentials and regain legitimacy lost by its alliance with the military.⁵⁶ With Baloch nationalist parties besieged, their leaders imprisoned and their workers harassed, the electoral playing field in the province will in any event be uneven. Given that the military still believes Baloch dissent must be forcibly subdued, it will likely rig the election.

The military's support for Islamist parties to counter the Baloch and Pashtun nationalist opposition has been accompanied by attempts to divide and rule the Pashtuns and Baloch, the two main ethnic groups in the province.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "UN help sought to save IDPs from starvation: Balochistan instability displaces 84,000", *Dawn*, 22 December 2006.

⁴⁶ Ziad Zafar, "Pakistan's 'Other' War," *Newsline*, June 2007, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Saleem Shahid, "Amnesty to militants offered on surrender", *Dawn*, 11 May 2007. Musharraf's spokesperson in Balochistan claimed many of the displaced were "still undecided" about returning home "because they fear reprisals from their rivals and not from the government", Laghari, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁵⁰ "Despite the large numbers displaced...no one is allowed in to assess the situation in the conflict-affected areas; it is not possible to verify the little information that has trickled out about the displaced populations". "Pakistan: tens of thousands displaced by army operations against insurgent groups", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 10 October 2006.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Zafar Jan, Karachi, May 2007.

⁵² Zafar, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁵⁴ See Crisis Group Asia Reports N°40, *Pakistan: Transition to Democracy?* 3 October 2002, and N°49, *Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military*, 20 March 2003.

⁵⁵ Although Benazir Bhutto's PPP was the largest political party in the national parliament, Fazlur Rehman was given the post of leader of the opposition in the National Assembly (lower house of parliament).

⁵⁶ The MMA, however, has yet to quit the coalition government. Muhammad Anis, "APDM [All Parties Democratic Movement] pulls 163 lawmakers out of assemblies", *The News*, 3 October 2007.

⁵⁷ Balochistan's ethnic makeup, according to the last official census in 1998, is 54.7 per cent Baloch, 29 per cent Pashtun. Pashtuns dispute this figure and claim a 40 to 50 per cent share, whereas the Baloch allege that the Pashtun population includes Afghan refugees who have acquired false documents or have

The Baloch are concerned that the JUI-F, which mainly has support in Balochistan's Pashtun belt, will exploit its alliance with the military to increase its power. "The Pashtuns are being [supported] by the regime at the expense of the Baloch", said a Quetta-based journalist. "Several new districts have been created, all in the Pashtun areas, and most of the two million or so [mainly Pashtun] Afghan refugees in Balochistan have been provided shelter, property and even identity cards" which would allow them to vote.⁵⁸

Although Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan, such as Mahmood Khan Achakzai's Pashtoon Khwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), oppose military operations and back the Baloch struggle for political and economic rights, they also want a separate province for the Pashtuns in Balochistan or the merger of Pashtun-majority areas with the NWFP.⁵⁹ In 2007, the two major Pakistani Pashtun nationalist parties, the PKMAP and the Awami National Party (ANP), forged the Pakhtoonkhwa National Democratic Alliance (PNDA). It demands equal rights for the Baloch and Pashtuns within Balochistan and also supports creation of a new Pashtun-majority province, which would merge Punjab's Pashtun majority districts of Attock and Mianwali and eleven Pashtun-majority districts in Balochistan with NWFP. Baloch nationalists reject the latter.⁶⁰

Even if the Baloch and Pashtun nationalist parties manage to resist the military's divide-and-rule tactics in the province, they appear to have succumbed at the national level. In July 2007, the PKMAP and ANP and the two main Baloch nationalist parties, the National Party and the BNP, joined the MMA in an opposition alliance, the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM). Baloch leaders insist this will not undermine their credibility. "The APDM has a huge purpose, which is the restoration of democracy and the termination of the military's involvement in politics; all parties should be welcomed into the fold to achieve this purpose", said National Party leader Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch.⁶¹ Neither he nor leaders of other moderate APDM parties can explain, however, how their alliance with the MMA, their main political opponent and the military's ally in Balochistan, will help restore democracy in their province or create an even playing field for the nationalist parties in the elections.

The JUI-F has benefited from its hold over the provincial government. "The number of [Deobandi] madrasas in

Balochistan has increased steadily, thanks to generous financial support by the provincial government", said an HRCP official.⁶² The resultant rise in extremist Deobandi sentiment, which has also manifested itself in increased sectarian violence,⁶³ has helped the JUI-F to expand its influence, particularly within Balochistan's Pashtun belt.

JUI-F political and material support has also helped the Taliban to recoup, rearm, recruit and launch attacks into Afghanistan from Balochistan. In September 2006, General James Jones, Commander of the U.S. European Command, told a U.S. Senate panel it was "generally accepted" that the Taliban headquarters was somewhere in Quetta district.⁶⁴ On 3 August 2007, President George W. Bush signed anti-terrorism legislation that, noting "the continued operation of the Taliban's Quetta Shura", called for progress "to end the use of Pakistan as a safe haven for terrorist groups, including those associated with al-Qaeda or the Taliban".⁶⁵ Dismissing U.S. claims, the Pakistan government maintains that the Taliban in Quetta are so few that "you can count them on your fingers".⁶⁶ Nevertheless, in June 2007, a leading Taliban commander in Afghanistan delivered an audio address to thousands of Taliban and their Afghan and Pakistani supporters at a gathering organised by the JUI-F at a madrasa 35km from the city.⁶⁷

While Islamabad turns a blind eye at best to support given by its JUI-F ally to the Taliban, the military, the beneficiary of more than \$10 billion in U.S. aid since 2001, is more focused on curbing Baloch dissent than countering Afghan insurgents. The staunchly anti-Taliban and secular Baloch believe the international community has yet to understand the threat the military's Islamist allies pose, domestically and externally. "Balochistan is the only secular region between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and has no previous record of religious extremism but Pakistan has now radicalised this area simply to

settled in the province permanently. Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Zakir Hasnain, "PNDA to fight for Pakhtun rights", *Daily Times*, 30 July 2007.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, August 2007.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

⁶³ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°95, *The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan*, 18 April 2005.

⁶⁴ K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan-U.S. Relations", Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, 6 June 2007, p. 14. Earlier in 2007, a Taliban spokesman, captured by Afghan intelligence, claimed that Taliban leader Mullah Omar was in Quetta under the protection of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. David Montero, "More evidence of Taliban leader hiding in Pakistan", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 19 January 2007.

⁶⁵ "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007", H.R. 1, 28 July 2007.

⁶⁶ "Bush signs bill to step up anti-terror efforts", *Dawn*, 4 August 2007.

⁶⁷ Shahzada Zulfiqar, "Mammoth Taliban gathering near Quetta", *The Nation*, 2 June 2007.

counter Baloch nationalism”, said a BSO activist.⁶⁸ Through support for Musharraf, the U.S. and its Western partners are alienating the Baloch, who could be natural partners in countering extremism. “No religious extremist has ever been captured from the Baloch areas but U.S.-supplied weapons are still being used against us in the name of the war against terror”, a Baloch leader said.⁶⁹

IV. BALOCH GRIEVANCES AND ISLAMABAD’S RESPONSE

A. POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DISEMPOWERMENT

The Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan’s recommendations on political and administrative autonomy, which were devised after consultation and with the support of all major stakeholders,⁷⁰ could have helped create a favourable environment for solving the crisis. By disregarding them and retaining the military option, Islamabad has alienated the Baloch further. An activist said Musharraf consigned the report and its recommendations to “that dustbin of history” which contains “all the broken promises that Pakistan has made to the Baloch”.⁷¹

Responding to Baloch demands, the committee recommended retention of the Balochistan levies, a mostly local force, to maintain law and order.⁷² Districts in the province are divided into two categories. The regular police operate in the “A” districts, the levies in the “B” areas. The government intends to convert all “B” areas into “A” areas. From policing 95 per cent of Balochistan just five years ago, the levies now operate in only five districts; in the other 22, they have been merged with the local police.⁷³ Baloch and Pashtun nationalist parties argue that the levies are familiar with and serve the community, unlike the predominantly non-Baloch police, who are seen as brutal, corrupt and ill-disciplined. In the past three years, there has been a marked increase in crime in recently converted “A” areas; public unrest is also far more visible in “A” areas.⁷⁴

The report recommended a temporary end to the construction of new military cantonments in Balochistan.⁷⁵ Musharraf, however, inaugurated a new cantonment at Sui in May 2007, while work continues on two others, at Kohlu and Gwadar. “When the government keeps announcing that it is spending countless billions on Balochistan’s development, it fails to mention that the enormous sums spent on constructing new cantonments are also labelled development expenditure”, said the JWP’s Jamil Bugti.⁷⁶

Military operations, which have now extended beyond Dera Bugti and Kohlu to Khuzdar and Awaran districts, feed Baloch perceptions that the massive security presence and cantonments are aimed at perpetuating “colonial rule”.⁷⁷ Baloch opponents are justified in pointing out that the cantonments, which are largely in Balochistan’s interior, have little to do with protecting Pakistan “against external aggression or threat of war”, the military’s primary constitutional role,⁷⁸ but are aimed primarily at subduing Baloch dissent and enabling the centre to exploit the province’s natural resources.⁷⁹

The government’s insistence on constructing new cantonments is also heightening inter-provincial tensions, since the predominantly Punjabi military is seen as an instrument of that province, the most populous and politically dominant in Pakistan. Denouncing the Punjab as a “colonial” power and the army as the “Punjab army”,⁸⁰ Baloch militants are now targeting Punjabi settlers. Following Bugti’s death many Punjabi settlers, some of whose families have lived in Balochistan for over a century, were threatened or attacked. “Resentment against Punjabis has reached extreme levels”, said a Quetta-based journalist. “Since Bugti’s death, there is also a visible social segregation between the Baloch and the Punjabis; even in schools and universities”.⁸¹

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁷⁰ “Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan”, op. cit.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Baloch activist, Karachi, May 2007.

⁷² Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit.

⁷³ Malik Siraj Akbar, “More crime in police-controlled areas in Balochistan,” *Daily Times*, 11 July 2007.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan”, op. cit., p. 100.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Quetta, July 2007.

⁷⁸ “The Armed Forces shall, under the direction of the Federal Government, defend Pakistan against external aggression or threat of war”. Article 245 adds that the military shall “subject to law, act in aid of civil power when called upon to do so” but this does not correspond to the role the army has assumed in Balochistan. Article 245 [259] (1), Miscellaneous, Chapter 2. Armed Forces.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Islamabad, July 2007.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Karachi and Quetta, May-July 2007.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

B. LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS

1. Humanitarian neglect

While General Musharraf has frequently referred to his government's efforts to transform Balochistan into a vale of prosperity,⁸² it remains the poorest and least developed of the four federal units. The military government's neglect was more than evident in inadequate relief efforts following the cyclone and floods that also ravaged Sindh in June-July 2007. In July, the death toll was 180;⁸³ by September, it had risen to 420.⁸⁴ "This cyclone was several times more devastating than the earthquake of 2005 [in NWFP and Pakistan-administered Kashmir] yet it has received several times less attention from the government", said National Party (NP) leader Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch. The government is "totally apathetic to the plight of the Baloch people".⁸⁵ While the federal government obtained foreign help for earthquake relief in 2005-2006, it has yet to respond to the Balochistan chief minister's call to convene a donor's conference.⁸⁶

Describing Islamabad's response a month after the calamity as ineffective, insufficient and slow, the Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI), using the National Disaster Management Authority's data, reported only seven relief camps were set up in Balochistan in June and July compared to 108 in Sindh, though Balochistan was harder hit.⁸⁷ Over 5,000 villages in Balochistan (and 1,400 in Sindh) were affected. Losses in Balochistan amounted to \$417 million (Rs.24 billion). The agricultural sector was almost completely wiped out, with more than 320,000 hectares of crops and orchards destroyed; most people lost their livestock, while 5,000 kilometres and \$43 million (Rs.2.6 billion) of roads were washed away in the province.⁸⁸

⁸² Addressing a meeting in Zhob, for instance, Musharraf said, "all our efforts for the people of Balochistan are to bring them at par with the rest of the country and dispel their sense of deprivation". "President Musharraf urges Balochis to resist those against development", 3 September 2007, at <http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk>.

⁸³ Iftikhar A. Khan, "Over 6,000 villages hit by flood in Sindh, Balochistan", *Dawn*, 14 July 2007.

⁸⁴ "Pakistan Floods/Cyclone", Situation Report 24, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, 10-16 September 2006.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, Islamabad, August 2007.

⁸⁶ "Balochistan CM reiterates demand for donors' conference", *Daily Times*, 7 August 2007.

⁸⁷ "Pakistan: NGOs criticise government over lack of tents in flood-affected Balochistan", UN-IRIN, 31 July 2007; "Education 'a casualty of floods,' says UN", UN-IRIN, 11 September 2007.

⁸⁸ "Pakistan: IDPs in worst flood-hit areas struggle to cope", UN-IRIN, 26 August 2007. See also Baqir Sajjad Syed,

The disaster included breaches of the controversial Mirani dam. Cited by General Musharraf as another symbol of Balochistan's development when it was inaugurated in 2006, the dam was ostensibly designed to facilitate agriculture. Many in Baloch political circles and civil society, however, believe it was built to provide potable water to Gwadar, whose population is expected to increase substantially over the next decade with the influx of several million workers.⁸⁹ Opposition parliamentarians in the Senate have called for a high-level inquiry into the breaches, reportedly caused by design errors, which produced flash floods in Turbat, Naseerabad, Kharan and several other southern districts. The federal minister for water and power, Liaqat Jatoi, has conceded the dam will have to be redesigned but has refused to hold the government accountable or to pay damages.⁹⁰

2. Fiscal decay and executive disconnect

Balochistan's gas fields provide large revenues for the federal government but not the province, which is heavily in debt to the centre.⁹¹ That debt has declined somewhat, not because of an increase in revenues but thanks to an Asian Development Bank soft loan for the purpose.⁹² The provincial government acknowledges that Balochistan's overall debt burden, including an overdraft to the State Bank of Pakistan, could soon reach \$417 million (Rs.25 billion), drastically reducing already scarce resources for development.⁹³ The PML-Q-MMA coalition government has had a budget deficit every year since its formation in 2002.⁹⁴ "Balochistan is the only province whose total budget is [based] on loans", said a prominent journalist. "Provincial budgets are prepared purely on the basis of imagination and presumption; there is not even a modicum of reality in them".⁹⁵

According to the ministry of finance's 2007 economic survey, Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate countrywide, the fewest educational institutions and the lowest ranking

"Cyclone caused Rs. 24 bn damage in Balochistan", *Dawn*, 16 August 2007.

⁸⁹ Ilyas Khan, "Pakistan's dam of sorrow", BBC News, 5 July 2007.

⁹⁰ "Senators urge govt. to declare Balochistan calamity-hit", *Daily Times*, 18 August 2007.

⁹¹ For a detailed discussion on disputes over the sharing of energy revenues, see Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

⁹² Syed Fazal-e-Haider, "Grappling with debts and fiscal deficits", *Dawn*, 14 May 2007.

⁹³ "Balochistan's revenue reaches 2.8 million rupees", *Daily Times*, 31 May 2007.

⁹⁴ "Balochistan government finalising budget for 2007-08", *The News*, 18 May 2007.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Shahzada Zulfikar, Quetta bureau chief of *The Nation*, Quetta, July 2007.

in the Gender Parity Index.⁹⁶ Unemployment is increasing; a 2007 study on demographic transition, education and youth employment found that young people in Balochistan were twice as likely to be without a job as their Punjab counterparts.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the federal and provincial governments seem unconcerned about the province's financial plight and lack of human development. "The provincial government is corrupt to its core", charged a Baloch political analyst. "80 per cent of development funds are pocketed by politicians and officials, which also explains why the mullahs are so reluctant to resign from the government in spite of their oft-stated opposition to Musharraf".⁹⁸

C. MEGA-PROJECTS OR MEGA-PROBLEMS?

The Chinese-built Gwadar port project on Balochistan's Makran coast is the largest and most controversial of the federal government's major development projects. These schemes have aroused wide scepticism in the province. "Balochistan's resources are being utilised but not for the welfare of the people of Balochistan", a trade union leader claimed. "There is an ever-increasing demand for provincial autonomy as our people wish to develop, manage and control their own resources".⁹⁹ Many Baloch fear that far from improving their lives, the projects will impoverish them further and reduce them to a minority in their land. Nationalists and even some members of Musharraf's ruling PML-Q complain Islamabad ignores local stakeholders in planning and implementation.

Musharraf insists the Gwadar project shows the government's commitment to developing Balochistan. Since they are not stakeholders, however, many Baloch would rather see it fail. To subvert it and deter investment, militants have attacked government installations and officials, local and foreign, at the port.¹⁰⁰ "Gwadar is very unlikely to take off", said a political analyst in Karachi. "Six months or a year down the road, the insurgents are going to ambush a busload of Chinese and kill them, and that will spell the end of Gwadar".¹⁰¹ Instead of dispelling opposition, Islamabad still excludes locals from decisions. In February 2007, it granted a 40-year

lease for the port's administration and a twenty-year tax exemption to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), reportedly without consulting even its allies in the Balochistan provincial government or parliament.¹⁰²

Acting on complaints that the provincial government had illegally allotted hundreds of thousands of acres of land in Gwadar to civil and military bureaucrats, serving and retired judges and others, the Supreme Court ruled on 5 October 2006 that there was no authority for the transfers and cancelled them.¹⁰³ Informed sources in Quetta, however, are doubtful that the provincial authorities are implementing the court's orders.¹⁰⁴

With the Gwadar controversy still unresolved, Musharraf has announced construction of another port in Balochistan – at Somiani, 70km from Karachi, Sindh's capital and the country's main port city. Once again, local stakeholders have not been consulted, provoking resentment and raising concern that Somiani, too, may only benefit outsiders. The project could also provoke ethnic conflict, since many Baloch see it as part of a plan by Musharraf's Muhajir partners in Sindh, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), to merge Somiani with Karachi. In May 2007, the Balochistan assembly unanimously passed a resolution opposing the port's construction.¹⁰⁵

"Mega-projects have created nothing but mega problems", said Nawab Aslam Raisani, a member of the provincial assembly for the Pakistan People's Party (PPP, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's party). "Eight million people from outside will be settled in Gwadar and a similar number in Somiani. Where will we Baloch go?"¹⁰⁶ Strongly opposing the project, even a member of Musharraf's PML-Q complained that "local representatives are never taken into confidence when these projects are devised".¹⁰⁷

Islamabad, which ignored an earlier unanimous resolution against the construction of new military bases, is unlikely to abandon the Somiani port project or rethink policy towards Gwadar. Indeed, the military has reportedly sought to acquire more than 11,000 acres of land in Gwadar to construct what it calls a "combined defence complex".¹⁰⁸ "When such resolutions are ignored, it is not our credibility that is weakened but that of the

⁹⁶ "Balochistan home to lowest literacy-rate population", *Daily Times*, 12 June 2007.

⁹⁷ Sher Baz Khan, "Unemployment on rise, says ADB [Asian Development Bank]", *Dawn*, 22 May 2007.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

⁹⁹ Nadeem Murad, trade union leader, Quetta, quoted in Laghari, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group Report, *The Worsening Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

¹⁰² Sajid Chaudhry, "Three Gwadar port companies exempted from income tax", *Daily Times*, 31 July 2007.

¹⁰³ "SC cancels land quota for MPs, others in Gwadar", *Daily Times*, 22 October 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Quetta, July 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Malik Siraj Akbar, "Baloch legislators and govt. 'conspiracies'", *Daily Times*, 26 May 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹⁰⁸ Arif Rana, "Army seeks 11,000 acres of land for 'Defence Complex' at Gwadar", *Business Recorder*, 6 September 2007.

institution we represent”, said Kachkol Ali Baloch, leader of the opposition in the Balochistan assembly. “This is regrettable; it inevitably makes people lose faith in the political process and resort to violent means to bring about change”.¹⁰⁹

V. THE NATIONALIST CHALLENGE

To counter the Baloch opposition, the Musharraf government has attempted, with some success, to create discord within the nationalist parties through co-optation and coercion. Since Akbar Bugti’s death, those parties have been systematically targeted, and intelligence agencies have played a key role in dividing and weakening the Baloch opposition. “Balochistan is completely under the thumb of the intelligence agencies”, said a journalist in Quetta. “They make and break political parties, manipulate elections and even allot cabinet portfolios”.¹¹⁰

A. BALOCH NATIONALIST PARTIES

The unity of Baloch Ittehad, the four-party alliance of Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch’s National Party, Sardar Akhtar Mengal’s Balochistan National Party, Akbar Bugti’s Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) and Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri’s Baloch Haq Talwar, has come under considerable strain. Some observers question its capacity to defend Baloch interests. “Divide and rule has worked well”, said a Quetta-based journalist. “The opposition is fragmented”.¹¹¹

Bereft of its leader and under severe pressure from the government and security agencies, Bugti’s party is deeply divided and no longer poses a credible challenge to Islamabad’s authority. Even while Bugti was alive, the intelligence agencies had succeeded in sowing internal dissent. In July 2006, while Bugti was battling the army from his mountain hideout in Kohlu, his nephew, Mir Ghulam Haider Khan Bugti, JWP’s sole representative in the National Assembly, suddenly distanced himself from the party and expressed support for the government’s development projects in Balochistan. A month later, Haji Juma Khan Bugti, JWP party leader in the provincial legislature, attended a government-sponsored jirga in Dera Bugti, held to remove his uncle as head of his tribe.¹¹²

Internal discord became all too evident when JWP national and provincial legislators refused to agree to

Jamil Bugti’s demand that they resign their posts to protest his father’s death. “They kept procrastinating”, Jamil said, “so I eventually had to ask them to leave the party if they could not resign from the assemblies”.¹¹³ Seven senior members and office-bearers left the party; some of JWP’s national and provincial legislators apparently have remained in the party only to avoid losing their seats.

Baloch nationalists believe that most JWP legislators are now pro-government. A party activist said the legislators were “either bought off by the intelligence agencies or else coerced into ditching the party in its darkest hour”.¹¹⁴ A former office-bearer who left the party in 2006 conceded that the intelligence agencies had played a major role in dividing JWP parliamentarians and added, “officially [JWP] legislators remain members [of the party] in order to retain their seats but unofficially they are all members” of Musharraf’s PML-Q.¹¹⁵ This became clear in September 2007, when JWP’s provincial parliamentarians said they would support Musharraf’s presidential candidacy.¹¹⁶ “We have no choice except to vote for President Musharraf, as military intelligence personnel have been hounding us, directing us to follow their instructions or face the consequences”, one said.¹¹⁷

The government has also sown discord among Akbar Bugti’s family, reportedly helping one of his sons, Talal Bugti, to take over the party leadership. In May 2007, a hastily called convention elected him as party chief, after which he vowed to “continue the struggle for complete autonomy for Balochistan within the parameters of the constitution”.¹¹⁸ Akbar Bugti’s loyalists, however, denounced Talal’s faction as “Musharraf’s JWP”, insisting that it has “been created and is being sponsored by the government and its intelligence agencies”. They also said that Brahamdagh Bugti, Akbar Bugti’s grandson and political heir, now heads the party.¹¹⁹ Jamil Bugti denounced the Talal faction as a “one-man show that does not have the support of any of the close confidants of my father or the central executive committee of the party. Even those who had resigned from the party last year did not attend Talal’s convention”. Jamil supports his nephew, Brahamdagh.¹²⁰

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹¹² Bahzad Alam Khan, “Nudged by agencies, JWP falling apart”, *Dawn*, 31 October 2006.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Zafar Jan, Karachi, May 2007.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Ejaz Khan, “Musharraf to kick off campaign from Quetta”, *The News*, 26 September 2007.

¹¹⁷ Shahzada Zulfiqar, “Four JWFP MPAs back Musharraf”, *The Nation*, 26 September 2007.

¹¹⁸ “Talal Bugti new JWP chief”, *Dawn*, 14 May 2007.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Zafar Jan, Karachi, May 2007.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

These problems have reduced the JWP to a shadow of the political force it was under Akbar Bugti. Until military operations end in Balochistan and democracy is restored in the country, Brahamdagh, who is believed to have sought refuge in Afghanistan, from where he reportedly plays an active part in guiding the insurgency,¹²¹ will not be in a position to revive the party's fortunes.

In sharp contrast to the JWP, Akhtar Mengal's BNP has stayed united and in opposition to the military government. Since the BNP, which has won previous provincial elections, could pose the strongest electoral challenge to the PML-Q and its MMA allies, the party and its leadership have been systematically targeted by the security agencies. As noted above, Mengal has been imprisoned since November 2006 on terrorism charges and denied a fair trial.

There are periodic crackdowns on BNP workers. In December 2006, hundreds of party members and supporters were arrested to prevent them from holding a protest rally against disappearances, killings, displacements and military operations. In April and May 2007, the BNP announced but was forcibly prevented from holding protest rallies after scores of party leaders and workers were arrested. In June, too, a massive crackdown prevented the party from holding province-wide protests.¹²² According to BNP Secretary General Habib Jalib Baloch, "we are targeted because we oppose the Punjab's colonial domination, mega-projects and cantonments....Our struggle will continue until this colonialism ends....People now know that we will not ditch them and become traitors when the going gets tough".¹²³

Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch's National Party also insists it will not compromise with the military government. In a free and fair electoral contest, it could pose a credible challenge in southern Balochistan. Unlike BNP members, NP delegates did not resign from parliament after Bugti's death, fuelling suspicions the party was secretly negotiating with the government. NP leaders insist those rumours were "designed by the government to fracture the unity of the Baloch nationalist alliance".¹²⁴ One said, "there are people intending to cut deals [with Musharraf] but we – the people of Balochistan – will never coexist with dictatorship".¹²⁵

The BNP and the NP believe that elections held under Musharraf's watch would be rigged but they have not yet lost faith in the ballot box as a means of political change. Khair Bakhsh Marri's Baloch Haq Talwar, now led by his son Balaach, appears, however, to have abandoned parliamentary politics for armed resistance to military rule. A member of the provincial legislature, Balaach went underground soon after the insurgency began. "Balaach Marri does not believe in the existing political process", said a Quetta-based journalist. "The only reason why he contested the election in 2002 was to prevent his ancestral seat going to a non-Baloch or a mullah".¹²⁶ The government maintains that Balaach heads the BLA and, like Brahamdagh Bugti, is leading the insurgency from a safe haven in Afghanistan.¹²⁷

B. THE BALOCH INSURGENCY

By targeting the Baloch leadership, marginalising secular nationalist parties, sidelining the provincial legislature, forging ahead with contentious development plans and using military force to subdue dissent, the government has shown a disregard for the political process that is now widely mirrored in Balochistan. Many young Baloch have lost faith in politics and picked up the gun.

Soon after the Bugti killing, Baloch nationalist forces held a grand Baloch jirga; more than 380 leaders, including 85 sardars, participated, exposing Musharraf's claim that he enjoyed the support of all except three sardars.¹²⁸ Condemning Bugti's killing, the jirga appealed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague against the "violation of...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".¹²⁹ While the ICJ has no jurisdiction to take up the petition, Baloch nationalists maintain that the jirga succeeded in its twin objectives: to raise the Baloch cause internationally and to unite Baloch tribes and factions.¹³⁰ A sardar who participated said that armed BLA fighters had dominated the proceedings with calls for Balochistan's independence. "It is these youth, and not the sardars, who are now leading the resistance". The hatred for Pakistan voiced at the jirga, he said, "would have left the intelligence agencies aghast".¹³¹

¹²¹ Government officials say Brahamdagh Bugti is conducting "terrorist activities" within Balochistan from his sanctuary in Afghanistan. Mukesh Ropeta, "Afghanistan sheltering Baloch terrorists: Jam", *The News*, 26 July 2007.

¹²² "Jalib, other BNP leaders detained", *Dawn*, 21 May 2007; "Top BNP men held ahead of meeting", *Daily Times*, 4 June 2007.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Islamabad, July-August 2007.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Laghari, op. cit., p. 17.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹²⁷ Ropeta, op. cit.

¹²⁸ Shahzada Zulfiqar, "Rage Revisited", *The Herald*, October 2006, p. 79.

¹²⁹ Malik Siraj Akbar, "Baloch jirga to appeal to ICJ", *Daily Times*, 22 September 2006.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

Marri and Bugti tribesmen may have dominated the insurgency at first but the ranks of the fighters now include hundreds of educated, middle-class Baloch. An observer noted: "Previous insurgencies were led by sardars but today's insurgency is spearheaded by ordinary, middle-class Baloch". Nationalist fervour, he said, is driving it; factors such as poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment are of secondary importance. "The insurgents", he said, include "doctors, lawyers, traders and teachers. They can all make a living but they have chosen to fight because they see their rights violated and [Balochistan's] resources plundered".¹³²

Akbar Bugti's death was a turning point. "The dictator thought that by killing my father, he would extinguish the whole movement", said Jamil Bugti. "He has been proved wrong; the intensity of the insurgency has increased".¹³³ According to another Baloch nationalist, the military cannot crush the insurgency, since "there is no single messianic leader whose removal will end it. This movement is based on an ideology that cannot be wiped out, and that ideology is Baloch nationhood".¹³⁴

In May 2007 Musharraf claimed that 65 "terrorist camps" in Balochistan had been destroyed, and the remaining "three or four" would be "eliminated soon".¹³⁵ His government insists that military operations have weakened the insurgency and that there has been a marked decline in insurgent attacks. There is, however, little evidence to support these claims. Attacks on government personnel, installations and other infrastructure still occur province-wide. Even Quetta, the provincial capital and a major army cantonment, is not spared. In June, ten soldiers were killed; Raziq Bugti, official spokesman of the provincial government, was killed in broad daylight in July in the capital.

Independent observers believe the insurgency may gain even greater force if the root causes of the conflict are not urgently addressed. "[All] Baloch now support the BLA's cause, if not practically then at least morally. The lava is brewing and when it erupts, it will be devastating".¹³⁶ The Baloch insurgents cannot defeat the army but they can certainly, as they have demonstrated, defy the writ of the state.

The Musharraf government still insists that the insurgency in Balochistan is externally supported and has on several occasions accused India and Afghanistan. At the first

meeting of the Pakistan-India Joint Mechanism on Terrorism in March 2007, for instance, it reportedly gave India a dossier on "the involvement of Indian spy agencies in terrorist acts on Pakistani soil and especially acts of sabotage in Balochistan".¹³⁷ Balochistan chief minister Jam Yusuf has accused the Afghan government of providing sanctuary and a base of operations to insurgent leaders, including Brahamdagh Bugti and Baalach Marri, and of refusing to hand them over despite repeated requests.¹³⁸

Some Baloch insurgents with ethnic kin and sympathisers in Afghanistan have obtained refuge there. The governor of Afghanistan's Kandahar province admits that a number of Baloch nationalists are in his province to "escape excesses by the Pakistan government".¹³⁹ India, following a long pattern of mutual interference in each other's affairs, may be providing the insurgents some assistance. Baloch nationalists reject such allegations as "malicious governmental propaganda" aimed at damaging the credibility of "a voluntary, indigenous struggle for emancipation".¹⁴⁰ An analyst observes, however, that "when you are fighting a whole army, you are not likely to turn down help from any quarter".¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Crisis Group believes any such support is limited, and Islamabad should recognise that its policies are primarily responsible for the conflict in Balochistan.

VI. CONCLUSION

The insurgency is unlikely to subside as long as the military relies on repression, killings, imprisonment, disappearances and torture to bend the Baloch to its will. "Why is the government pushing the Baloch to the wall?", asked HRCP Secretary General Haider, warning that repression of the Baloch "might push them so hard the federation might collapse".¹⁴² Unless the federal government also cedes meaningful political and economic autonomy, Baloch alienation is bound to grow, undermining the province's stability and heightening centre-provincial tensions.

Islamabad, however, is unlikely to abandon coercion for cooperation so long as the government remains undemocratic. The 1973 constitution, a former Balochistan Chief Secretary (senior-most bureaucrat) said, "sets the

¹³² Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

¹³⁵ Saleem Shahid, "Amnesty to militants offered on surrender", *Dawn*, 11 May 2007.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Quetta, July 2007.

¹³⁷ Shaiq Hussain, "Pak proves India's role in Balochistan unrest", *The Nation*, 7 March 2007.

¹³⁸ Ropeta, op. cit.

¹³⁹ "Kandahar governor offers to mediate in Balochistan", *Dawn*, 25 May 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Karachi and Quetta, May-July 2007.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

¹⁴² Crisis Group interview, Karachi, May 2007.

limits to the powers that the provinces can exercise. If democracy is absent and the constitution is a piece of paper that could be disregarded at the convenience of a dictator, then the whole debate regarding autonomy becomes meaningless".¹⁴³ The conflict in Balochistan could, however, be reversed if the military government were to be replaced by a genuinely democratic order through free, fair, transparent and democratic elections. The restoration at the centre and in the province of participatory democratic institutions willing to accommodate the legitimate political demands of the Baloch would assuage dissent and restore trust in constitutionalism and rule of law.

Democratically elected national and provincial governments and the presence of representative, participatory institutions ensured the peace in Balochistan during the 1990s. That peace could be restored if the election process were indeed free and fair. The election process will, however, lack credibility unless the federal government:

- immediately ends all military operations and withdraws the army to the barracks;
- releases all political prisoners, including those in the unlawful custody of intelligence agencies, and accepts the Supreme Court's directive to end the disappearances of political opponents; immediately produces those charged with criminal offences before competent civilian courts, which should be responsible for any trials; and drops terrorism charges against BNP leader Akhtar Mengal, transfers his kidnapping trial to a sessions court and releases him on bail;¹⁴⁴ and
- ensures freedom of speech, movement, association and assembly, removing all restrictions on Baloch nationalist parties.

A free and fair election would empower the moderate, secular Baloch nationalists and their Pashtun allies. It would also marginalise the pro-Taliban Islamist forces that have had the run of the province with the military's

support for the past eight years. Anything short of a democratic election, however, would keep the fires of insurgency burning in Balochistan and strengthen religious extremism both there and in Afghanistan.

Islamabad/Brussels, 22 October 2007

¹⁴³ Syed Shahid Hussain, quoted in Laghari, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁴ National Party leader Dr Hayee Baloch said Mengal "is not a terrorist. All he is striving for is the attainment of a legitimate political cause. The charges against him are completely devoid of substance and are politically motivated. This is just another appalling example of how dreadfully this regime treats its political opponents". Crisis Group telephone interview, 4 October 2007. Amnesty International has expressed concern about Mengal's imprisonment and trial, as has the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. See "Pakistan: Incommunicado detention/torture/ill treatment/unfair trial", Urgent Appeal, Amnesty International, 19 January 2007 at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA330022007?open&of=ENG-PAK>.

APPENDIX

MAP OF BALOCHISTAN





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