MEMBER PROFILE

WEST BALOCHISTAN

Balochistan People’s Party (BPP)
**Status:** Occupied territory – annexed to Iran in 1928

**Population:** 4.8 million in Iranian part of Balochistan (8-10 million in Pakistan, around 500,000 in Afghanistan)

**Area:** Total Baloch-inhabited landscape is 690,000 km², of which 280,000 km² are occupied by Iran, 350,000 km² by Pakistan and 60,000 km² by Afghanistan

Capital of Province: Zahidan

**Language:** Balochi and Brahui

**Religion:** Sunni majority, Zikri and Shia minorities

**Ethnic Groups:** Baloch and Brahui, as well as a minority of Persians who migrated to the area after the annexation of Balochistan in 1928

**OVERVIEW**

In what went down in history as the “Great Game”, during the 19th century, the Baloch people gradually lost their country and national sovereignty – largely due to the competition for influence in Central Asia between different empires, first, between the “Russian Bear” and the “British Lion” and, later, between the British and the Persian empires who divided Balochistan into different spheres of influence. In 1928, West Balochistan was annexed to Iran by Reza Shah Pahlavi, who assumed power from the Qajar dynasty through a British-backed military coup soon after the famous “constitutional revolution” of the early 20th century. The Pahlavi dynasty marked the beginning of a centralized Iranian state, where the Persian language and Shiite religion were given prominence, leaving Baloch people struggling to defend their rights and identity under Iranian rule. In 1979, Iran became an Islamic republic while Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile. The new regime outlawed political organisations and, in 1981, launched a major assault on political activists in the form of systematic persecution, imprisonment, torture, execution and assassination.

Today, about twenty percent of the Baloch population lives in southeastern Iran in the area known as West Balochistan, while a considerable group of 8-10 million Balochs live in East Balochistan (Pakistan). A small community of around 500,000 Baloch resides in Afghanistan. The Balochistan People’s Party represents the Iranian Baloch population, while the Afghan and Pakistani Baloch population are represented by their own organizations and parties in their respective countries. Parts of West Balochistan have been partitioned to three neighbouring provinces in the southeast of Iran, namely Khorasan, Kerman and Hormozgan. There have been considerable migratory movements of Balochs throughout Iran as many seek employment opportunities, particularly in urban centres such as Tehran. The Baloch population in Iran consists of approximately 4 million people in total, although there are no independent census figures. While the CIA Factbook estimates that they account for 2 percent of Iran’s population (total 66,429,284, July 2009 estimate), this appears to be an underestimation. The majority of Iran’s Baloch are Sunni Muslims with small minorities of Shia and Zekri. The national language is Balochi and the second-most commonly spoken language is Brahui, a language of unknown origins with Persian loanwords.
Baloch people in Iran are deprived of their cultural, social and economic rights, degrading them to the status of third-class citizens. They face discrimination in all walks of life, particularly with regards to political participation and access to the job market. The dissemination of Baloch culture and language was declared by the Iranian central governments as an act of treason against the state. Assimilation policies carried out by the Persian state mean that the Baloch are rapidly losing their identity. Baloch civil society faces systematic state-sponsored intimidation and harassment, while journalists, human rights activists and everyone else who dares voicing dissent are being arbitrarily arrested and tortured by security forces and Iran’s infamous Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

UNPO PERSPECTIVE
UNPO condemns the ongoing and unwarranted military operation against the Baloch people in Iran, which comes along with gross human rights violations results such as extrajudicial killings, disappearances and arbitrary imprisonment of Balochs in Iran. UNPO deplores the discrimination against the Baloch people, particularly in the economic and political sphere. In addition, UNPO roundly condemns the denial of the Balochs' linguistic rights, including the right to speak Balochi and be educated in their mother tongue. UNPO supports the Balochistan People's Party in its effort to protect and promote Baloch culture and identity.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early History
Balochistan marked the territory of some of the earliest civilizations in human history, such as the early settlement of Mehrgar (6500 BC) in today’s East Balochistan, which is one of the earliest sites with evidence of agricultural activities and herding. The Kech civilization in central Makuran dates back to 4000 BC. In the seventh century, an Arab army invaded Balochistan in a most significant incursion into the region which had significant social, religious, economic and political impacts. During this period, Islam was gradually embraced by Baloch tribes. In 644, an Arab army led by Hakam ibn Amr al Taghlibi defeated the combined forces of Makuran and Sindh. During the then following anarchic and chaotic phases of Arab rule and military conquests in the region, Baloch tribes established their own semi-independent tribal confederacies. While trying to adopt a neutral position and not be involved in the political upheavals surrounding them at the time, these confederacies were frequently threatened and overwhelmed by stronger forces and subject to the indirect reign of dynasties of surrounding areas.

After close to 200 years of Saffarid rule, all of today’s Iran came under the single and powerful rule of the Seljuq Dynasty, whose army made hostile advances against the Baloch by invading Kerman in the eleventh century under the pretext of maintaining law and order. The brutal encounter with this Arab power and the atrocities of the Seljuq rulers against the Baloch forced many tribes to move from the areas of conflicts, thus causing massive waves of migration from Kerman to further east. With the intensification of Baloch migration into Makuran and Turan, the area of Balochistan began to assert itself as a significant political and social entity with a distinct national identity. Baloch tribes became dominant in every aspect of the region, while Balochi started to become the lingua franca of the region. By the 18th century, the Khanate of Kalat had become the dominant power in Balochistan and the Khan of Kalat was the ruler of the princely state of Balochistan. The Balochs semi-sovereign rule then came to an end with the British occupation of Kalat. The British invasion was a turning point in Baloch history and marked the beginning of the demise of the Baloch state as one entity.
Baloch leaders of the 17th and 18th century had been aware of the importance of non-interference in the affairs of other countries. They refused to be part of the Afghan invasion into Sindh territory and the British plan to invade Afghanistan as part of the “Great Game”, the competition for influence in Central Asia between Russia and Britain. In 1839, Britain requested safe passage for its troops through Baloch territory in order to invade Afghanistan. As the Baloch refused this request, Britain invaded Balochistan, merged parts of Balochistan and Afghanistan and imposed direct rule to maintain control over the two countries while, at the same time, deterring Russian expansionist ambitions. In 1843, the British also annexed Sindh from the Talpur Mirs, a Baloch dynasty. In theory, the Khan’s authority over Balochistan still applied, but under the watchful eye of a British minister.

West Balochistan was conquered by Iran in the 19th century. In 1849, an Iranian army defeated Baloch forces in Kerman and captured Bumpur. The partition of Balochistan by the British and Iranian empires dramatically changed Balochistan’s political status as it was divided into separate spheres of influence. In 1871, a British colonial official agreed to cede territory to Iran’s rulers in a bid to win Tehran’s support against Tsarist Russia. The then-established Goldsmid Line divided Balochistan into two parts – without taking into consideration Baloch common history, culture, religion and interests. The Goldsmid Line forms the present international boundary between Pakistan and Iran. Named after British diplomat and civil servant of British India, Mortimer Durand, the Duran Line established in 1893 further divided Baloch territory and have parts of Balochistan to Afghanistan.

Baloch rebellions against this partition occurred throughout the 19th century, and included the revolt of Jask in 1873, the revolt of Sarhad in 1888 and a general uprising in 1889. A major final uprising under Baloch chieftain Sardar Hussein Narui in 1896 provoked a joint Anglo-Persian expeditionary force to crush the struggle of Baloch. Baloch resistance was defeated after two years. Chief Narui was arrested.

With the crowning of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925, Iran witnessed the gradual transformation towards a centralized state with Persian national identity-based features. Western Balochistan was annexed to Iran in 1928 after the defeat of Baloch forces by Reza Shah’s Army. Reza Shah Pahlavi was forced to abdicate by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in September 1941, which led to his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, assuming power over Iran.

Recent History
During the 1970s, the Iranian government began to assist settlement and economic development by building dams and power plants, but these efforts ceased abruptly following political changes at the end of the decade.

Initially, the Baloch nationalist movement in Iran was a relatively insignificant force compared to the movement in Eastern or Pakistani Balochistan. However, with the overthrow of the Shah during the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the region witnessed a resurgence of nationalist activities. Iraq attempted to destroy the Revolution in its infancy and invaded Iran, marking the beginning of a bloody, indecisive war between 1980 and 88.
The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 marked a shift in Iranian foreign policy from the idealistic post-revolutionary hardline during the Iran-Iraq War. Iran became more pragmatic and improved relations with its non-revolutionary Muslim neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia.

After the destruction of a Sunni mosque in 1994, a series of riots occurred in Zahidan which was quelled when Revolutionary Guards fired live ammunition into the crowd. In response to popular dissatisfaction, political reform was initiated following the election of reformer Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad Khatami in 1997.

In the 1990s, Baloch political activists set about founding a new political party, facilitated by the post-Cold War climate which favoured oppressed nations’ struggle for self-determination and sovereignty. Conservatives were able to regain power during municipal elections in 2003 and Majles elections in 2004, which culminated in the August 2005 inauguration of hardliner Mahmud Ahmadinejad as president, who returned Iranian policy to reflect Islamic revolutionary policies. The president was re-elected in the controversial elections in June 2009.

Even though he was internationally received as being a moderate reformer, the election of Ahmadinejad’s successor, Hassan Rouhani, in 2013 has not brought any positive changes on the ground for the people of Balochistan or other marginalized regions. Rather, there has been an increase in extra-judicial killings, executions, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. Coming from a clerical and security background and having been a member of the National Security Council as representative of the Supreme Leader Khamenei for more than 15 years, the intensification of human rights violations under Rouhani is consistent with his background and hardly comes as a surprise.

**CURRENT ISSUES**

Contrary to president Rouhani’s campaign promises and rhetoric, there is virtually no minority representation in the legislative wing of the Iranian government. Similarly, local administrative posts in Balochistan are dominated by non-Baloch Iranians as Balochs only managed to secure about 5 percent of administrative posts in Balochistan. Meanwhile, security operations in the Baloch region intensified under the Rouhani administration, while his government continued the construction of the Iran-Pakistan border wall. As recently as 3 March 2017, Mr Mulavi Abdual Hamid, a religious leader from the Baloch city of Zahidan, voiced his concern regarding the construction of the border wall, claiming that border trade had been taken over completely by the Iran Revolutionary Guards. This constitutes a significant threat to the local economy in the region as it prevents the Baloch population from engaging in cross-border trade, hampering economic development. The increased number of military personnel deployed in the region further threatens the safety of the Baloch population, as Revolutionary Guards frequently commit gross human rights violations against Balochs.
**Revolutionary Guards**

In 2009, the regime ‘gave’ the Revolutionary Guards complete decision-making power, including security and governance authority in Balochistan. The Revolutionary Guards govern Balochistan like an occupied territory or colony, and treat the Baloch people as an occupied people.

The Revolutionary Guards, in their endeavours to increase their political and economic power in Iran, have established more than 60 illegal and unregistered ports in Iran. This fact was revealed by Mr Karoubi, then-head of the Iranian Majlis, during Khatami’s presidency. Large numbers of these ports are in Balochistan, by the Makoran Sea (also known as the Arabian Sea) and the Gulf. The Guards’ economic interests are an incentive for them to further increase their presence in the region.

Seeing the Guards’ increasing presence and control in the region, the local economy is stagnating and unemployment is high in Balochistan, leaving the youth vulnerable to exploitation. The regime takes advantage of this deplorable situation by recruiting unemployed young men and women into the Baseej, an armed militia group. The aim of this is to be able to confront the national movement with a local force and to divide the Baloch amongst themselves. Iran’s regime pursues a colonial policy of “divide and rule” in Balochistan. In some areas it has outsourced the security to local people and has armed them to oppose each other. With the Revolutionary Guards’ increased control and governance in Balochistan, the Iranian government demonstrates that it does not consider the Baloch as Iranian citizens, and that it regards Balochistan as a colony of Iran. The regime’s contempt is mirrored in its indiscriminate policies of killing Baloch.

Iranian chauvinistic policies have been manifested in the militarization of Balochistan. In recent years, the Revolutionary Guards have taken complete control over Balochistan. This has resulted in insecurity in all spheres, and affect the region’s physical, cultural, economic, social, and political well-being.

**Arbitrary Arrest, Torture, Judicial Procedure and Execution**

In Iran, the death penalty continues to be applied in political cases where individuals are commonly charged with the vaguely defined delict of “enmity against God”. In August 2007, Amnesty International noted that a disproportionately large number of executions in Iran that year targeted Baloch (50 out of 166). However, the persistent lack of information from
the region of Sistan-Balochistan, which is due to forced displacement and violent silencing of the Baloch and a government-imposed media blackout, has made the collection of reliable increasingly difficult in recent years.

Another pressing issue as regards Iran’s law enforcement is the judicial procedure applied in cases of minors. Teenagers under the age of 18 are frequently tried without the presence of a lawyer. Furthermore, the execution of minors is common despite Iran’s official commitment to refraining from the killing of underage individuals as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Tragically, the case of Fatemeh Salbehi, who was convicted of murder of her husband at the age of 16 and sentenced to death in January 2011, is but one of many cases.

In 2017, an unnamed high-ranking member of Zabol University’s Faculty of Science was imprisoned for four years and was additionally sentenced to a corporal punishment of 75 lashes for contesting the university’s management. The academic had previously made public accusations of nepotism against the university administration. The practice of bypassing university regulations in appointment procedures in order to give key positions to persons belonging to the country’s Persian elite further increases the marginalisation of the Baloch people in their own country.

Being an extended arm of the security forces, Rouhani’s administration sees the current situation of suppressing national minorities as an advantage to its own interests. At a time when the regime is relatively successful in creating an internationally positive atmosphere towards it due to its presumably “moderate” behaviour as regards the negotiations around the nuclear accord, Tehran recognised that the international community will not criticize the Iranian administration for its human rights violations against national minorities. Due to this non-consideration of human rights concerns on the agenda of the P5+1 deal, the Iranian governments has effectively been given a free hand by the international community to suppress and violate the Baloch peoples’ human rights in particular – without having to face any criticism or sanctions.

**Political Representation and Discrimination**

The Baloch are unrepresented at the central government in Tehran, which has led to marginalization of Balochi people. There is a lack of meaningful dialogue on the domestic level between interstate and state leaders about the desire for greater autonomy and self-determination. The ideological selection procedure called *Gozinesh* requires state officials and employees to demonstrate allegiance to Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran, including *velayat-e faqih* (Rule of Juris consult). This is in conflict with Sunni beliefs, meaning that equality of opportunity in employment both in the public (e.g. Bonyads or Foundations) and sometimes in the private sector is severely impaired. *Gozinesh* excludes non-Shi’a from certain state positions in the state’s administration and restricts access to higher education.

**Suppression of Baloch Culture**

Despite provisions in Article 15 of Iran’s Constitution, saying that “the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media as well as for teaching of their literature in
schools is allowed in addition to Farsi”, the Balochi language is subject to discrimination, elimination and assimilation by Iranian rulers.

Although Balochi publications were finally allowed in 1979, the following year the government closed down three Balochi publications (Mahtak, Graand and Roshanal) and today Balochi publications are banned completely. There is a state radio station with a few Balochi programmes, but no Balochi appears on television. Balochi is forbidden in formal and public places and Baloch children are denied education in their mother tongue.

**Economic Discrimination and Expropriation of Land**

Around 76 percent of Balochs live below the poverty line, although the grossly-manipulated official figure put forward by Tehran is 11 percent. Despite signing the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, there is strong evidence that the Iranian authorities encourage land confiscation, forced migration of ethnic groups and the resettlement of Persians in regions inhabited by other national groups.

Once again, Balochistan is the battleground of a Great Game of empires. While in the previous ‘game’, only two imperial powers had been involved, this time around, the situation is much more complex and numerous regional and international powers are involved. The centre of the game has shifted from the Bolan Pass to two port cities, Gwadar (Pakistan) and Chabahar (Iran). Because of India’s and China’s need for energy and Balochistan’s geopolitically strategic location, it is the crossroads for oil and gas pipelines. In 2005, Baloch houses were destroyed after areas of Chabahar were dismantled by Iranian Security forces, with no alternative housing provided for those evicted.

In 2005, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate housing expressed concern regarding “the continued discrimination faced by ethnic and religious minorities and nomadic groups, as reflected in [...] the considerable number of alleged cases of land confiscation and forced evictions”.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

1. **Does Balochistan seek autonomy?**

The Balochistan Peoples Party (BPP) believes in non-violent and peaceful means of seeking national self-determination and popular sovereignty for Baloch people within Iran. It is campaigning to achieve this sovereignty within a federal Democratic Republic of Iran based on parity of its constituent parts. It seeks to create a liberal democratic system based on political pluralism, secularism and social welfare free from discrimination. BPP seeks to work in co-operation with Iranian nations in a peaceful co-existence based on parity and mutual respect and engages in the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran (CNFI). It also seeks to develop peaceful relations with neighbouring countries. BPP aims to support and guide grassroots Baloch organisations which are emerging in civil society inside the Iranian part of Balochistan.

2. **Does West Balochistan want to unite with Balochistan in Pakistan and Afghanistan?**

Iranian Baloch identify with their kin in neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan where communities are also engaged in their own struggle for greater rights and self-determination. Baloch regions are referred to in their entirety as “Greater Balochistan” and are united by historic persecution at the hands of imperial powers. The circumstance of a nation divided without a state of its own pervades the Baloch national consciousness. The true desire of the Baloch is the existence of a unified Baloch nation.
3. Why is a wall being built dividing Pakistani and Iranian Balochistan?

Iran started the construction of a 700km concrete wall, separating the Iranian from the Pakistani part of Balochistan. The Iranian government claims that this three feet thick and 10 feet high concrete wall is being constructed to stop illegal border crossings and stem the flow of drugs. The BPP strongly believes that the construction of the wall serves political goals of the Iranian regime, namely to divide the Baloch people and to suppress opposition voices claiming a unified Baloch nation. Close relatives live on both sides on the border and the wall divides the community both politically and socially, despite seriously impeding trade and social activities of the Baloch.

**SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

**Language and Culture**

Iranian Balochs see themselves as the heirs of an ancient and proud tradition distinct from Iran’s ethnic Persian population. They speak a distinct language, Balochi, which is one of the oldest living languages of the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-European languages. They prefer to use the Nastaliq script which is a variant of Arabic. The Baloch have close ties with populations in Pakistan and Afghanistan because of family or tribal links. Baloch live in a stratified society and have historically administered themselves as a loose tribal confederacy. Each tribe (tuman) consists of several clans and acknowledges one Sardar or hakim (leader) who has traditional social ties with his retinue (who include pastoralists, farmers, lower level leaders and hizmatkar).

**Economy**

While Balochs are traditionally nomads, they are increasingly converting their farming practices to settled agriculture. In the coastal area, fishing represents a major income source. Although Balochistan is rich in gas, oil, gold and other minerals and marine resources, occupation of their land and lack of trust from occupant regimes means that the people of Balochistan do not benefit from their vast resources, causing the Balochs to live as one of the poorest population groups in the Middle East.

**Religion**

The majority of Balochs are Sunni Muslims, whereas approximately 90 percent of the Iranian population are Shia. There is also a community of Zikri Balochs and a small population of Shia.
NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Balochistan is an arid desert and mountainous region. The dry season in Balochistan runs for 8 months of the year, with Sistan Balochistan being the driest region in Iran. Seasonal winds visit the province, including the 120-day wind of Sistan known as Levar. Erosion is a serious problem as precipitation is scarce, but mostly falls in violent rainstorms which cause heavy flooding. In the centre of the region, there is abundant groundwater and streams, such as the Māshkid and the Konārī rivers. The iconic Mudy Mountain towers over Chahbahar, Balochistan, Iran and the unique Mudy volcano are located in northwestern Chabahar city. Each eruption involves a loud gunshot sound with an explosion of gas and mud. Sistan Balochistan’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department proposed that mud volcanos be registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.
LINKS:
Balochistan Peoples Party
http://eng.balochpeople.org/
http://www.ostomaan.org/

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