

Balochistan and the State of Pakistan: An Overview of 1947 CE till the Start of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002 CE

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Abstract

The relationship between Balochistan and the Pakistani state from 1947 to 2002 is a complex narrative defined by a persistent tension between federal integration and ethnic particularism. This period witnessed the evolution of a provincial identity that often found itself at odds with the centralized vision of the nascent state. Following the contested accession of the Kalat State in 1948, the region was marked by cycles of armed insurgency and heavy-handed military crackdowns, punctuated by brief intervals of political negotiation. Central to this friction was the “One Unit” policy of the 1950s and 60s, which stripped Balochistan of its provincial autonomy, fueling a sense of political marginalization. Even after the restoration of provincial status in 1970, the dismissal of the NAP-led government in 1973 triggered one of the most violent insurgencies in the region's history. The state's response—predicated on security-centric governance—often prioritized the extraction of natural resources, such as Sui gas, without providing equitable socio-economic returns to the local population. By the late 20th century, the geopolitical landscape shifted significantly. The fallout from the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent rise of the Taliban introduced new layers of sectarianism and instability. This abstract concludes at the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001–2002, a pivotal moment when Balochistan's strategic importance escalated due to its proximity to Afghanistan. This era set the stage for modern grievances, entrenching a legacy of mistrust that continues to shape the contemporary Pakistani political fabric.

Key Words: Balochistan, Pakistan, Insurgency, Marginalization, Geopolitics

Introduction

In 1947 Britain pulled out of Indian subcontinent and this caused an instant and highly intense diplomatic war between newly independent states of India and Pakistan. The rivalry was not necessarily a territorial rivalry, but rather a regional dominance rivalry that essentially posed a threat to the sovereignty of different princely states that were left in the vacuum left by the colonial exit (Kutty, 2009). As the British exit was controlled by the Indian independence act, the situation with Balochistan was still unilaterally disputed. Balochistan was originally grouped under the umbrella

title of princely states, which was an umbrella designation that the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan vehemently opposed. Based on past agreements with Britain that had established the Khanate as a separate region with protection, the Khan claimed that his state had to back to its pre-colonial freedom. Therefore, when the British were ready to depart, the Khan of Kalat officially proclaimed the independence of Kalat on August 11, 1947- days before the formation of Pakistan was to occur (Kutty, 2009).

The regional security environment shifted dramatically in March 1948. The burgeoning conflict over the Indian occupation of Kashmir heightened existential anxieties within the Pakistani leadership. From the perspective of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the nascent Pakistani administration, an independent or unaligned Balochistan was viewed as a strategic vulnerability that could potentially invite Indian interference or encirclement (Breseeg, 2001). To mitigate this perceived threat, Jinnah accelerated efforts to secure the formal accession and merger of Balochistan into the Pakistani federation.

To resolve the legal and political status of the region, a high-level conference was convened in Delhi. This meeting was a pivotal moment in the diplomatic history of Balochistan. The proceedings were chaired by Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy and representative of the British Crown, who was assisted by Lord Ismay, the Viceroy's chief of staff and legal advisor (Kutty, 2009; Dashti, 2012). Representing the interests of Balochistan were the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, and his Prime Minister, Barrister Sultan Ahmed Khan.

According to the historical accounts of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, a central figure in Baloch politics, this conference resulted in a foundational three-point agreement that temporarily defined the relationship between Karachi and Kalat (Kutty, 2009). The points were as follows:

- a. **Recognition of Sovereignty:** The Government of Pakistan officially recognized the independent and sovereign status of the State of Kalat. This recognition was predicated on the understanding that Kalat maintained unique treaty relations with the British Government, distinguishing its legal standing from other Indian princely states.
- b. **Legal Succession and Leased Territories:** It was agreed that a formal legal opinion would be sought to determine if Pakistan could legally serve as the successor to the previous British treaties, particularly concerning the strategically vital leased areas (such as Quetta and the Bolan Pass).
- c. **The Standstill Agreement:** Pending the receipt of this legal opinion, both parties agreed to engage in further negotiations. In the interim, a "Standstill Agreement" was established, maintaining the status quo regarding the territories previously leased to the British, thereby preventing any immediate administrative vacuum or military confrontation.

This agreement is considered by many Baloch historians as the "lost opportunity" for a peaceful confederation. The subsequent months saw a departure from these three points. While the Khan attempted to seek a mandate from the Darul Awam (Lower House) and Darul Umara (Upper House) to maintain independence, the Pakistani government—driven by the pressures of the Kashmir conflict—viewed the delay as a security threat.

The eventual "accession" of 1948 was not a result of these Delhi negotiations but a consequence of military pressure and the unilateral integration of Kalat's subordinate states (Kharan, Lasbela, and Mekran). This historical friction point is what modern scholars refer to as the "original grievance" that fuels the contemporary insurgency (Dashti, 2012). By understanding this brief window of recognized sovereignty, one can better appreciate the depth of the current nationalist argument regarding the "forced" nature of the 1948 merger.

The Accession of Balochistan: Conflicting Historical Narratives

The integration of Balochistan into Pakistan remains a subject of intense historical debate, characterized by two fundamentally opposing perspectives.

The Nationalist Perspective: Forced Integration

Baloch nationalists frequently argue that the amalgamation was a forced process conducted without the genuine consent of the Baloch people (Breseeg, 2001). Historical accounts from Baloch authors and Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo—a prominent representative of the Khanate of Kalat—suggest that the Pakistani government exerted significant pressure on the Khan of Kalat to merge his territory. While some historians note that Jinnah initially approached the Khan to discuss a merger, the Khan insisted that such a decision required the deliberation of Balochistan’s legislative bodies.

However, according to Dashti (2012), the Pakistani military forcibly occupied the Kalat state while these parliamentary proceedings were still underway. The Khan had maintained that he could not act unilaterally and subsequently brought the matter before the Parliament of Balochistan. This legislature consisted of two houses: the Darul Awam (lower house), representing the non-tribal populace, and the Darul Umara (upper house), representing the tribal constituency. Both houses ultimately rejected the proposal for accession to Pakistan (Kutty, 2009).

Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo argued that the status of Balochistan had been intentionally manipulated by colonial structures:

“The Indian government act of 1935 was nothing but a planned and constructed strategy to control the region through divide and rule, therefore, they (the British government) changed the status of Balochistan as a princely state, but Balochistan was never a princely state, rather, it was an independent state, had a treaty relation with the British Indian government” (Dashti, 2012).

The Official Perspective: Voluntary Merger and Strategic Necessity

On the other hand, other Pakistani scholars and policymakers insist that the Khan of Kalat did in fact formally agree to a merger with Governor-General Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Supporters of this position point out that the other three princely states in the area—Mekran, Kharan and Las Bela, had already expressed their preference for merger (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). According to A.B. Awan (1985), the leaders of the three provinces had made it clear after Partition of the subcontinent that they wanted to join Pakistan.

Upon accepting these requests, the Pakistani government deployed military contingents to Pasni and Jiwani to secure vital coastal defense installations. Awan (1985) details the strategic nature of this movement:

“At Pasni and Jiwani the government of Pakistan had valuable installations, such as airstrip and postal and radio installations. That is why on the 26th, the prime minister called up the three service chiefs and it was decided to send one platoon of troops, by air to Jiwani for the protection of the airport, another platoon to Turbat and a company, by sea to Pasni to take over the port and radio stations. The Agent of the Governor General at Quetta and the Khan were both informed” (Awan, 1985).

The Climax of Accession

The consolidation of these three strategic regions created a tremendous amount of geopolitical pressure on the Khan of Kalat. The Khan challenged the move, saying these areas had no autonomy to take independent decisions. Keener than most to see the merger take place was the Khan, who even sought for Jinnah to complete it within three months despite categorical opposition from both parliamentary chambers. Recalling the events, Bizenjo, then Leader of the House of Commons (Darul Awam), said with great trepidation:

“Despite both houses giving their categorical verdict against Kalat’s accession to Pakistan, Khan Sahab informed the government of Pakistan to finalise the merger of Kalat within three months. Instead of accepting this offer, the Pakistan government decided to annex Kharan and Lasbela – the two subordinate states of Kalat – and enforce their ‘merger’ with Pakistan directly. Similarly, Mekran which had been a district of Kalat for the last 300 years, was made ‘independent’ of Kalat state on March 17, 1948, and one of its three sardars, Bay Khan Gichki was made its ruler” (Kutty, 2009).

Under mounting pressure and internal indecision, the Khan signed the Agreement of Accession on

March 27, 1948. Bizenjo’s critique of this decision remains a cornerstone of nationalist discourse: “In taking such a step-in gross violation of the will of the people of Kalat-Baluchistan as expressed unanimously by the members of both Houses of Parliament, the Khan rendered himself guilty of an act of great injustice to them. I wonder if history will ever forgive him” (Kutty, 2009).

Strategic Aftermath

From a geopolitical point of view, Pakistan's annexation of Balochistan, which has a long coastline and a lot of mineral resources, almost doubled the size of the country. But the disagreement between Baloch leaders and tribal chiefs who were against the merger made the political situation unstable. This unresolved tension eventually led to a cycle of insurgency and conflict between the Pakistani military and Baloch nationalists that is still going on in different ways today.



Map II: The map of Pakistani Balochistan after March 1948. Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from:

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/11/balochistan-state-versus-nation-pub-51488>

Review of Literature

The scholarly discussion of Balochistan is diverse and it draws on the histories of the colonialism, Cold War politics, and contemporary security studies. The works below are both the pillars of the research in this sphere and its contemporary ones:

Harrison, S. S. (1981). *Shadows in Afghanistan: Baluch Nationalism and the temptations of the Soviets*. Having been broadly considered the canonical work, or the Baloch Bible, of Baloch studies, the work by Harrison was the first to acknowledge the Baloch nationalist movement as an influential and significant political force. Harrison writes at the peak of the Cold War and offers a crucial geopolitical observation of how the insurgency of the 1970s was viewed in the prism of Soviet expansionism. His work is still crucial in the international aspects of the Baloch struggle and how regional instability has traditionally attracted the attention of the outside superpowers.

Siddiqi, F. H. (2012). *Pakistan Politics of Ethnicity: Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir ethnic Movements*. Siddiqi gives an elaborate comparison analysis of ethnic movements in the Pakistani state. Through the Baloch movement and Sindhi and Mohajir identities, Siddique explains the institutional and structural competitions that the central government has used to control or even suppress dissent since the secession of East Pakistan in 1971. This work is critical for researchers attempting to understand the "why" behind the persistent friction between the federation and its periphery, highlighting the failure of the state's nation-building project.

Sheikh, S. R. (2018). *Genesis of Baloch Nationalism: Politics and Ethnicity in Pakistan, 1947-1977*. Revolving around the initial thirty years of the Pakistani life, Sheikh provides a microscopic insight into the early years of the conflict. The study can contribute especially to the volume of local sources and vernacular narratives that give an alternative account to official state histories. Sheikh insists that the politics adopted between 1947 and 1977 created a path-dependency of suspicion and institutionalization that created the origins of the more violent insurgencies of the 21st century.

Grare, F. (2013). *Balochistan The State vs. the Nation*. Grare has provided a crucial contribution to comprehending the contemporary Pakistani establishment paradigm of security-first-first. He evaluates how the military force has relied on as the main instrument of political management by the state in Balochistan. Published in the exacerbation of military actions since 2002, Grare fills the gap between the past-based grievances and modern human rights issues, claiming that the state is commonly focusing on the territorial integrity rather than the democratic rights of the so-called nation (the Baloch people).

Ahmedzai, M. N. K. (2023). *The History of the Baloch and Balochistan*. Being a descendant of the Khan of Kalat, Ahmedzai is an invaluable source of history that is the missing element of the western or Islamabad-oriented history. His work is a detailed re-analysis of the 1948 accession, but it is not viewed as a historic moment in the political life of the Baloch people, but as a cultural and existential crisis. This new book brings an extra depth of primary-source material to the historical record, highlighting the most recent process of Baloch identity continuity between the princely period and the contemporary period.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature as it combines available records and literature with primary information collected via field work in the form of interviews. The analysis of the sources is very diverse; it covers academic journals, historical sources and government archives which reveal the political changes occurring in Balochistan since 1947. Through a process of triangulation of official state reports with the independent records of human rights organizations and nationalist versions of the history, the study creates a balanced portrayal of the different insurgencies and policy developments, and the socio-political trends are cross-referenced to achieve historical validity.

The Baloch conflict is a result of the colonial past and annexation of 1948, but the tensions have been

compounded by institutional political and economic marginalization. This has caused a lot of civilian casualty and even human rights abuses. Lethal force has been commonly used by state security agencies against a range of actors, including armed insurgents, educated youth and social activists (Mendez, 2020).

The Complex Dynamic: The Federation and Balochistan

Balochistan is defined by a rugged, arid geography that has historically fostered a culture of fierce independence and resistance to external hegemony. As Harrison Akins (2017) aptly describes:

“On the periphery of the Subcontinent’s historic empires and highly resistant to outside invaders, Balochistan is a land of extremes—burning deserts, towering peaks, freezing winters, and fierce tribes. It has been described as a veritable moonscape, one in which Alexander the Great famously got lost during his return march from India.”

Since the formal merger in March 1948, the relationship between the central government of Pakistan and the province has been characterized by persistent ambiguity and recurring armed conflict. These periods of unrest have not been static; rather, they have exhibited periodic fluctuations, shifting between intense armed struggle and fragile periods of diminished strength (Cohen, 2006).

The period of annexation is directly related to the origins of the Baloch rebellion. Prince Abdul Karim, the brother of the Khan of Kalat, launched a military war against the Pakistani state right after the merger in 1948 (Ali, 2005; Akhtar, 2007). In order to assemble tribal Lashkar troops and plan a specific attack on the Pakistani military, he made a quick trip to Afghanistan (Center of Foreign Policy, 2006). However, the movement encountered insurmountable obstacles, such as inadequate support among internal tribes and a lack of significant backing from the Afghan government. Karim and his supporters were detained and accused of treason upon his return on July 12, 1948 (Kutty, 2009).

The ‘One Unit’ program, which combined the West Pakistani provinces into a single administrative unit, set off a second wave of resistance in 1955. The old tribal ruler Nawab Norouz Khan led an armed uprising after Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, the Khan of Kalat, was arrested. This resistance was likewise short-lived; in 1964, several of Norouz Khan's close relatives were put to death, and he was eventually captured and put through a military trial before receiving a life sentence (Center of Foreign Policy, 2006).

Insurgencies of 1962–1973

During the martial law era of General Ayub Khan, a third wave of insurgency erupted in 1962. This phase was notably more protracted than its predecessors, lasting until 1968 and causing significant financial and material losses for both the state and the region (Cohen, 2006).

However, it was the fourth insurgency in 1973 that marked a fatal shift in the conflict. This uprising was sparked by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s dismissal of the democratically elected National Awami Party (NAP) government in Balochistan, led by Chief Minister Sardar Atta Ullah Mengal. This move dismantled the political arrangement between the NAP and the JUI, leading to a massive military escalation. Stephen P. Cohen (2006) provides a vivid account of the scale of this conflict:

“[T]he peaks of Baluchi separatism during the insurrection of 1973–75, sparked by Bhutto’s dismissal of local administrators... army and paramilitary forces numbered about 80,000 troops, reinforced by helicopter gunships, armoured vehicles, and mortars from Iran. This was the first occasion on which Pakistan’s elite Special Security Group (SSG) commandos saw battle. On their part, the Baluch could only field some 10,000 guerrillas, armed with ancient rifles. Their forces suffered about 3,300 casualties, and some 7,000 families took refuge in Afghanistan.”

Following the 1977 coup, General Zia-ul-Haq sought a policy of reconciliation, releasing political detainees and halting military operations. This approach successfully mitigated the volatility of the region for nearly two decades, leading to a period of relative peace throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

The Musharraf Era: A Populist Transformation

The transition back to military rule under General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 reignited the conflict. Musharraf adopted a confrontational stance, famously warning Baloch leaders:

“Do not push us ... It is not the ‘70s. We will not climb mountains behind them, we will hit them, and they will not even know what and from where something has come and hit them” (Wirsing, 2008).

The subsequent 2002 elections were viewed by Baloch nationalists as a pre-planned exercise in electoral rigging designed to install a handpicked provincial administration (Zaidi, 2002; International Crisis Group, 2006). This political marginalization was compounded by the rapid development of the Gwadar Port and new military cantonments, which locals perceived as a strategy for "ethnic swamping" and demographic displacement (Wani, 2021).

Summary of the Waves of Baloch Insurgency

| Wave | Period | Key Figures | Primary Trigger | Outcome |
|--------|-----------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| First | 1948 | Prince Abdul Karim | Forced annexation of Kalat state. | Rebellion crushed; leaders arrested for treason. |
| Second | 1955–1964 | Nawab Norouz Khan | The "One Unit" policy and arrest of Khan of Kalat. | Leaders executed or imprisoned for life. |
| Third | 1962–1968 | Tribal Chieftains | Imposition of Martial Law under Ayub Khan. | Protracted conflict; ended with a fragile ceasefire. |
| Fourth | 1973–1977 | Atta Ullah Mengal, Khair Bakhsh Marri | Dismissal of the NAP provincial government by Bhutto. | Massive military operation; thousands of casualties. |

Geopolitics as a new driver for Insurgency and the deteriorating situation in Balochistan from 1947-2002

I. The Internationalization of the Baloch Conflict

A new and risky geopolitical rivalry has been sparked by the changing geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape in South Asia, which has drawn significant attention to Balochistan from several regional and international powers. It is essential to go beyond localised analysis and look at the core interests of the international actors engaged to fully comprehend the province's ongoing economic hardship, systematic human rights violations, and current spike in violence.

This study posits that internal issues including economic hardship, political marginalisation, and inadequate development are not the only drivers of the rise in violence in Balochistan. Although these

local issues serve as the foundation for Baloch hatred, foreign forces and the geopolitical rivalry of major world powers also have a considerable impact on the war, frequently making it worse. Problems in the local community have gotten harder, and internal systemic failings have made them worse (Peerzada, 2019; Iqbal, 2012). But the main cause of the insurgency's current lethality is the impact of international geopolitics and foreign meddling in Balochistan's domestic affairs, which is best illustrated by China's multibillion-dollar participation through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Council, 2017).

II. The Strategic Value of Geography and the Paradox of Plenty

Geography cannot be overemphasized as a source of development and success of a state. The availability of natural resources and a good coastal positioning can significantly have an impact on the economic course of a country. Natural resources are economic development catalysts in the sense that as the emerging global economies continue to grow at a high rate in demand of these raw materials, they are the ones that drive development (Dogan et al., 2021).

Balochistan has a variety of geographical characteristics due to which it is very useful in economic development. But even being the energy bucket of Pakistan, the province is still not developed in comparison with the rest of the provinces. This is not a fortuitous form of poverty, but a result of marginalization in the past, institutional non-intervention, systematic deprivation, and unequal resource allocation between the federal government and provincial governments. Being bounded by South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East, Balochistan has a unique intra-regional trade advantage, which makes it more attractive to the world (Safdar Sial & Basit, 2010). This has become more important in recent decades as the deep-water port at Gwadar and other pipeline projects are built to satisfy the increasing energy demands of the region.

III. The Three Pillars of Baloch Geopolitics

The geopolitical importance of Balochistan has been historically predetermined by three key factors in the first place, which are the geographic characteristics of this region:

- a. The Great Game and the ancient competition between the United Kingdom and the Tsarist Russia over the domination of the Indian Ocean has been rekindled in another shape. The coastline of Baluchistan was a strategic asset of the British during the Khanate, the comparable event today is being reflected in the tensions between the United States, China, and India (Dashti, 2012).
- b. Baluchistan is endowed with mineral wealth and there are precious deposits of gold, copper and chromite. Such resources also attract the attention of the world superpowers who employ extractive diplomacy to obtain the 21st-century supply chains (Dashti, 2012).
- c. The other strategic asset is the gateway of the coastlines, which has a lengthy coastline along the Indian Ocean. Traditionally, the British wanted Jiwani as the entry point into Afghanistan to stop the growth of the Russians. Gwadar today is the epicentre of the CPEC initiatives that have seen it connected to Western China and the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Hormuz, and the Indian Ocean at large.

IV. Extractive Federalism and the Security Prism

Though, it is so abundant, successive governments in Islamabad and Pakistani military establishment have traditionally perceived Balochistan through the narrow perspective of security and law enforcement. The state has been driven, to domestic and geopolitical issues to put provincial rights aside in the interest of centralized control. The unequal allocation of resources in Balochistan has always been a problem that federal authorities have admitted even in most cases, yet they have seldom corrected (Kakar, 2020).

As the work of Dr. Kaiser Bengali shows, the historical failure of the province to invest in basic economic and social infrastructure is a direct consequence of one policy, which is the fact that the province is focused on resource extraction at the advantage of other provinces. In Balochistan, natural

gas mining supported the industrialization of the North, but the local population was deprived of an extended tax base and fiscal resources to develop themselves (Dorsey, 2019; Bengali, 2015)

The Crisis of Saindak and Reko Diq

Copper and gold deposits in Saindak and Reko Diq (Chagai district) have the capability of transforming the rest of the province. But the agreements which are being made do not usually consider the local people. As an example, deals between China and Islamabad regarding the areas of these minerals were obtained without any significant consultation with the provincial government (Finings, 2019). Although Chinese corporations have raised the portion of the royalties paid to the central government, the province receives a little profit. Moreover, mining processes have been aggressive in activities that have caused the fast exhaustion of these non-renewable resources, and this has seen a lot of blame about resource plundering and environmental exploitation (Jha, 2022).

V. The United States, the "War on Terror," and the Balochistan Issue

Balochistan is a very important strategic point to the United States. After 2002, the US used different air bases in the province to carry out security missions in Afghanistan in the War on Terror (Masood, 2011). Balochistan played a strategic role of being a supply channel to NATO. But the rise of CPEC changed the US-Pakistan relationship.

The US is highly concerned about the presence of the Chinese in Gwadar, which it feels may pose a threat to its foreign policy goals of Indo-Pacific. The possibility of Chinese naval presence at Gwadar strengthens the economic and military strength of Beijing in a manner that does not coincide with the US and Indian interests (Shah, 2017). This has ignited a new geopolitical conflict, which pits the US and India against the China-Pakistan axis, frequently leaving the local tragic Baloch people to shoulder the responsibility of more intensified securitization.

VI. Human Rights and the Victims of Internationalism in Balochistan

When the great powers conflict in the areas of strategic importance, the native population is usually the unfortunate victim of the conflicting sides. Gwadar seaport and related megaprojects have the potential to bring economic benefits but have a threat of being an activity that will displace and marginalize indigenous people. Defenders of human rights believe that the internationalization of the conflict enables the state to consider the safety of projects first before the rights of citizens. When ordinary citizens are the focus of warfare between the leading nations, their lives are at stake. The re-emergence of China and Russia and the acceleration of the geopolitical tussles in the present international system has resulted in the erosion of the rights of the local people.

The state, which reaches enormous amounts of money in the name of development, does not help people because the emergence of the so-called geopolitics supplants the idea of human-oriented governance (Sabatini, 2022). The present Balochistan insurgency is much more violent than the earlier ones since it is a conglomeration of the socio-economic struggle and the fear of existence. Militaristic policies of the Musharraf administration have been used to fuel these tensions, and the entry of the external forces, including China, the US, and India, have further complicated the violence (Wani, 2021). The Baloch are concerned that the Gwadar Port and non-locals will cause an ethnic swamping and ultimate expropriation of their traditional resources. The Baloch people in this world game are not only fighting to be given the autonomy to govern themselves politically, but also for existence in an ever-securitized world.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of Balochistan from the partition of British India in 1947 to the dawn of the War on Terror in 2002 is not merely a chronicle of sporadic rebellions; it is a profound study in the challenges of post-colonial nation-building. Looking back at this fifty-five-year span, the overarching theme is a persistent disconnect between the center's vision of a unified, centralized Pakistan and the Baloch leadership's insistence on a federalist, autonomous identity. What began as a legal and diplomatic dispute over the accession of the Kalat State in 1948 evolved into a deep-seated structural

conflict that the state repeatedly attempted to solve through military force rather than political negotiation.

By examining the mid-century period, we see that the “One Unit” policy of the 1950s was perhaps the most significant turning point. By erasing provincial boundaries to achieve parity between East and West Pakistan, the state inadvertently signaled to the Baloch people that their unique cultural and political history was an obstacle to national progress. This sense of erasure laid the psychological groundwork for the 1960s and 1970s insurgencies. While the state viewed these uprisings as threats to territorial integrity—often blaming “foreign hands” as Harrison (1981) noted—the local perspective remained rooted in the demand for a fair share of the Sui Gas dividends and a seat at the decision-making table.

The 1970s, specifically under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, represented a tragic irony in this timeline. The 1973 Constitution promised a framework for provincial autonomy, yet the dismissal of the NAP-led provincial government in that same year proved that the center’s commitment to democracy was secondary to its desire for control. The ensuing conflict was the bloodiest of the century, leaving a legacy of “missing persons” and military encampments that would define the province for the next thirty years. It was during this era that the Baloch grievance transitioned from being purely political to being deeply existential.

As we move into the 1980s and 90s, the “Silent Decades,” the conflict shifted from the mountains to the socioeconomic sphere. The influx of Afghan refugees during the Soviet-Afghan War altered the demography of the province, while the state’s focus on the “Islamization” of the frontier introduced sectarian elements previously foreign to the secular Baloch nationalist movement. By the time we reach the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002, Balochistan had become a strategic chessboard for global powers once again. However, the internal wounds of 1948, 1958, 1963, and 1973 remained unhealed.

Ultimately, the period ending in 2002 reveals a sobering reality: security-centric governance may maintain temporary order, but it cannot manufacture national “belonging.” The state’s failure to transition from a colonial-style extractive relationship to a collaborative federal partnership meant that as the 21st century began, Balochistan was not a settled province, but a simmering frontier. The year 2002 did not bring a solution; instead, it ushered in a new era of globalized conflict that would build upon the half-century of grievances already etched into the Baloch landscape.

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