



# The Balochistan Movement— A Struggle For Dignity And Self- Determination By A Proud Populace

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**Abstract:** That Pakistan is a nation contrived artificially by the Muslim League and their benefactors in the then British colonial establishment, is a fact which has been proven repeatedly throughout history. Pakistan, a nation held together only by the iron fist of the mainly Punjabi Sunni elites of the Army, is riven with a multitude of movements demanding emancipation from the feudal elites of the country's armed forces and genuine democracy based on the inalienable right to self- determination. Among these, of prime importance is the Baloch struggle, a historic battle being waged by the doughty Baloch population, the inhabitants of Pakistan's largest province by area (Balochistan), a land enriched with minerals and abundant natural resources like rare earths, yet also one which has suffered the most at the hands of the Pakistani state. The Baloch are a proud people, having a storied past, dating back to the days of the Harappan civilization. This piece deals largely with the state sanctioned oppression which they have undergone and how their struggle today continues in defiance of the autocratic Pakistani state apparatus. It delineates several aspects of this phenomenon while dwelling upon the response of the Baloch.

**Index Terms** - Component, formatting, style, styling, insert.

**Introduction:** The Balochistan region is divided into 3 nations - Iran (Sistan Balochistan), Pakistan (Balochistan) and Afghanistan (Nimruz, Helmand etc) (Sharma, 2023). At the time of independence, Balochistan was divided into 4 distinct princely states in the territory of Pakistan - Kharan, Makaran, Las Bela and Kalat (Sharma, 2023). Of these the first three agreed to a merger with Pakistan. Kalat, party to the 1876 treaty with the British, obtained a unique status with residual autonomy residing with the Khan of Kalat, the most prominent tribal chief of the region, widely regarded as the head of the Kalat state. After a meeting with Lord Mountbatten, involving both Pandit Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Baloch state came into existence with an agreement signed by the Khan and the Muslim League, on the 15th of August, 1947 (Roychowdhury, 2022). However, the machinations of Jinnah, ably assisted by the British refusal to provide arms to the nascent polity without approval of the Pakistani government which was pressing for a merger, meant that the Khan had to give in to Pakistani pressure. While there have been reports that VP Menon, then Secretary to the Ministry of States was quoted by the AIR, to have talked of the Khan's ostensible outreach to New Delhi for assistance in securing Baloch independence against Pakistani designs to merge the territory through coercion, the same has been summarily rejected by Pandit Nehru and the Khan himself in later records (Hindustan Times, 2006). In the end, the 227 days old independent state of Kalat merged into Pakistan, systematically upending the balance of power in the subcontinent and ensuring that the Baloch, feeling an intense sense of betrayal, continue to resent the Pakistani state and forge ahead with further bouts of intense, often armed movements for restoring the independence of the Baloch nation. The Baloch movement has witnessed 5 major instances of rebellion which now reside in the annals of history. After the first instance mentioned above, the second rebellion came in 1954, in opposition to the Pakistani "One unit Plan", the third

arrived in 1963, under the aegis of General Sherif, the penultimate one occurred in the aftermath of the Bangladesh liberation war, which enthused the Baloch to seek their own emancipation, and the final one transpired in the early to mid-2000s after the alleged targeting of the Pakistan army's Quetta Cantonment by militants from nearby hills (NDTV, 2025) (Sareen, 2024).

### **Inside the state sanctioned apartheid against the Baloch carried out by the Pakistani establishment**

PM Modi's remarks referencing the Baloch nation, during the Independence Day speech delivered by him in the year 2016, show that India has given an official voice to the struggles of the Baloch people (Chakravarty, 2016). The further part outlines the scope of these struggles spanning several domains.

**Political:** The major reasons behind the Baloch movement are the grievances expressed by inhabitants which are mostly political in nature (The Friday Times, 2025). The systematic sidelining of the Baloch in the power sharing structure of the Pakistani state has exacerbated a sense of alienation among the masses. The Pakistani state has failed to implement the ambitious devolution of powers envisioned by the 18th amendment and has instead only consolidated power even further. Unilateral decisions like the permission for the construction of the Gwadar port given by then President Musharraf, bypassing well established democratic channels including both the National Assembly and the Balochistan Provincial government have infuriated the Baloch. Other mega projects like the Saindak and Reko Diq mines, both multi-million-dollar enterprises, have also been conceived without any significant involvement of the Baloch populace and any consideration of their aspirations or concerns (Samad, 2025). The systematic sidelining of Baloch interests by a corrupt and inefficient provincial government, and an oppressive central administration is the province's greatest challenge. The diverse communities of the region including the Pashtuns, Hazaras, Sindhis, Punjabis etc. make fertile ground for political instability. The province has failed to achieve even a single Millennium Development Goal prescribed by the UN. The existence of tribal leaders and feudal loyalties makes governance even tougher. The dichotomy of tribal and state authorities dominating social and political life respectively fuels a sense of hopelessness among the Baloch. The variegated communities, conflicting tribal loyalties, incompetent politicians, poor infrastructure, lack of educational and health facilities and the marginalisation of the Baloch leaders and the internecine conflict among tribes like the Bugtis, Marris, and the Mengals fuelled by the Pakistani state have further destabilized the state's political environment. However, arguably the most crucial turning point in this saga was the assassination of former Chief Minister and Governor, Akbar Bugti in 2006 by the Pakistani armed forces (Samad, 2025). This spurred the separatists into action and resulted in the insurgency taking on a far more serious tone. The Baloch movement is plural in nature, consisting of hardliners and those who adopt a softer, more political approach to the problem. Many, especially the youth, have embraced human rights advocacy and political activism as a solution for a conundrum which truly is political in nature. The fact that Balochistan contributes only a measly 16 seats to the Pakistani National Assembly out of a total of 266 elected members, only serves to underline the sheer magnitude of political disenfranchisement of the Baloch in a Pakistan increasingly dominated by the Punjabi Sunni elites of the establishment (Khan, et al., 2025). The new orders given by Army backed CM Sarfaraz Bugti, warning government employees of action in case they're involved in "anti-state activities", doesn't augur well for the province (Hussain, 2025).

**Economic:** The major economic grievances emerge from the deep-seated political suppression of the Baloch themselves. That they haven't been consulted through their chosen representatives in the Baloch provincial assembly for the approval of mega projects like the Gwadar port, and mines like Saindak and Duddar with significant Chinese investments which mainly exploit the region's resources while essentially enriching the Punjabi heartland, is a matter of great angst for the Baloch (Sheikh, 2024). So only, the projects and the Chinese engineers working on them have consistently come under attack from Baloch militants (RFE/RL, 2023). Concerns are rife among the Baloch that the mineral and gas resources of their region as also significant gold and other metals, rare earth deposits etc. are being unfairly appropriated by the State without them receiving even a small chunk of the economic prosperity that they entail. The Baloch have also been entirely stripped of any revenue rights with respect to the Gwadar port by the Pakistani government. Even the locals especially the fishermen have been subjected to draconian restrictions on plying their trade exacerbating a sense of discontent among the masses. The presence of Chinese deep-sea trawlers in the exclusive economic zone off Sindh and Balochistan provinces has further exacerbated tensions (Pal, 2024). The Chinese intend to expand the fishing industry and that has accentuated fear among local communities (Basu, 2023). The investment by China in the Gwadar project seeks to surpass the Malacca Strait by connecting Beijing to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea (Gulzar, 2025). It's been established that the port project, a part of the Greater Gwadar Plan is significant in the calculations of global powers (ORF, 2006).

About 70% of the Baloch population is classified as “poor” (Baloch, 2025). Assam CM Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed that Balochistan holds over 80 percent of Pakistan's total mineral wealth, including the colossal Reko Diq copper-gold deposit, one of the world's largest untapped reserves with an estimated 5.9 billion tonnes of ore, containing 41.5 million ounces of gold and 35 million tonnes of copper (Deccan Herald, 2025). “Despite being the largest and most resource-rich province of Pakistan, Balochistan remains its most neglected and underdeveloped region — a contradiction that reflects decades of systematic economic and political exploitation,” he added (Deccan Herald, 2025). According to one estimate, there exists only 1 doctor for 7,300 people in Balochistan (Saeed, 2022). Similarly, in the education sector, the province government has done nothing yet. The situation can be estimated through the figures that tell us that only 29pc of the female and 40pc of the male population are in school and 66pc children are working as child labor (Saeed, 2022). Sui Gas field, one of the largest reserves in Pakistan, is in Balochistan but it receives only 12.5% of the revenue (Pal, 2024). A large chunk of oil and mineral resources especially copper and gold are exploited but Balochistan hardly gets its share. It receives only 9.7% of the National Finance Commissions awards, despite contributing to it significantly (Pal, 2024). The unemployment rate in Balochistan is around 33.4% - highest among all the provinces (Pal, 2024).

Such has been the devastation wrought by the insurgency that a scheduled visit by then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was cancelled in light of threats to his arrival posed by Baloch militants in the 2000s (ORF, 2005). Even the educated classes, typically aloof in the case of such insurgencies, are participating with great gusto. The participation of women in particular has been immensely surprising, considering the rather conservative society of Balochistan. Shari Baloch, a graduate woman responsible for an attack on Chinese nationals at the Confucius institute, was the first in this regard (Baloch & Notezai, 2022).

**State sponsored repression:** While the above stated instances of state sponsored apartheid are grisly enough to outrage the sensibilities of any sane person, they are mostly policies of the government which percolate downwards to ultimately have an adverse effect on the population. However, what follow are accounts which display how the brutality of the Pakistani security establishment evidenced through its sanguinary campaign of alleged forced disappearances, kidnappings and extrajudicial killings has pushed the locals into a state of utter helplessness in face of the might of the Generals of the Pakistani army and their flunkies. Several thousand Baloch nationalists are known to have gone missing, and, as usual, the authorities have unleashed sectarian terrorists in Balochistan to discredit the nationalists by injecting their reliable hit men from the ASWJ, the successors to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, into their ranks (Sood, 2015). They have repeatedly killed Hazara Shias in Balochistan (Sood, 2015). Human Rights Watch in its 2014 annual report talked about the crimes against humanity committed by the Pakistani army against the Baloch including “forced disappearances, killings of suspected Baloch militants and opposition activists” (Sood, 2015). The alleged sheltering of ISKP terrorists by the Pakistani deep state has also complicated the situation further (Sunday Guardian, n.d.). The Baloch are not only fighting a political battle but are also waging an economic and military struggle against the hybrid Pakistani regime comprising the civilian government, the armed forces, and the terrorists and drug lords allegedly under state patronage. The non-profit organization “The Voice for Baloch Missing Persons” says that approximately 7000 cases have been registered with them since 2004 as reported by the BBC (Ng, 2024). According to the Balochistan Union of Journalists, more than 40 reporters have been killed since 2000 (Baloch, 2025). Foreign media are also denied access to the region. This has contributed to an absolute information blackhole in the province. Another predicament is presented by the “Death Squads” allegedly carrying out the dirty work of the Pakistani Intel agencies (Balochistan Times, 2024). These consist broadly of thugs, strongmen, goons, drug peddlers and all manner of other sinister entities. These squads help the Pakistani army stifle dissent and prevent demonstrations from breaking out. The Bramsh rallies demanding justice for the attack on the mother of the child ‘Bramsh’ galvanized the populace and led to the emergence of the Baloch Yakjheti Committee headed by the charismatic activist Dr. Mahrang Baloch, as the pivotal group in the fight against state oppression. The group organised protests against the forced disappearances. Women like Sammi Deen Baloch marched hundreds of miles to demand justice for their kin. In the case of Sammi, it was her father Deen Mohammad Baloch, a doctor who has been missing for a decade and a half now, who had been allegedly abducted by the Army when it stormed his hospital in 2009 (Ng, 2024). The aforementioned Dr. Mahrang Baloch, a venerable and feisty young activist has led numerous long marches, and faced arrests, intimidation and coercion by the Pakistani state, in a quest to find justice for her late father Abdul Gaffar Langove, a man abducted in 2009, tortured and later found dead in 2011, allegedly at the hands of the Pakistani security services (Ng, 2004). Her brother was also disappeared forcibly in 2017 (Ng, 2024). Such horrific instances of state sanctioned oppression drove the BYC under Dr. Mahrang Baloch to organise numerous demonstrations for seeking justice (Hafeez, 2022). The Long March of Justice of the BYC, a 1600 kilometres long journey from the southern tip of Balochistan to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan,

was conceptualised and led by her (Tareen, 2023). This led to an awakening among the masses and made them aware of the struggles of the proud Baloch populace stifled by the regime. There seems to be a growing attempt in Pakistan to convert into a “hard state” to dampen the Baloch insurgency (Sareen, 2025). The army, therefore, seems to be committing the same error once again- trying to find a military solution for a problem which is inherently political in nature. This strategy has revealed itself to be nothing more than a campaign of intimidation and terror aimed at arresting the spread of the Baloch movement. Dr. Mahrang was arrested in March and remains in jail at the time of writing, booked under charges of murder, terrorism and sedition (Sareen, 2025). The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights, Mary Lawlor was “very concerned” at Baloch's arrest (Arab News, 2025). The army, perhaps is far more worried due to the BYC's activities than those of the BLA for the former has openly renounced violence and has become a mainstream, and respectable voice advocating for Baloch rights through peaceful agitations. Dr. Baloch, once named in the Time magazine's Top 100 Emerging Leaders list was also barred from traveling abroad (Baloch, 2025). With global accolades showering upon the valiant Dr. Baloch, including a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, the security establishment has become increasingly wary of her influence (Baloch, 2025). Venerable Baloch leaders like former CM Mengal declared a long march to demonstrate against the high handedness of the Pakistani army (Sareen, 2025). The mysterious deaths of Baloch activists abroad like Karima Baloch and journalist Sajid Hussain, point to a deleterious trend of transnational repression apparently carried out by the Pakistani state (Ng, 2024). All of this has been brushed under the carpet by Pakistan. A loyal social media machine, servile news agencies and a spineless civil society cowed into submission, have essentially given the Army a free run in the nation to spread havoc as it pleases. This has prompted Munir to act in an unabashed manner as he invokes acts like the Action in Aid of Civil Power Act, to strengthen his position internally (Sareen, 2025).

#### **Militant Resistance: BLA, BLF, BRG, BNA**

While Balochistan has suffered from waves of insurgency since the early 2000s, the latest round has been far more intense in wake of the 2006 assassination of Baloch leader Akbar Bugti. This decade has seen an exponential rise in Baloch resistance both political and military. The number and frequency of attacks against the Pakistani state have risen with IED blasts becoming commonplace. The role of women suicide bombers has risen in an unprecedented manner (Baloch & Notezai, 2022). The recent hijacking of the Jaffer Express by militants from the BLA is another case in point. It showed not only the lacunae in the Armed forces but also the mistreatment of the province's population by the Punjabi dominated military establishment. The Balochistan Raaji Aajoi Sangar [BRAS] an organization of the BLA, BLF, BRG and the SRA has founded the Balochistan National Army for the creation of an independent State of Balochistan (Sareen, 2025). They have established a unified command structure and started a campaign against the Pakistani State and Chinese investments in the region. They have resolved ‘to intensify the blockade of all important national highways to harm the logistical, economic and military interests of the occupying state’ (Sareen, 2025). These groups have intensified their activities with a spate of attacks since last year. On March 20, 2024, a group of BLA militants attempted to enter the Gwadar Port Authority Colony and opened fire (The Hindu, 2024). In June 2024, the BLA attacked a Frontier Corps check post guarding an oil and gas exploration site in Kalat, killing two security personnel (The Hindustan Times, 2025). They've also hit tankers and police vehicles along the Coastal Highway over the past year (Sareen, 2025). The militants have carried out ingenious operations in Kalat, Quetta, Khuzdar, Zehri and other cities with the South Asia Terrorism Portal reporting 70 attacks in 2025 alone leading to the deaths of 135 soldiers (Sareen, 2025). These attacks haven't been restricted only to security forces though. Many attacks have targeted economic infrastructure and businessmen mainly from the Punjab province due to the belief that the Punjabis are economically exploiting the Baloch nation (Sareen, 2025). The so-called “Operation Herof” of the Baloch militants last year involved a series of attacks on security personnel, soldiers, businessmen, lorry drivers etc. (Sareen, 2025) While the Baloch claim to have conducted about 300 attacks this year, the number last year was even larger. Another important change in the movement has been its spread covering nearly all districts of the province showing how it has transcended the divides of tribe, creed, language, ethnicity etc. The BLA's highly sophisticated attacks in recent months betray its strong foundations, resilient organization and astute propaganda skills. That it has outfoxed the Pakistani army, itself a formidable force in this domain, speaks volumes of the sheer magnitude of the force that the BLA has transformed into. The BLA, over the years, has changed form, from a conventional separatist movement to a powerful insurgency. A weak and impotent government devoid of popular approval and legitimacy, a mountainous terrain, support among the Baloch tribes, sanctuaries in Iran and Afghanistan, a steady supply of weaponry and the simmering resentment in the Baloch populace have all come together to create a situation so grave for the Pakistani state that it has effectively lost control in swathes of territory in the province (Sareen, 2025). With the emergence of younger commanders from the Baloch Student Organization- Azad movement, the Baloch

struggle has witnessed a democratization of sorts (Basit, 2025). The active participation of the feisty young Baloch women and student activists stands testimony to this claim. Pakistan's insistence in figuring out a military solution to what is essentially a political problem has led to the utter devastation of what might have been an incredibly prosperous region and has engendered immense resentment among the Baloch masses. Amid heightening tensions, the Baloch continued to up the ante by preparing for an 'Independence Day' celebration in August (AIR, 2025). In recent days, the BLA has shifted focus claiming to have assassinated members of the aforementioned infamous 'death squads' of the Pakistani state (Basit, 2025). The Pakistani state has responded in the only way that it knows, by cracking down on the Baloch and suppressing their legitimate aspirations for freedom. From summary arrests and court martialing to 'mysterious disappearances' the Baloch have seen everything. It's now incumbent upon the world to take note of this paramount struggle of a proud populace for its rights, freedom and self-determination

**Conclusion:** Political alienation, economic coercion, forced social homogenisation and militaristic despotism characterize the predicament of the Baloch people today. With a wounded yet resurgent Pakistani state, led by the jingoistic regime of the self-proclaimed "Field Marshal" Asim Munir unleashing a campaign of terror and oppression upon the innocuous tribal populace, the Baloch are in a more precarious situation today than ever before. This has only worked to strengthen their resolve for their right to self-determination and a peaceful and self-fulfilling life. With the citizens finally beginning to stand up for their rights against an Orwellian state, Balochistan is indeed in a state of flux. Whether the Baloch will finally attain their much-coveted freedom remains to be seen

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