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Balochistan: The Strategic Pearl

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Abstract

Balochistan in the post-Columbian Age is central to the New Great Game because Central Asia is once more the Historical Pivot and a Heartland to the World Island i.e., Eurasia & Africa. It remains inaccessible to sea powers. The new transportation technology is decisive in reassertion by land powers in the Asia-Pacific region. The struggles in Eastern Europe (missile shield) and South Asia (Balochistan) are two indicators amongst many. Both regions are part of the Inner Crescent (Europe & Asia) to the Historical Pivot at the Gestalt level and are strategic routes to the Heartland whereas the Outer Crescent originates from North America goes through Atlantic, Africa, and the Indian Ocean and culminates in the Pacific Ocean. The coast lines of Pakistan, India and Iran are part of the Inner Crescent i.e., Rimland. In the Eurasian context, the Rimland is yet again critical for America. Moreover, the most prosperous and the largest democracies could have assisted the case of economic and human development; instead the two have added a neo-imperialist Raag Bhairvi to the Eurasian struggle for world domination. An aspect is the interference in Pakistani Balochistan.

Keywords: Balochistan, Gwadar Port, New Great Game, Eurasia,

Introduction

Balochistan is the heart of Eurasian power struggle. It straddles Persian Gulf and Caspian Basin in time and space dimensions. It is an economic and strategic magnet. The struggle over it involving Great Powers is yet to conclude. The U.S. attraction for Balochistan is due to its virgin coast line, vast hinterland with nominal population, secular culture, untapped natural resources, Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, the naval base in American perception, failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, rising China, revanchist Russia, Iranian nuclear issue cum regime change and the ongoing covert operations against Iran. However, what is more dangerous, an attack on

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Iran or the nuclear Iran? It is all about the *New Great Game*, the *New Cold War* and Eurasia as a sphere of influence. Americans have a hypothesis, but are looking for a deduction—a dangerous assumption.

Balochistan's tribal political economy is twofold. Resentment is its critical core. Other than contrabands owing to hardships of life, an important aspect of Balochi political economy is trade in narcotics, weapons and ammunition. Sub-surface dumping is dotted all over. The same is true for Afghanistan because during Soviet occupation drugs flourished whereas under Americans are bumper opium crops. Despite abundance, the prices have skyrocketed. The connection is the ongoing insurgencies. Success in an insurgency, flow of money and the availability of manpower are linked. An insurgency attracts weapons and ammunition like a magnet. Enough guns and suicide bombers are around. It is now beyond butter and ideas. In the post 9/11 world, an attractive and lucrative addition to Balochistan's political economy is the operational human cargo. The logistics of Islamist insurgents stretching from Afghanistan to Iraq to Turkey and to East Africa is a reality.

The arrests in the border areas of Taftan Balochistan and Iraq indicated the trail of Islamists more than once. The smuggling of weapons and cigarettes went up in Kut and Nasiriya, and clashes between drug runners have increased near the Iranian border.¹ In addition to others in Africa and Middle East, Balochi tribesmen in the border areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are ideal for the transportation of human cargo. They made good money during the Iranian Revolution and so is the case in the post 9/11 world. The unwritten rules are made of something stronger than paper, may be even stronger than steel.²

The trans-geographic Balochi tribal bond is a linguistic, cultural and an ethnic fact. An ethnicity is like a centuries old tree. The branches may be all around but the trunk has a specific location. The trunk of Balochi ethnicity is Pakistani Balochistan. Branches are into Afghanistan and Iran. And demographics always mix like milk and water e.g., astride Durand Line. Balochistan is an epicenter of the regional and global power struggle. The discontent in Balochistan adds fuel to the fire. If not handled properly, it has the potential to lead Pakistan towards war. Pakistan's domestic political situation is critical to that, as it was in 1971. Pakistan's dissonance based pursuits have historically violated the rights of the smaller provinces as well. This history has come to haunt Pakistan once again. The cognitive dissonance has both domestic and foreign policy implications.

Both internally and externally, Pakistan is in for a long haul. Its claim to be the front line state in America's "long war" has proved disastrous. It has generally been acknowledged to be madness to go to war for an idea, but if anything is more unsatisfactory, it is to go to war against a

nightmare.³ And the new strategic naval postures of “from sea to land” suggest that the geopolitical themes of Mahan and Mackinder are still relevant to understanding the international politics of the post-Cold War era.⁴

The Caravan World

The *Real world* of Balochistan is that of armed tribal caravans carrying narcotics, weapons, ammunition and sometimes aristocratic Persian carpets and cigarettes as well. The security parameter of these caravans is in tens of kilometers. The number of vehicles and armed escorts could be in dozens, perhaps more. Secrecy, suspicion, deceit, treachery and distrust works. They come from hard school of life with a capacity to improvise. A world within themselves, they are secret cells. The combat psychology is unconventional. It is extremely violent. High intensity drugs are used to enhance fighting efficiency. They want to be like that. The application of force and violence generated is decisive. They know their land and withdraw at will to protect the consignments. In addition to the time and space dimensions, liberty of movement and action, correlation of forces and weapon systems; scouts and screens protect the load carrying main body.

Expensive cruisers with studded tires, satellite phones, hi-tech communication, telescopic assault rifles and mounted heavy weapons including long range have replaced camels, 7mms and 303s. Mobility is in their blood and culture. It is demonstrated in the employment of weapon systems. There are no good boys and men. They are hard edged tribesmen from the dangerous end of the *Real World*. On encountering, both objective and phenomenal experience is harsh, but sustainable. Against them, irrationality carries the day. Rationality has no role in the scheme of things. And integrity is irrationality (more precisely non-rationality).

Pakistan provides the shortest possible route for the transportation of drugs to Europe and UK. The transactions are in pure gold and U.S. dollars. The financial benefits are more to the middlemen and *transporters* as opposed to the growers. The pick and drop is in tons and trans-geographic for the connection is trans-national. It is rather global. Much to the relief of the world's richest and most militarily adept heroin traffickers, Afghanistan today is the largest heroin manufacturer in the history of mankind.⁵ And the Afghan mafia in southern Afghanistan has ethnic, family and business connections with the trans-national Balochi mafia. The linkages are centuries old.

Balochis in the Iranian province of Seistan are fighting Tehran since long whereas the strife among the Arabs and Kurds of Ahwaz and Iranian Kurdistan is a reality aided from Iraq. Iranians blamed the Anglo-Saxons and Balochi Jundallah with an Israeli connection for the suicide

attacks in Seistan killing many soldiers and Revolutionary Guard Generals. Subsequently, the leader of Jundallah was captured and hanged by the Iranians. Historically, Balochistan is water logged and part of the conduit and a perceived geo-strategic and geo-political bridgehead as well. Merchants have joined hands. Balochi pride can not be understated. It has an impact on sociology, politics, economics and now on geo-strategy and geo-politics. The Balochi worldview is also that of a great gravitas and patience in the face of socio-economic and political reductionism. Given chance, the phenomenon speaks for itself. And tribesmen instead of protests and speeches pick up guns and go to the mountains.

The Strategic Environment

Whenever you approach a big event, the prelude to that in geo-strategy, geo-politics and geo-economics is the Strategic Environment made up of facts creating a climate. The detailed information is not needed because a situation is always a mixture of psychological, perceptual, strategic, political, economic and cultural facts in which any given policy or an event unfolds. Before going into specifics, the strategist should ask himself of the ambiance in the zone in which reality will disentangle. It is a Strategic Environment which one can cut with the sword. The richer the analysis, the more rational one would be. The strategic conception should always be logical and rational as opposed to the one based on instincts or intuitions.

The State of Pakistan has enough knowledge to infer, if it wishes to, that the misconduct in Balochistan is a threat to the federation of Pakistan. The quality has to be raised both in and out of colors. There are enough grounds for the enemies of Pakistan to exploit. The people of Balochistan understand the lifestyle across the gulf. One knows it and that is the reality. The facets are many and one is enough to bring the state down. The prevailing Geo-political and Geo-Strategic Environment in the region makes it more sensitive, and a threat to be reckoned with. Since the toppling of Shah of Iran, dissidents from Seistan-Iran sit all along Pak-Iran, Pak-Afghan and Iran-Afghan borders with trans-cis tribal and family connections.

Pakistan condemned the hearing and the subsequent resolution on Balochistan in the U.S. Congress. American perception is that Balochistan offers an alternative to contest Eurasia. The queen bee intends to sit in Balochistan, whether as part or not part of Pakistan. The move has to be quick due to increasing Chinese influence. The competition has intensified. It is an expensive affair. So far China has shown no sign of flogging. It is rather flexing its space, stealth and naval muscles. America is also courting India to increase its strategic space for

the *Indo-U.S. Entente* has Eurasia in view as a sphere of influence. Resultantly, the 26/11 was an assault on the Indian consciousness. India should not complain while playing High Politics. Blaming Pakistan is being deductive as opposed to inductive. The Indianness of India is India's cognitive dissonance.

Some high circles in New Delhi have questioned the wisdom of the dual faced policy of engaging Islamabad in peace dialogue while at the same time supporting insurgent activity in Balochistan.⁶ The closest thing to a major power supporting terrorism is India, because of what it may be doing in Pakistan in reprisal for Pakistani-supported activity in Kashmir.⁷ However, despite steps by Pakistan since 9/11, the Indian interference in Balochistan continues. The fact is that India has infiltrated significant number of agents into Pakistan.⁸

Balochistan is a Strategic Pearl because it is central to the *New Great Game* and the *New Cold War*. It is complex. There are many cooks in the broth. The political indecisiveness is dangerous. And common denominator is always weak. The late political move makes it irrelevant. The use of force turns local into regional, global and geo-political. It is a dilemma. All types of chickens are coming home to roost. Pakistan has become an attractive idea. The clash persists. It is yet to be resolved. Black gold, ethnic conflict, Islamic fundamentalism, civil war, Russian irredentism—the Great Game is back on for sure.⁹ It is all about minerals, metals, oil and gas. The struggle and the game go on. The New Cold War is fought with cash, natural resources, diplomacy, propaganda and Russia is building up its clout as an energy supplier, while diversifying its customer base.¹⁰

Americans wanted to bypass Russia in Eastern Europe but the Russian geo-economic and geo-strategic moves are a blow to American interests in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. However in South Asia, the Strategic Environment has exposed Pakistan to the Strategic Games of the Big League. It is to its disadvantage, that the location has become a burden. It is no more an asset or an aid. The U.S. efforts revolve around changing Strategic Environment in South, South West and Central Asia. It has ramifications. Afghanistan is a Big Game, Iraq never was. The game has become too deadly and has attracted too many players; it now resembles less a chess match than the Afghan game of *buzkashi*, with Afghanistan playing the role of the goat carcass fought over by innumerable teams.¹¹ And Iranians are not neutral.

It is a small world and the number of lords is on the rise. It will be found out as to who is the Big Dog. There is this shifting in the Westphalian systemic landscape. The sovereignty of nation-state is under attack in the context of intended post-Westphalian New World Order.

Will Pakistan knuckle under global and regional hegemony? The razor-sharp strategic focus with a grip over details is needed.

The suicidal instinct is part of Pakistani concealed wiring. It is micro of the macro e.g., Pakistan's nuclear policy and logic is suicidal. The development of nuclear weapons and delivery systems reflects it. Pakistan's enemies are superior conventionally and in depth. Pakistan is all length and no breadth. The strategic equilibrium is tilted in others favor. Yet, Pakistan will not simply go down fighting. The thesis is that if others do not pull back, then the nuclear catastrophe will take over. Only wisdom and restraint can deter such a possibility.

The Gwadar Port

In the early 1950s, Pakistan's intelligence set up was located at capital Karachi. A Military Attaché (read: CIA) at the American Embassy contacted Pakistan's Military Intelligence Directorate for permission and security cover to travel from Karachi to Gwadar. The embassy was informed about the absence of roads and related infrastructure but the CIA officer did not recoil and opted to travel on camels along with the security cover. Of course the technical information gathered about the coast line was shared with Pakistan's Military Intelligence Directorate. The record reveals that the Military Attaché surveyed the area for three months. American interest in Gwadar dates back to the creation of Pakistan. The awareness has increased.

Some realists and of course the neo-cons in U.S. have raised concerns about the range of Chinese connection in Balochistan with particular reference to Gwadar and its impact on the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Along with ever-present Russians, new powers such as China, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan have entered the arena, and transnational corporations (whose budgets far exceed those of many Central Asian countries) are also pursuing their own interests and strategies.¹²

The cancellation of the opening of Gwadar Port by the Chinese premier was meaningful. The conditions of Dubai Port had implications whereas other than the Hupchon Company of Hong Kong, China had lobbied for a Chinese firm, but Singapore Port Authority won the contract. The forty year tax relief makes it a tax free port. The port was inaugurated by Pakistan's President in March 2007. It became operational in December 2008. Pakistani decision makers are indecisive about the status of Gwadar Port. The unanswered question is whether it will be a feeder port or handling trans-national trade. The understating of trans-shipment gives advantage to Chahbahar, Salalah and Dubai ports endangered by the futuristic potential of Gwadar. Consequently, the houbara bustard is now a pan on the geo-political chess board.¹³

It synthesizes the Strategic Environment. The Sino-U.S. clash of interests over trade routes is risky. At stake is the trade corridor centred on Central Asia. And in Anglo-Saxon perception, what is China doing building roads, ports in Myanmar and Pakistan, connecting west and south west China with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.¹⁴ The pincers are understood. The Eurasian power struggle involves Persian Gulf and the arc of Balochi territory stretching through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And some unrest is going on in Balochistan.¹⁵ The situation demands to be in harmony with time. Let's not make it the failing of pride and honor. The honor and arms are linked in a tribal society.

Balochistan is a pyramid like tribal society. The forlorn funerals become part of conscious and sub-conscious. The Balochi consciousness now carries yet another millstone of antecedents. It was a deliberate attack and a trial of strength. The belief was that the problem would be solved. It did not. A genuine politico-economic move is awaited. The insurgents are not responding to the overtures. Even the battered Jundallah is not willing to lay down arms, let alone the groups led by Baramdagh Bugti, Harbayar Marri, Javed Mengal and Dr. Allah Nazar.

The mind has to open up. The commitment is to be demonstrated. The thinking has to be critical. Lack of moderation is to be avoided. How could a multiple combination of weaknesses become so glaring? Everything over time has mixed up. The problems will keep recurring, but it is possible to arrange affairs within means and live honorably. Since *perceptions* remain critical, the statements emanating are not reliable in an unpleasant region. Military solution has costs, especially in domestic affairs. There is a failure to recognize the environment that exists. What mixture of domestic and foreign policy should Pakistan follow in relation to Balochistan? The art and alchemy is the *right combination* of politics and strategy. For Iran too, like Afghanistan, became a strategic rear base for India against Pakistan,¹⁶ since Iran helped India in Afghanistan. And India is a blunt geographic wedge in China's zone of influence in Asia.¹⁷

Across the Indus, two militant salients of FATA and Balochistan have emerged to the dismay of Islamabad. It is all very fragile. Something extra ordinary is afoot. An inestimable storm is gathering. It is now diffusion and not confusion. Friction is inefficiency. Entropy is the wasting away of time. The winds are only friendly when one knows where one is going and how one is going. The uncertain domestic and external game can go up to a point and for limited time and not after that. That is why the ultimate task of statesmanship is to shape the future.¹⁸ Moreover, the prophet of realism holds his heart, whenever there are elections in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The question always was how to fill the gap? The thirst to fill the gap remains. It is a constant struggle. The disparity took Pakistan in different directions. And becoming a prisoner of rent is the heart and kernel of the problem. A bit of achievement led to more than one adventures. The denial accelerates the desire. The organizing principles of Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies will have to be reoriented. For it has foundered in its orientation. The perception needs to be debated. An adjustment is required. One has to adapt to the reality. The pretending will have to be replaced. The situation is complicated and is not going to go away. It is unpredictable. It will not precipitate easily. And a dilemma is a stage where if you do you are dammed and if you don't you are still dammed. If experience in Balochistan is anything to go by, the situation over the decades has been forced into local, regional and global dilemmas by those at the helm of affairs.

Furthermore, the vicious failure of political system haunts Pakistan. It remains unstable. It has become a suffering. There is an up swell of feeling of resentment. The dispensation is exposed. The political movie makers are equally bewildered. Nothing makes sense any more. The understanding of law is lacking. The breaking of law and its sanctity by government after government can go up to a point. It is difficult to reconcile. It has not sunk into some. Mind takes time to catch up. How should one see the Gestalt of whole tragedy in Pakistan? And there is no end in sight to the suffering.

Likewise a cascaded, made up and a close mind is blind to the passage of time. It refuses to be confused with the facts, be those phenomenal or otherwise. There is a stage when ones mind is beyond insight. It is a terrible state. The capacity to mislead one self is always there. One becomes victim too willingly. The situation is going to a stage where it will be muddy. The murkiness remains. To try to see a degree of clarity in a situation that is murky and to claim it is not is the denial of reality. The way events are shaping the things is touchy. The nemeses have caught up. The strategic equilibrium has limits. And the leadership does not have the capacity to realize that the world takes a round to come around, and the world has changed.

What is more the make-belief world is out of touch with the reality. Like in case of a sleep walker, a sense of unreality prevails. Why doesn't the Pakistani mind turn to ask, how in a society time and again they repeat the same mistakes? The occurrences are same irrespective of leaders. What is the fault common to all? The growth, development and maturation that should accompany the rise are missing. Do they have in them to be leaders? Some qualities must be valued e.g., germs of

leadership. To enter into their minds is not a problem, but the spell and hunger of power is sickening. The zone of proximal development perhaps lacks the systematicity and logic of adults. Everyone is part of the narrative. Everyone is discredited. An original leadership is required.

There is this difference between boys and men in the context of a call of a Higher Order. There is also this difference between rule and statesmanship. The latter does not come from rationalization, but stems from consciousness. An average mind suffers from insecurity, and makes a grab for power. And the problem with pathology is that it has no upper limits. There is no remorse. With eruptions in an unsettled Strategic Environment, assessment and determination is a difficult task including decision making. The numbers of crisis over the decades were numerous. What we see is the result of that build-up. Did they hold it in bag for some time? The present situation in Pakistan is bathos and bathos has anger. The slide is from sublime to triviality.

Similarly, the ancestral spirit has failed. The disintegration is not only philosophic and historic, but administrative as well. It is a failure at bottom and is fundamental. It is failure of mind and instincts at establishing linkages and connections. Any orchestration is based on composer's capacity to see connections and linkages. And the capacity to see exclusive linkages in an apple garden is the essence. This failing is whether generalized or individual is the failure of a measure to see connection between unrelated things. It is always the ability to see connection that is vital. The failure to connect pits one against the reality itself.

The razor edge relationship is far from being clear e.g., the strikes on Salala Post or the curtain-raiser hearing and resolution in the U.S. Congress on Balochistan. It is an escalating Eurasian struggle and the rest are premises of the *New Great Game*. The championship is becoming interesting. The players are into finale. Like a Wagner's High Drama, it is being played at the world stage. But the law of the unexpected continues to govern. What else one can do except letting it evolve. The savants understand. How can the Concert Master with its honorable consultant, allies, institutions, intellectuals, scholars, values and ideals commit errors of such historic proportions? How can one attribute brains? The ideas would be left out like scain. The capacity to convey is more effective if it is cold and logical.

Central Asia is up for a grab and Balochistan is critical to that. Other than the direct Indian, Iranian and European interests, America wants control of Gwadar Port and bases for the promotion of its trade and strategic interests while asking Pakistan to strategically distance itself from China. The strategic encirclement of China is part of perception. However,

notwithstanding the continuing drone strikes, getting the Shamsi Base vacated sent the message in the reverse direction. No wonder, given the political will, Pakistan can be a Game Changer e.g., Pak-Iran-Afghan Summit or Pak-Iran gas pipeline.

Nonetheless, these are the times when this becomes that, therefore, integration is the name of the game. The passage of time is of essence because it can be greatest of all allies for it exerts control by conspiring in favor of one and against others. Pakistanis may define it anyway they like, but there is a situation. The issue is not law and order. It is lack of political participation and foreign intervention. And since there is a snowballing *Luna Caprice* connection to it, Islamabad can hope for the best, but it must plan for the worst. Moreover, there exists only one region in which all Great Powers are present i.e., Eurasia, particularly the sub-region of Central Asia; the first meeting place of China, India, Russia, the U.S. and the EU in history and here the gaps between Great Power rhetoric and the reality of their policy approaches are all too evident.¹⁹

Lastly, keeping in view the American perception of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon Capability and Terrorism, the New Great Game, the New Cold War, the revanchist Russia, the ascending China, Eurasia as a sphere of influence, and the elusive Strategic Pearl; the time has come not only to forge a new relationship with China but also to further the vindicated spirit of the architect of Sino-Pak relationship. This is Pakistan's *Defining Moment*. If true potential is channelized, Pakistan will be a *Great Nation*. And justice is an ever fresh centre of gravity for it is Divine. Dispense justice and everything will fall into place. One should always tell the truth, but truth need not to be told, because, it is a jewel that shines by its own light.

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