Almost Iranians: the Forgotten people of Iranian Balochistan

Exploring Armed Ethnic Conflict and Terrorism in Iranian Balochistan

after the 1979 Islamic Revolution

by

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Dedications

This Thesis is dedicated to my late Grandmother "Madar"
who had an infinite passion for learning.

Abstract

The world is awash with protracted ethnopolitical conflicts and civil wars as around the world, from Northern Ireland to Chechnya and to Rwanda, minority ethnic groups challenge the authority of nation states around the world. These groups seek more autonomy, a decentralization of power or outright secession from the nation state. The Iranian region of Balochistan is located in southeastern Iran and the majority of its population are Balochs who have a distinct ethnoreligious and cultural identity. There are eight major ethnopolitical groups that comprise the Iranian nation state. The Balochs are Sunni Muslims and have been systematically marginalized in a predominantly Shia country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Today, Balochistan is one of the poorest provinces in Iran, and the Balochs have some of the worst living conditions in the country. In 2003, organized violence in the form of suicide bombings, hostage taking, and the ambush of Iranian military personnel commenced in the region as the Iranian central government retaliated against Baloch paramilitary forces, led by Jundullah and later Jaish-ul Adl, with even more violence. As a result, a cycle of direct and structural violence continues to affect the region to this very day. This thesis is perhaps the first study of its kind in Peace and Conflict Studies. It is a qualitative study that explores eight scholars and other experts' perceptions and images of some of the causes behind the eruption and escalation of both physical and structural violence in Balochistan. It also examines how these experts perceive the construction of "the other" by the Iranian government who is contributing to this unending cycle of destructive conflict. The thesis attempts to improve our understanding of this protracted conflict and to offer some explanations for the current economic and political situation in Balochistan. The thesis also outlines a possible peacebuilding model in which the political and economic problems in the region are transformed into possible solutions to build trust and sustainable peace between the people of Balochistan and the Iranian nation state.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Ethnic conflicts are one of the main reasons for violence, displacement and distress around the world (Carter, Irani & Volkan, 2008). These conflicts are usually complex and hard to understand, especially for those individuals not belonging to either party. Ethnic conflicts are very difficult to analyse and have multiple dimensions (Wolff, 2010; Carter et al., 2008). They are also extremely sensitive since the ethnicity and other core interests of one or more groups are threatened. Usually the presence of a neutral third party can prove most useful in a peace process. However, third parties may lack the understanding and required resources to help solve the problem. As a result, many conflicts become intractable and seem impossible to resolve (Bose, 2010). Iran is a country that is mostly perceived as homogenous even though its government has dealt with numerous ethnic conflicts over the years. Kurds in the west, Arabs in the west and southwest, Turkemens and Azeris in the north and the Baloch people in the east, have all entered into conflicts with the central government of Iran over the past centuries. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution changed many dynamics within the country and with its ethnic minorities.

Over the past 36 years, the central government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has aggressively forced Shi'a values, as well as the Fars[1] identity and language, on all Iranians. This policy violates its subjects' religion and ethnic freedoms, which are guaranteed in the constitution. The government's anti-ethnic policies include the denial of one's right to be educated in one's mother tongue, the outlawing of other faith's religious rituals (including Sunni

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[1] The new regime avoids the title "Persian" due to its links to the monarchy and has replaced it with the Arabic form of the same word, "Fars".

Muslims), and the exclusion of minorities from important jobs and positions within the government and public sector (Boroujerdi, 1996).

These discriminatory policies have continuously marginalized several ethnic groups within the country and have contributed to clashes between these groups and the government. Over the same time period, numerous Iranian ethnic groups have taken up arms against the central government. The Kurds, Arabs, Azerbaijanis and the Baloch people have all formed one or more armed organizations with equality, justice and liberation as the goals for their peoples. This thesis focuses on the acts of terrorism, its nature and its problematic definition in Iranian Balochistan and the role of the central government in the conflict.

The current political, social and economic situation in Iran has left many Iranians underprivileged, unemployed and deprived of their basic civil, political, and human rights. The situation is, however, worse for some rather than others, namely minority groups. The Baloch people are a minority group in terms of ethnicity, language and religion. They live in one of the harshest geographical areas in Iran, far from the capital, and the global media spotlight. Their two external neighbors are Afghanistan and Pakistan, notorious for their own internal struggles with human rights problems. These factors further isolate the Baloch people when compared to, the Kurds, for instance, who are located in Western Iran because the latter group borders smaller countries with more access to the developed world in the West. As a result of their geographical location, the Kurds have formed a large and strong diaspora outside of Iran; for example, a strong Kurdish community resides in Germany and continues to be a voice for their people.

There have been two active terrorist organizations operating in Balochistan; namely, Jundullah (2003-2010) and Jaish-ul Adl (2012-present). Both organizations are shrouded in

mystery, which is further intensified by the lack of freedom of speech existing in Iran. However, it is believed that Jaish-ul Adl was formed by members of Jundullah, which was weakened after the execution of its leader (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Both organizations have collectively launched more than 50 attacks (including suicide bombings and hostage kidnappings), killing more than 200 and injuring between 700-1000 people. It is believed that the members are currently headquartered in Pakistan, hiding there after carrying out operations in Iran, with the most recent incident occurring in April 2015.

The government of Iran owns all television and radio networks across the country, and imposes heavy censorship on all kinds of printed media as well as the Internet. Consequently, the majority of Iranian people look to the government as their sole source of information. This is a major source of propaganda directed against the Baloch people and the ethnic conflict taking place in Balochistan). This exclusive power over the media allows the government to paint a picture of an illegitimate "other", and justifies its discrimination and violence directed against the Baloch people.

On the other hand, relative deprivation (that is the economic "gap" between people living in these peripheral areas and the rest of Iran) alienates the Baloch people from their fellow countrymen and those who appear to be more privileged and indifferent to their hardships. Such a gap is not limited to just financial disparities; it also extends to all areas of life with the Baloch people experiencing a lower status and standard of living compared to the rest of the Iranian people. Thus, it is in comparison with the others needs that deprivation must be understood; what is an absolute need in one country may very well be a luxury somewhere else. The sense of deprivation, unless it is an absolute biological human need, may not exist if individuals are not

aware of other opportunities and amenities enjoyed by others. Moreover, people who are aware of the gap between themselves and others may also not feel deprivation; yet for various reasons they believe that their lives are going to be improved. In other words, relative deprivation is a feeling that is experienced by people who are both aware of, and dissatisfied with the differences enjoyed by themselves and by others (Byrne, 2015).

Hypothesis

In this thesis I argue that the construction of "the other" by the Iranian government is the key contributing factor to the emergence and continuation of armed ethnic conflict in Iranian Balochistan. I explain how the discrimination against the Baloch people is rooted in the government viewing them as "the other", and how this image of "the other" is used to justify the state's violence in the "fight against terrorism" in Balochistan.

Purpose and Significance

This thesis answers the question of whether the Iranian government is using propaganda to construct "the other" in order to create its own definition of terrorism in Balochistan. In a situation where both parties to the conflict are using violence against each other, the paramilitary organizations in Balochistan are the only side of the conflict that is officially branded with this label of "other" and "terrorist". I explore how this branding changes the conditions under which the potential transformation of this conflict is approached.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind violence in the Balochistan state, the violence of the Iranian government, and it is an attempt to clarify the different kinds of terrorism used in this conflict. Identifying the reasons behind the escalation of

ethnic conflict is the first step towards resolving it. While the military and police forces may "control" and manage the situation to a certain extent, they are by no means a sustainable solution to the situation in Balochistan. Every year, more border patrol, police and military personnel as well as civilians alike, fall victim to terrorist activities in Balochistan. Little non-violent education is used to educate and to promote empathy, peace and compassion in order to better the lives of the Baloch people. As a result, little significant improvement has been made to transform the conflict since the first official terrorist attack by a Baloch paramilitary organization took place in 2003.

The resolution of this conflict and the establishment of peace will be a significant contributor to the overall well-being of the Iranian people. As Martin Luther King says in his famous letter from a Birmingham jail: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King, 1963). Even in the absence of terrorist activities, it is imperative for a nation to ensure everyone is enjoying the same rights and opportunities in the whole country.

Since Jundullah started what has been called its terrorist activities in 2003, the Jundullah actions in Balochistan are widely broadcast by the Iranian media and news of these actions have appalled Iranian people everywhere. This news coverage comes from a country that is ranked amongst the lowest in terms of freedom of speech, and amongst the highest number of jailed journalists in the world (The Guardian, 2015; Human Rights Watch). In Iran, much of the news never makes it on Iranian national TV or into newspapers and the news that is given is closely monitored and heavily censored by the government. While acts of terrorism anywhere, in any form and for any reason should be condemned, I believe that the state should not be excluded from that condemnation. It is important for the Iranian people to get both sides of the story about

the plight of Balochistan and the acts taking place there. The people of Balochistan, like the rest of the Iranians, have no voice and their actions are judged by the one-sided news analysis provided by the national media, which is under the complete control and censorship of the government.

Much of the Iranian people's perceptions towards the Baloch people are a result of government propaganda. While it is difficult to properly document the Internet users' comments on various Iranian news websites and social media, it is not hard to imagine their sentiments. Iranian propaganda has prompted many countries including the United States as well as the United Nations into condemning "terrorism" in Balochistan without questioning the circumstances under which the conflict is happening. Ethnic hatred threatens the national unity of Iran. More importantly, the label of "terrorism" increases the indifference of the Iranian people towards what is going on in Balochistan; the Balochs are framed as terrorists who are being dealt with as they should by the government. Thus, the vicious cycle of violence continues. I believe that my study can give a voice to the people of Balochistan and hence promote understanding and tolerance among all Iranians. A deep understanding of the conflict is an essential part of any step toward conflict resolution and conflict transformation between the Baloch people and Iranians in the future. Furthermore, this thesis may serve as a small step towards filling the gap in the Peace and Conflict Studies literature, regarding Iranian Balochistan, its people and the ongoing conflict with the central government.

Limitations of the Study

This study faces several limitations; most important of all is the lack of reliable sources and inaccessibility to the area under study. It is rather difficult to find reliable media sources due

to the lack of free press and media in Iran. Both paramilitary organizations studied in this thesis are enigmatic entities surrounded by doubt and rumours with no officially confirmed communication channel between them and the government. In addition, due to the sensitivity of the subject and the political situation in Iran, it is impossible to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews without putting the subjects in danger.

Similarly, taking an accurate pulse of public opinion in Iran is a difficult task due to government misinformation and the lack of a reliable outlet for public opinion. The Iranian government's "cyber" forces have also taken over social media and news outlets' comments sections and it is extremely hard to differentiate between authentic and "propaganda" statements where the contributors remain anonymous and can post several comments with different names and titles. Conducting a survey on Iranians living outside of Iran also has two major problems. The first problem is that, most Iranians travel back and forth to Iran and the dangers of conducting interviews also applies to them. Judging by my own personal experience over the past eight years, not many Iranians would risk taking part in an interview regardless of my assurances to them regarding their privacy. The second problem is that, for any future peace process, it is Iranians inside Iran that can play the most important role. They are living under political and economic oppression and it is they who will participate in bringing about true change. While Iranians outside of Iran have more freedom to raise awareness and express their opinions, I feel strongly against the diaspora "writing prescriptions" for those living the reality. As a result, I did not see a major benefit in conducting surveys with the diaspora of Iranians considering the hardships of the Balochs living inside Iran. However, the views and opinions of Baloch diaspora who have become Baloch rights activists outside of Iran have been used extensively in this thesis.

Finally, the reader must keep in mind that the current regime in Iran is a theocratic dictatorship with little or no room for peaceful activities and the promotion of diversity. The findings of this study are most useful and practical in a more democratic environment. Possible solutions to the current situation are discussed in the last chapter but will be extremely difficult to achieve due to the current political and economic circumstances in Iran.

Terms and Concepts

Clarification of the following terms used in the thesis is provided in order to avoid confusion for the reader and to provide a better and clearer understanding of the subject matter at hand.

Balochistan: The term Balochistan or Balochistan refers to a large area of land divided between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The area studied in this thesis is more specifically known as "Iranian Balochistan", which is the southern part of the Iranian province of Sistan and Balochistan with the larger area divided between the three countries indicated as "Greater Balochistan". However, for the sake of simplification, it is simply referred to as "Balochistan" in this thesis.

The Baloch: Balochistan is the southern part of an Iranian province called Sistan and Balochistan. The term "Balochi" refers to the language, culture and identity of this specific part of the province where a distinct ethnic group with a unique culture have resided there for centuries; the people from this region are the Baloch people or simply the "Balochs". The province as a whole is mentioned throughout the thesis specifically when discussing national

statistics and numbers that are collected on a per province basis. However, the geographic area studied in this thesis is specifically Balochistan, where the Baloch people mainly reside[2].

The Iranian government: Iran's system of governance consists of the Cabinet, Parliament and the Security Council, which are all under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. The term "government", without going into too much detail, is used to describe the central political system and regime in Iran, with the Supreme Leader as the ultimate de facto decision-maker on all matters, including the passing of bills, appointing the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Broadcasting (IRIB) system, as well as the head of the justice system, etc.

Iranian forces: Iran's official armed forces consist of several parallel sections with specific goals and duties that are blurred and overlapping at times. Sepah (short for Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami translated as the Army of Guardians of the Islamic Republic) are entrusted with maintaining Islamic order and values in the aftermath of the revolution; it should not be confused with the army that is in charge of defending the land, air and waters belonging to the country. This organization is under direct leadership of the Supreme Leader who appoints the commander-in-chief. Since the task of "controlling" the situation in Balochistan is entirely in the hands of the Sepah, the terms "Iranian forces" will be used in this thesis to refer to the Sepah, unless specified otherwise.

Terrorism: There is no doubt that bombing a mosque, taking hostages and killing people in retaliation are all acts of terrorism; however, this term is not absolute and its meaning can shift according to context. In the case of the paramilitary organizations operating in Balochistan,

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[2] Alternative spellings are Baluchistan, Balouchistan, Baluch and Balouch. This thesis uses the most common spelling according to the number of results generated by the Google search engine with regard to Iranian Balochistan.

terrorism seems to be more of a strategy than an agenda. These organizations are known to have done more in the community than taking up arms (Baloch, Boladai, Doshoki, Hosseinbor, 2010). In this thesis, the term terrorism is used to refer to certain violent acts carried out by these organizations, keeping in mind, that depending on one's point of view, terrorism can be viewed from many points of view and is therefore a contested and debatable term.

Iranians and Iranian identity: I believe that under a free democratic regime of political governance, Iran would look much like Canada, a diverse country with a high degree of tolerance for different languages, cultures, religions and traditions. However, the Iranian government (despite its manipulating efforts to "celebrate" ethnic diversity) has been forcing a particular identity on Iranians through both the media and state prosecution. This "typical Iranian" is a Shia Muslim, who speaks Farsi and has a "typical" Iranian look. This "identity propaganda" as I like to call it, has been so successful that it has a direct effect on how people are treated, both by the government and the Iranian public. In his 2009 report from Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Balochistan, Karlos Zurutuza says, "sharing borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, here every 'non farsi' [sic] is a potential 'terrorist', 'drug dealer', or both at the same time" (Zurutuza, 2009). Ibrahim, a Baloch university student, tells him that "the main obstacle is the Iranian Constitution itself. It limits the Persian identity with Shiism [sic] as the only religion and Farsi as the only language". He goes on to call it "apartheid imposed on us by the ayatollahs" (Zurutuza, 2009). Talking about the same issue with one of the professors at the University of Sistan and Balochistan, Zurutuza is told, "it is a tyrannical regime that seeks the Farsis [sic] total hegemony in Iran, nothing else" (Zurutuza, 2009).

Zurutuza talks with a Baloch young man named Mansur who says that in Tehran he is mistaken for an outsider due to his dark complexion and different way of clothing: "Then they get puzzled when I tell them in perfect Farsi that I happen to come from their very same country". He goes on to say that he often hears "You are not Iranian", to which he responds "Unfortunately, I am" (Zurutuza, 2009).

When discussing Iranian identity, I am referring to the government's constructed concept of a Shia Muslim and Farsi speaking Iranian, which in my opinion is a minority in Iran. Being Iranian is simply a nationality and a citizenship that entitles people to the same rights.

Throughout this thesis, it is important for the reader to keep in mind that "terrorism" is a loaded term with strong implications, especially in today's world where terrorist attacks are frequent and brutal by groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (better known as ISIS), Al-Shabaab and other isolated events inspired by the ideology of these groups, for example attacks on the offices of Charlie Hebodo magazine in January 2015 in Paris.

History is full of examples of "fighters" and "brave heroes" who were also labeled "rebels" and "traitors" by the dominant group in power; a clear example is Louis Riel, the leader of the Canadian Metis people in the 19th century. Without going into much detail, it is clear that terrorist and freedom fighter can be two sides of the same coin depending on one's point of view. In the case of the Iranian Balochistan, the projected image of the conflict (via, of course, the Iranian state's monopoly of the media) is easily manipulated.

What seems to be the effort of advocates for equal rights of the Baloch people is shown as the malicious work of Western powers to undermine the unity of the state of Iran. The use of

violence by the Baloch paramilitary organizations is labeled terrorism, while the State's mass imprisonment and executions of peaceful activists is "justice" and "order". The terrorists are sub-human and treated as such because they are not what the government calls "Iranians". They are discriminated against to the point that violence seems like their only option, and they are faced with absolute brutality when they take advantage of that last option. They are citizens of Iran, but only "almost Iranian". Even though the Baloch people were never officially painted with the same brush as the terrorists, they are being punished for posing a danger to the government's agenda. This agenda in practice makes Iran a place to live in only for those who are Shia Muslims and never oppose the government or demand any form of authority or control over their affairs based on their ethnicity, language or culture. During this propaganda war of what is an "Iranian", the Baloch people are forgotten in their own country, and deprived of their rights. They are labeled terrorists and brutally eliminated when they oppose their situation, and the government remains the only "rightful" authority to use violence at its discretion and as it sees fit.

Chapters

This thesis consists of the following chapters:

Introduction: The current chapter familiarizes the reader with the topic, the purpose and significance of the study as well as the research questions and the contents of the study.

Context: This chapter explains the background as well as all significant aspects of the conflict.

Literature review: This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study and is an instrumental section as it helps examine the matter at hand based on what little information is

available. The theories that are used to describe and analyse the conflict are discussed in this chapter and provide an umbrella for the research and the results and act as the framework for the whole study.

Methodology: This chapter describes the manner in which the research was conducted and how the data were analyzed. An introduction to the conflict, its location and the parties concerned as well as the manner in which the data were collected and analysed are outlined. The chapter also highlights the limitations surrounding the collection of data and the reliability of sources.

Data analysis and the key findings: In this qualitative chapter, I discuss the ideas presented and the data collected for this study. The key findings are presented and examined in a common sense inductive grounded theoretical analysis.

Conclusion: Finally, this chapter brings together the key findings of the study, as well as ideas and suggestions for forging sustainable peace and the future research that needs to be explored.

Conclusion

The ethnic conflict in Iranian Balochistan has existed for many generations. In recent years however, the situation has escalated with the appearance of organizations carrying out terrorist attacks in the region in response to government oppression of the Baloch people. The Iranian government has long reacted to these activities using military attacks, prison, torture and execution to perpetuate the cycle of violence. This thesis explores how the Iranian government's monopoly of power defines Iranian identity and terrorism in the ways that benefit the government the most which is preventing a peaceful resolution from evolving in Balochistan. In the next chapter, I present the background and the context in which this study takes place.

Chapter Two: Context

Iran

Located in the southwest of the Asian continent, Iran is the second most populous country in the Middle East with approximately 79 million people living across 31 provinces. A legacy of the largest empire in history[3], which was home to close to 45 percent of the population of the world at the time, Iran, is not a homogenous country. Iran is an ethnically diverse country consisting of only 61 percent Persian, with 16 percent Azeri, 10 percent Kurd, 6 percent Lur, 2 percent Baloch, 2 percent Arab, 2 percent Turkmen and Turkic tribes and 1 percent other living in the country (The World Factbook, 2012).

Persian, 51%

Other, 1%

Turkmen, 2%

Baloch, 2%

Lor, 2%

Arab, 3%

Azeri, 24%

Kurd, 7%

Gilaki and Mazandarani, 8%
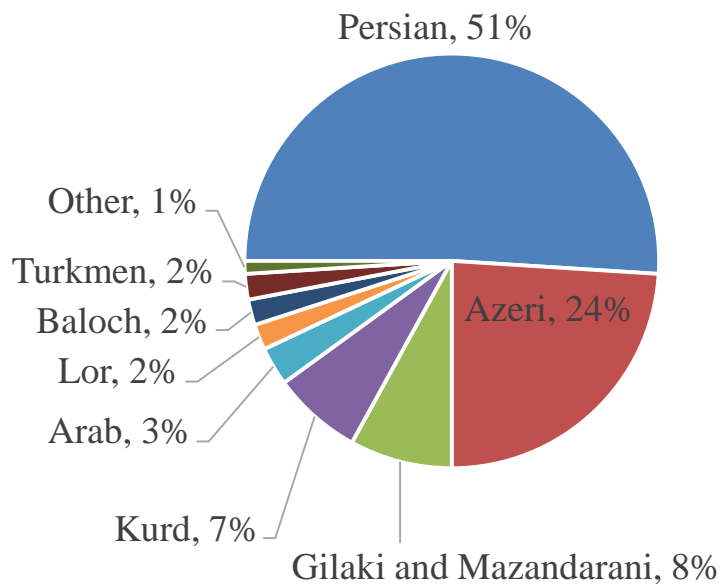
Figure 1. Ethnic groups of Iran (based on the information from The World Factbook, 2012).

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[3] The Achaemenid Empire (interchangeably known as the Persian Empire) had at one point occupied the largest geographic area of any empire in history.

Persian (or Farsi), is the official language of the country despite the fact that it is spoken by merely 53 percent of Iranians at home as their first language. The rest of the population speaks Azeri Turkic and Turkic dialects (18 percent), Kurdish (10 percent), Gilaki and Mazandarani (7 percent), Luri (6 percent), Balochi (2 percent), Arabic (2 percent) and other (2 percent).
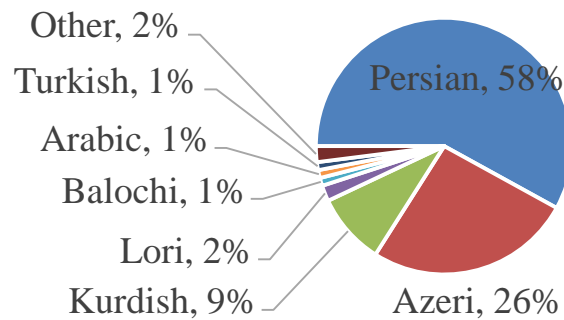
Figure 2. Languages spoken in Iran (based on the information from The World Factbook, 2012).

The official religion of the country is mainly Shia Islam, while 9 percent of the population are Sunni Muslims and 2 percent are non-Muslims. Considering the continuous persecution of religious minorities in Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, including other sects of Islam, it is not surprising to see this intolerance reflected in the lack of diversity of religions.
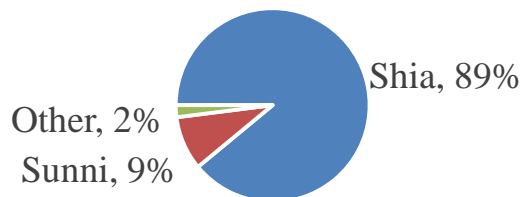

Figure 3. Religions of Iran (based on the information from The World Factbook, 2012).

After more than 2500 years of having a monarchy and the eventual rebellion by Iranian desire for a democracy and a parliament, the 1979 revolution overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty. The Mohammadreza of House Pahlavi, commonly known as "the Shah", was forced into exile. In a series of complicated events that are beyond the scope of this thesis, the revolution turned in a direction different than the one planned. Despite the fact that people of all groups and faiths, from the communist left to the conservative right played an active role in overthrowing the Shah, the revolution was thereafter quickly referred to as the Islamic revolution that placed the fundamentalist Shia Muslims in power. After Iraq's military attack on Iran in 1980, tens of thousands of Iranians fueled by nationalistic desire to defend their country marched to the front lines for the next eight years. This war prevented any opposition from emerging because opponents were tried for "treason" and thousands of members of different political parties and groups that aided the revolution ended up in prisons. The unity of the people to fight a common external Sunni Baathist enemy further empowered the Islamic regime. In 1988, and after the acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 598, the eight-year war ended. Almost immediately after the ceasefire, the government started systematically executing prisoners without trial with the death toll between 5000-6000. However, some scholars estimated that the number of those executed was between 12000 and 25000 people[4]. Since 1979, Iran is officially an Islamic Republic yet it has turned into a theocratic dictatorship with a poor human rights record. In March 2015 Ahmed Shaheed, the UN special rapporteur on Iran expressed concerns over the human rights situation in Iran. He added "the overall situation has worsened" stating that Iran has the highest per capita execution numbers in the world, including 13 minors in 2014 (The Guardian, 2015). According to Human Rights Watch (2015), since the 2013 election of the

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[4] The lack of data from the Iranian government means that it is difficult to estimate the official number of the regime's victims. However, some NGOs including Amnesty International have investigated this incident in recent years.

more moderate Hassan Rouhani as president the human rights situation in Iran has not improved much as "repressive elements within the security and intelligence forces and the judiciary retain wider powers and continue to be the main perpetrators of rights abusers". Among their key concerns are the high numbers of executions with the largest number of juveniles executed, being the biggest jailer of journalists, bloggers and social media activists, and the continuation of the house arrest of prominent opposition figures Mir Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnavard, and Mehdi Karroubi since February 2011 without trial (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Balochistan

Western Balochistan was annexed to Iran in 1928 during the first Pahlavi era. The province was called Balochistan, but was later changed to Sistan and Balochistan (Zurutuza, 2009). Sistan and Balochistan is currently Iran's largest province, with 11 percent of its territory. It consists of two distinct regions with Sistan in the North and Balochistan in the South. The capital is the city of Zahedan in the northeast of the province. The total area of the province is 181,785 km^2 with a total population of 2,405,742 and a Baloch population of 1,597,078. The inhabitants speak Balochi, Persian, Brahui and Lampuki. There are approximately nine million Baloch people living around the world spread mainly over Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Out of this nine million people, one and a half million live almost entirely in southeast Iran in the southern part of the province of Sistan and Balochistan. The Sistani people mostly occupy the northern part of the province, Sistan. The Sistanis are Persian speaking Shia Muslims, who are a majority in Iran but a minority in the province of Sistan and Balochistan. Balochistan is covered by deserts and mountains (Bosworth, 2000). The lack of rainfall in the region has shaped people's nomadic way of life for the greater part of the history of this region (Pastner & Pastner, 1972).

Figure 4. Map of Iran (Modified and used with permission. Wikimedia, 2010)

The provincial borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan have a considerably large Baloch population with close tribal connections to the Baloch people living in Iran (Zambelis, 2006). The Baloch people speak the Balochi language, which is very close to Pashtu in Afghanistan. Almost all of the Baloch people of Iran adhere to Sunni Islam, compared to 89 percent of Shias residing in Iran including Sistanis in the northern part of the province. The Baloch people are one of the most ancient ethnic groups and have lived in this area since the days of the Persian Empire. Baloch people have a distinct look that resembles the people from Afghanistan and

Pakistan. They usually have a darker complexion than most Iranians, with the exception of Arabs, and dress traditionally which is extremely uncommon in urban and non-Baloch areas. In his report, Zurutuza describes clothing for men as "white shalwar kameez…long shirt and baggy pants" (Zurutuza, 2009).

Numerous archeological sites and historical monuments are a reminder of a great civilization that has existed in this area for thousands of years. However, since the time of British Empire's rule over India, the living conditions of the Baloch people have deteriorated. Today in Iran, the Balochs are among the most disadvantaged ethnic groups and Balochistan is one of the least developed and poorest provinces in the country (Shirmohammadi, 2015). The harsh economic conditions of the Baloch people, as well as numerous ethnic, religious and linguistic discriminations imposed on them, escalated into an ethnic conflict that eventually turned into violence and armed conflict from 2003 onwards.

The government of Iran has also responded violently to the acts of terrorism by "terrorist" organizations operating in Balochistan, thereby adding momentum to the cycle of violence through arrests and executions of Balochs charged with drug smuggling or those who have ties and connections (sometimes remotely) to the organizations. These actions of the government are perceived by the Baloch people as acts of aggression against people who are mostly related to one another as a result of the traditional tribal system in Balochistan. The reasons behind the protracted ethnic conflict in Iranian Balochistan are multi-dimensional and cover a wide range of situations affected by geography and politics. The following sections examine the multi-dimensionality of this protracted ethnopolitical conflict.

History. Eastern Iran has always been embroiled in conflict. This area flourished and was of strategic importance beginning around the time of British rule over India. In the 19th Century, as Britain built its empire, it tried to clear eastern Iran (among other regions) and illicit. To protect India, its most precious possession, Britain created an isolated "safety perimeter" around India that turned Balochistan into an uninhabited desert. Consequently, Balochistan never thrived, and religious and ethnic conflicts, as well as power struggles within the state, prevented this area from ever developing again (Maleki, 2010). The oppression of the Baloch people continued during the Pahlavi era, well before the Islamic Revolution, when the monarchy tried to prevent the people from forming any organization or activity and efforts were made to cut ties between them and other Balochs, mainly those living in Pakistan (MERIP Reports, 1973; Rai, 1979; Beck, 1980; Lifschultz, 1983). During the second Pahlavi era (1941-1979), the Shah punished this region because it housed the opposition to his rule. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the oppression continued as Shia identity became prominent and the Sunnis became a marginalized group.

According to an unnamed University math teacher, "the power in Iran is held by the Farsis [sic] since the Shah´s times. Nonetheless, with the Pahlevis our only 'sin' was our ethnicity, but today Tehran also hates us because we are Sunnis" (Zurutuza, 2009). The oral tradition and collective identity of the Baloch people is shaped around a sense of victimization and oppression by imperial, regional and colonial powers, which have divided the Baloch people (Zambelis, 2006). As a result, a sense of misunderstanding and mistrust has grown between both the Baloch people and the central government.

Location and Geography. Balochistan is located in southeast Iran about 1800 km away from Tehran. It is the farthest location from the capital and the central government. Balochistan

also shares a large border with Pakistan and Afghanistan, both of whom have a significant Baloch minority, some having a Greater Balochistan aspiration. The combination of the long distance from the central government, and consequently the lack of direct supervision and control over the region, have led to constant oppression by the government who fears the separatist movement and partition of the territory. Furthermore, the violent actions of the government in the area, including the demolition of mosques, mass arrests and "desert executions", go unnoticed by the majority of Iranians. Sistan and Balochistan are also separated by vast areas of desert from the western and northern parts of Iran which has caused limited access to, and delivery of, goods and services to the region.

Balochistan is an arid region with mountains and deserts with some water existing in the south. As of 2010, the province has faced seven consecutive years of drought. In 2015, the Ministry of Energy announced that all 31 provinces are facing a shortage of water, with Sistan and Balochistan and six other provinces facing a "water crisis" (Radio Farda, 2015a). On the other hand, the area is affected by flooding when there is a heavy rainfall because there is no water management. In May 2015, Sistan and Balochistan and three other provinces were flooded, three people died and nine hundred people were dislocated (Radio Farda, 2015b).

Sistan and Balochistan has also endured another environmental problem over many years, namely sand storms. The continuous drought has resulted in most water sources drying up, resulting in severe dust and sand storm problems. In the past 18 years, this problem has intensified and the "wind season" has increased from 120 days to 150 days per year. In May 2015, winds gusting between 60 and 100 km/h resulted in the dust levels of the province being 35 times more than the world average standard. This has, on many occasions, caused the closure of schools and businesses. In 2014, 5000 families were affected by a sand storm and warnings

were issued to advise people not to leave their homes. The sand storms have resulted in health issues for the people of the region (Deutsche Welle, 2014a). Sistan has the highest rate of respiratory health issues in the country, with no specialized clinic existing in the region to tend to patients (Radio Farda, 2015d). The province's officials and religious figures have blamed the central government for not dealing with the problem, despite the fact that the province's budget allocation increased due to the environmental "situation" in Sistan and Balochistan (Radio Farda, 2015c).

Poverty. Balochistan is one of the most impoverished and underdeveloped areas in Iran (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Aside from the capital and areas closer to the sea and ports in the south, most of the province has to deal with severe poverty, unemployment, drought, emigration and lack of support by the central government (Maleki, 2010; Tribune Zamaneh, 2014a). Based on a national report from the Statistical Centre of Iran, Sistan and Balochistan are among the five lowest ranked provinces in terms of non-food per household expenditure (Radio Farda, 2015e). According to the Vice Chancellor of Zahedan University's Medical Sciences, Sistan and Balochistan is amongst the three provinces in Iran with a high level of food insecurity. Twenty percent of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition and are severely underweight. Moreover, 44 percent of pregnant women suffer from iron deficiency. Both of these percentages are twice the national average. The death rate for pregnant women is 12 percent, and only 7 percent of total births take place in the province (Radio Farda, 2015f).

Farming is the main source of livelihood in the area; the long drought has paralyzed the province and caused many people to smuggle goods and drugs in order to make a living (Maleki, 2010; Hosseinbor, 2014). Many have been imprisoned because of drug charges and their families are plunged into even more poverty as a result of losing a wage earner. The male children are

forced into becoming beggars or hawkers on the streets when their fathers are absent from the families. Many families in the province live solely on minimal state food subsidies, which barely keep them from starving. As a result, many are left without money for utilities such as electricity and water. They just work during daylight and are forced to turn in when it gets dark. They carry home 20 litre containers of water from the nearest public park. Majid Maleki observed from his interviews that people were confused when he discussed inflation because they rarely purchased anything and so did not notice price inflation (Maleki, 2010).

Lack of Education. There is no surprise that education and literacy are key problems in Sistan and Balochistan because the poverty rate is so high. In 2004, the rate of illiteracy in the province was 25 percent, the second highest in the country (Saghafi & Ehsani, 2004). The number of illiterate persons was reported as 500,000 in 2014, which has hardly showed any improvement in ten years (Khabaronline, 2014). According to a report by Nasrin Hezareh Moghadam (2014), the largest province of Iran with 3.7 square meters per student has the lowest per capita educational space in the country with a national average of 4.7 square meters. This rate is shockingly lower in Chabahar, the largest port and the most developed part of the province with merely 2.4 square meters per student. These statistics takes into account the mud brick schools with 452 in need of immediate attention, renovation or repairs. The government's educational budget for the province is unfairly low and most of the educational subsidies are provided by charities that build schools and provide supplies to students (Tribune Zamaneh, 2014b).

Between 120,000 to 136,000 students are unable to attend school (Moghadam, 2014; Khabaronline, 2014). The luckiest children attend primary school only (which is five years in Iran) while girls just go to school for two or three years (Maleki, 2010). The average rate of

students remaining in school is 60 percent in Sistan and Balochistan, which is 30 percent lower than the national average of 90 percent (Khabaronline, 2014). The educational crisis in Sistan and Balochistan has caused alarm amongst many activists and officials who in turn have warned the state.

According to Zurutuza (2009), a university education "remains an unattainable dream for most Balochs". Zurutuza was told by one of the very few Baloch professors at the University of Sistan and Balochistan, where out of 20,000 students, only 500 are Baloch.

Moreover, like every other ethnic group living in Iran, the Balochs are denied the right to read and write and be educated in their language (Beck, 1980). Even though Farsi speakers comprise only 53 percent of the Iranian population and even though the Constitution "recognizes" the right for all ethnic groups to speak their own language, there is no government support and encouragement for ethnic minority groups to educate their children in their language.

Religious and Cultural Discrimination. The political system of Iran is a combination of a constitutional democracy, guided by an Islamic ideology and supervised by a Supreme Leader. Even though 75-90 percent of Muslims in the world adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam, Iran is a majority Shia country. The Baloch people of Iran are an ethnic minority who speak a minority language and adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. The people have a distinct Baloch identity in terms of language, religion, culture, attire, diet and oral tradition (Salzman, 1971). The Balochs' devotion to Sunni Islam intensified in the early 20th century so that the Balochs could keep their identity in a traditionally majority Shia country (Pastner & Pastner, 1972; Hosseinbor, 2014). For decades and before the revolution, the Shia and Sunni people lived peacefully in Sistan and Balochistan. However, after the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran used religion as a way of

playing the Shia Sistanis and Sunni Baloch against each other to assert its power in the region (Doshoki, 2009, Maleki, 2010; Doshoki, 2010a). Even though the 1979 Iranian constitution recognizes the rights of religious minorities to practice their religion, in actual fact they have limited freedom and authority in this matter.

Under the religious rule of the majority Shia, religious discrimination against Sunni Muslims has placed the Baloch people (as well as other Iranian Sunnis such as Arabs) under tremendous pressure. While there are many Christian Churches in Iran, many Sunni regions do not have the right to have their own Mosques (Hosseinbor, 2014). Sunni religious leaders are under constant pressure and face many restrictions when it comes to teaching and preaching their religion. These include, but are not limited to, special permits to travel to other parts of the country to participate in religious meetings or conferences (Deutsche Welle, 2011). On numerous occasions, the government has demolished Sunni Mosques in Sistan and Balochistan and other cities in the country and has imprisoned those who have opposed it. The Baloch people are constantly insulted by Shia extremists yet they are unable to defend themselves (Hosseinbor, 2014; Doshoki, 2009). The discrimination is not purely limited to just the living; on several occasions fatal violence erupted between both groups, the Shia non-Baloch families were able to hold funerals for the victims, while Baloch and Sunni families were banned from doing so publicly (Doshoki, 2009).

Further, Sunni Muslims are banned from many government jobs (Zurutuza, 2009). Few civil service, military and police force positions are allocated to Sunnis. Despite the fact that they are the majority residing in the province, all of the prestigious and important jobs, including the whole provincial body of governance, are held by Shias (Maleki, 2010; Boladai, 2010). Even the healthcare system is not exempt from such discrimination. In February 2015, more than 50 Sunni

Baloch doctors met with Molana Abdulhamid, the religious head of the province and asked for equality in managerial and healthcare jobs (Deutsche Welle, 2015).

Even though the Baloch people are devout Sunnis, and despite the fact that Sunni religious leaders can play an important role in resolving the conflict in the area, religious discrimination against Sunnis ensures that the central government will not use this powerful group in a process to negotiate for peace. In the event that Sunni leaders mediate the safe return of hostages in Balochistan, the central government ignores their efforts and exclusively takes credit for freeing the hostages (Deutsche Welle, 2014b). Moreover, some central government officials have expressed dissatisfaction with the role of the Sunni leaders and have occasionally accused the mediators of not doing enough for peace in the province and even of cooperating with the terrorists (Deutsche Welle, 2014).

Drug Market and Smuggling. Balochistan shares a border with Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of opium, a highly addictive and profitable substance. Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Balochistan, is the closest city on the eastern border to Afghanistan, which makes Balochistan one of the key opium routes in the country (Nakhjavani & Raisdana, 2002). This geographic proximity and accessibility creates several problems in the area (Maleki, 2010; Baloch & Jahani, 2010; Zurutuza, 2009). The first problem is associated with drug addiction. Drug addiction, mainly to opium, prevents men and women from being productive because the acquisition of drugs becomes their main focus and this often results in irrational behaviors which spill over into violence. It is estimated that the rate of drug abuse in Balochistan is 50 percent. For the government, this simply means 50 percent less opposition (Zurutuza, 2009). Second, in an environment with little or no resources and job opportunities, smuggling has become the only way of earning a living for many people living in the region (Maleki, 2010; Hosseinbor, 2014).

After considering all the dangers associated with smuggling, including death, many unemployed people still prefer smuggling drugs because it is the most profitable way of providing for their families.

With no concern for the high drug abuse rate in the region and no allocated budget or plans to alleviate the situation, the government's war on drugs merely targets small dealers and has resulted in 67 percent of all prisoners in the province being incarcerated on drug-related charges. This usually means that the main breadwinner of the family, namely the patriarch, is incarcerated or worse, executed. According to Maleki (2010) who has spoken with many incarcerated Baloch women, almost all of those who are in prison for drug charges have falsely pleaded guilty to save their husbands from going to prison and to prevent their children from starving. When most families have one or both parents in prison, the children have to work to support the family, many of whom have little choice but to enter the smuggling business themselves. Finally, the prosecution of so many Baloch people, combined with the tribal structure of Baloch society and the culture of revenge or vendetta, have further fueled the hatred between the people of Balochistan and the central government. The government and the Baloch people now see each other locked in irreconcilable animosity because there is hardly a family left that does not have a family member imprisoned or executed for drug-related crimes.

Violence. The province faces a high rate of violence ranging from drug-related assaults to domestic violence and spousal and honour killings. Violence affects all layers of the society. As a result of the patriarchal structure in Baloch society, however, the violence usually trickles down from men to women, women to children, and from older to younger children. The harsh environment and severe poverty play a role in the escalation of violence in the region. Moreover,

the proximity of the region to Pakistan, a country long affected by violent conflicts, also adds to a culture of violence in the region (Maleki, 2010).

Several historians and scholars have pointed out a "culture of revenge" existing among the Baloch people. This vendetta culture prevents forgiveness and the creation of opportunities to create peace after a Baloch is killed. Sometimes these feelings of revenge carry on for two or three generations (Maleki, 2010; Doshoki, 2009, Qoraishy, 2012; Baloch & Jahani, 2010). According to Masoud Baloch who is a Baloch human rights activist, the culture of "revenge from a blood enemy" eliminates the possibility of peace after murder or execution (Baloch & Jahani, 2010). In addition, the government of Iran has treated the Baloch people with prison, torture and executions. As a result, a cycle of violence between the Baloch people and the central government is perpetuated by revenge killings by both actors (Hosseinbor, 2014; Doshoki, 2010b; Qoraishy, 2012; Baloch & Jahani, 2010; Deutsche Welle, 2008). The government threatens to, and executes Balochs for terrorist attacks by the terrorist organizations, which in turn generates a terrorist response from the same organization (Doshoki, 2010a; Deutsche Welle, 2014d). There are cases when Baloch prisoners are executed for terrorist attacks that took place long after they were imprisoned so that they could not have played any role in the atrocities (Doshoki, 2009; Deutsche Welle, 2013). These government actions are viewed as hostile by the Baloch people and generate even more terrorist attacks on security forces or hostage killings by Baloch terrorist organizations (Doshoki, 2009; Deutsche Welle, 2014e).

The fact that the government views the situation in Balochistan as a "security threat" as opposed to a socio-economic and political issue has raised concern among many scholars. They believe that as long as this thinking and the resulting stereotyping of Balochs serve as the official stance of those in power, the problem will remain unresolved (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Some

within the government do not believe in the necessity for diplomacy to solve the conflict (Shirmohammadi, 2015) and consider any such efforts as negotiating with terrorists as weak so the cycle of violence continues. In Sistan and Balochistan, both tribal and religious leaders have always condemned terrorist attacks by Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl (Doshoki, 2010a).

The combination of poverty, discrimination and a culture of violence has led to the growth of terrorism in the region. Baloch people, neglected by the government, have resorted to armed violence, which in turn is answered by more direct violence from the government (Maleki, 2010; Doshoki, 2009; Doshoki, 2010a). The situation has worsened since 2005 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office and Shia extremism gained more power in the region (Shirmohammadi, 2015). In the 2013 election, the majority of the people of Sistan and Balochistan voted in favour of Hassan Rouhani, a much more moderate candidate than his predecessor, in the hopes of improving their plight. However, not long after Rouhani won the election, conflict and violence once again escalated in the region (Shirmohammadi, 2015; Hosseinzadeh, 2014). Both parties to the conflict perpetuate the violence, yet the Baloch people remain the main victims of violence in the region and its key opponents (Doshoki, 2010a).

Acts of Terrorism. Terrorist activities were rare in the area before the emergence of both Baloch paramilitary organizations, Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Balochistan has been the scene of relative unrest and conflict (Doshoki, 2010a). Numerous "terrorist" organizations have carried out attacks in the region, which has left hundreds dead. Not much is known about many of these organizations yet they are believed to have the same beliefs and goals. Below, I take a more in-depth examination of the most famous terrorist organizations in Iranian Balochistan namely, Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl.

Jundullah. "Jundullah", meaning "Soldiers of God", is a terrorist organization founded by Abdulmalek Rigi in 2003 in Balochistan to fight for equal rights for the Sunni Muslims of Iran, specifically for the Baloch people (Boladai, 2010). Abdulmalek Rigi has also been credited with fighting against drug addiction among Baloch youth through the use of religious teachings to empower them to give up drugs (Hosseinbor, 2014; Baloch et al, 2010). Many of the facts about the organization are ambiguous as a result of the lack of credible information posted by the authoritarian regime and because the members must remain secret to protect their identities. Abdulsattar Doshoki who is Baloch and a scholar of the region, states that after the United Sates war in Afghanistan and in a top-secret mission, Iran agreed to allow Al-Qaeda members to safely cross its borders into and through Iran. Rigi was appointed as the leader of this mission in the region and used this opportunity to create the core philosophy and infrastructure of the Jundullah organization.

In the beginning, the first priority of Jundullah was to negotiate the freedom of Baloch prisoners. At the time, Iran's President Mohammad Khatami was a reformer and supporter of minority rights. The situation started to improve as some progress was made in the negotiations. However, in 2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hard-core Shia extremist, became the president and this not only put an end to negotiations, it started an era of even more discrimination. More Baloch people were imprisoned and sentenced to death. During his first presidential visit to the province, Ahmadinejad was attacked in an attempted assassination in which one of his bodyguards died. In the next few months, the government continued its policy of imprisonment, torture, execution, and the demolishing of Sunni mosques, which were responded to by attacks from Jundullah (Hosseinbor, 2014). In only six months after Ahmadinejad's term began, there were six confirmed attacks that left at least 40 dead in Balochistan.

The organization is believed to have had between 200 and 2000 trainees and fighters. Jundullah was designated as a terrorist organization by Iran and the United States, and was accused by the Iranian government of having links with Al-Qaeda, Pakistan, Britain and the US; Rigi denied these allegations. The organization's link to the drug market and the smuggling of narcotics and opium as well as its sources of funding is unknown (BBC, 2010).

Rigi, the founder and former leader of the organization argued that the group has no separatist aspirations and was created as a response to government injustices carried out in Balochistan, and as a ploy to draw international media attention to the situation (BBC, 2010). Any opposition, including peaceful protests faced arrests, prison and execution, thus, the Baloch people saw no choice but to take up arms against the government (Doshoki, 2009). Abdulmalek Rigi was arrested on February 23, 2010 in a plot that was reportedly arranged through "mediators" who set a trap on behalf of the Iranian government. There were many contradictory statements from the Iranian officials and his mysterious arrest leaves numerous questions unanswered (Doshoki, 2010b; Shirmohammadi, 2010). Three days later, he appeared on national television and confessed to having received promises of financial and military support from the United States government, a fact that was denied by the United States (New York Times, 2010). There is no way to definitely determine whether his statements were made freely or under pressure and torture (BBC News, 2010). However, many have questioned the authenticity of his confessions.

Dr. Doshoki points out that immediately after his arrest, Rigi was allowed to send a video message to the Jundullah organization. His tone and vocabulary in this video, including calling the dead fighters "martyr", is completely different from his later confessions (Doshoki, 2010b). Nasser Boladai, a Baloch activist from Sweden also points to the fact that Rigi confessed to

having connections with the Baloch People's Party even though his organization has no connections with Jundullah, given that their philosophy is entirely different (Shirmohammadi, 2010). In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Hossenbor recalls how the Islamic Republic extracted confessions from their own former officials and warns against how they would treat a "so-called terrorist", "…You can imagine what kind of situation he is in; these confessions have no legal or moral value" (Baloch et al, 2010).

Even though Rigi's arrest was a key turning point in the de-escalation of violence and terrorism in Balochistan, many expressed doubts that his arrest was a "solution" to the problem because the real underlying sources of the problem were not being addressed (Shirmohammadi, 2015). In addition, many Baloch experts believe that even though the Baloch people are not in favour of violence and did not condone all of Rigi's actions (Baloch et al, 2010; Hosseinzadeh, 2014; Doshoki, 2010a), he was respected and popular among his people and admired for standing up for the rights of the Baloch (Baloch et al, 2010; Doshoki, 2010a). For many, his story is a reminder of Dadshah, a Baloch fighter who opposed the monarchy before the revolution. Both fighters had brothers who were arrested and executed by both regimes (Baloch et al, 2010; Doshoki, 2010b).

Rigi was executed on June 20, 2010 at the age of 27 despite warnings by the province's premier that his execution would escalate violence. He joined the long list of Baloch "heroes" who died fighting against central government in Iran. However, aside from Mirdoust Mohammad Khab Baranzehi and Dadshah who were both executed in 1930 and 1938 respectively, none have gained worldwide fame like Rigi. Similar to most Baloch children, Rigi was born and raised in a poor family. He saw the huge gap between Sunni and Shia, the suffering of the people, and after the execution of both of his brothers, he left school at thirteen to join the guerrillas alongside

three of his other brothers and his parents. The fact that supporting Rigi can carry a death sentence in Sistan and Balochistan means that it is impossible for researchers and scholars including myself to talk to the people of Balochistan about Rigi. Many experts nonetheless believe that based on unofficial surveys, close to 80 percent of the Baloch diaspora support Rigi's resistance, despite their opposition to violence and the killing of innocent people (Doshoki, 2010b; Shirmohammadi, 2010).

Rigi's death was avenged by two suicide bombings in July and December of 2010, which killed more than 60 people and injured 365 people. Both attacks were carried out at Shia mosques with civilian worshippers as the key targets (Qoraishy, 2012; BBC News, 2010). These were the last official attacks orchestrated by Jundullah as Rigi's execution led to Jundullah's diminishing power and eventual inactivity and the formation of another organization called Jaish-ul Adl.

Jaish-ul Adl. Thirty months after the execution of Jundullah's leader, in October 2012, a Sunni group in Iran claimed responsibility for a suicide-bombing incident in a mosque in southeastern Iran. This new organization, named Jaish-ul Adl meaning "Army of Justice", is widely believed to be closely connected and practically a continuance of Jundullah with the same members. Similar to Jundullah, they claim "to fight against the denial of rights to Sunnis and Baloch people of Iran" as the reason behind their armed activities (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Between October 2012 and October 2013, they carried out approximately 30 attacks, most directed against border guards and members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The government of Iran responded to these attacks by mass executions of imprisoned Baloch people and by assigning the Revolutionary Guard fighters to secure the area. The Revolutionary Guard is a branch of armed forces in Iran that is hardly impartial due to their sworn allegiance to an

Islamic state based on the Shia interpretation of Islam. The Guard is notorious for its brutality and has political rather than national motivations that do not serve the interests of all Iranians.

Recent Developments and the Current Situation. Long after Rigi's execution in 2010, Jaish-ul Adl once again attracted worldwide media attention by taking five border guards hostage in February 2014. Since a two-year military service is mandatory for all males in Iran, four of the five hostages were ordinary young men who were fulfilling their military duties. It was widely speculated that they were held hostage in Pakistan. They were later released in April 2014, and the border officer was executed in retaliation for the execution of a Baloch prisoner. Almost a year later, in March 2015, his body was discovered and returned to Iran (Radio Farda, 2015g). The battle is ongoing as Jaish-ul Adl attacks border guards and terrorizes and kills officials and civilians in the region, while the government retaliates against the Baloch people with arrests, executions and claims that several terrorist organizations have been discovered and dissolved in Balochistan.

In 2010, the Iranian government treated the arrest and execution of Rigi as a successful end to the ethno-political conflict, in effect eradicating terrorism in the area. However, the consequent attacks, and later the emergence of Jaish-ul Adl, indicate that such actions have only ended up as sequels to the vicious cycle of violence in the region. Not only has the political violence not ended, its frequency has unfortunately dramatically increased in recent years.

Conclusion

Iran is a diverse country, with numerous different ethnic groups contributing to its culture and history. However, under the theocratic dictatorship after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, people living inside Iran are enjoying limited freedom and the situation is even worse for ethnic

minorities. Even though no ethnic group in Iran is in the absolute majority, the government puts extra pressure on the ethnic groups who have a different religion than Shia Islam and to a lesser extent a different language than Farsi. With the emergence of paramilitary organizations that carry out terrorist attacks in Balochistan, this conflict has escalated into deadly violence. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework with which the conflict is best analyzed and understood.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

The paramilitary organizations that carry out terrorist acts in Balochistan, their leadership, members and activities are all shrouded in a cloud of myth, rumour, mystery and doubt. This is as a result of the high level of security required for the survival of these organizations, and the lack of any kind of freedom for ethnic minorities living in a brutally oppressive Iran. Further, the literature regarding these organizations is limited. Acquiring information from members of these organizations is particularly challenging and poses dangerous risks to people both within the organization in particular and to those Balochs residing in Balochistan in general. This thesis is an attempt to better understand the situation in Balochistan, the reasons behind the emergence of these organizations, as well as their motives and goals. A number of theories are used to provide a framework to understand this conflict. The theories used to explain the Balochistan conflict and analyze related data are: Ethnic Conflict, Social Cubism, Identity and Construction of "The Other", Basic Needs, Relative Deprivation, Instrumental, Organizational, Suicide Terrorism, Dependency theory, World Systems, and Internal Colonialism. The sections below provide a brief explanation of each theory and how they relate to the thesis topic.

Ethnic Conflict: Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism

There are numerous debates concerning the root causes of ethnic conflict that mostly fall under three main schools of thought:

Instrumentalists: Ethnic elites use ethnicity and race for ethnic group mobilization and to gain their goals and political objectives (Weir, 2012).

Constructivists: Ethnic differences are socially constructed so that many ethnic conflicts are based on "differences" that are socially constructed by the elite (Weir, 2012). An example is the distinction created between the Hutus and the Tutsis of Rwanda by the Belgian colonial power that issued identity cards to both groups (Mamdani, 2002), which were manipulated by Hutu elites in the early 1990s.

Primordialists: Proponents of primordialist causes of ethnic conflict believe that ethnic groups exist because of their mixed traditions and beliefs, biological features, culture and territories. When a group's traditions, beliefs and culture or territories are threatened by other ethnic groups, conflict can occur (Weir, 2012).

This approach to ethnic conflict seems to be the closest explanation for the situation occurring in Balochistan based on existing evidence. The terrorist activities in the region are a "reaction" to the state's discrimination against the Baloch people, their religion, culture and way of life. Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl have emerged to defend the rights of the Baloch people and insisted that they have no secessionist aspirations other than fighting for equality for the Baloch people in Iran.

Social Cubism

Social Cubism, which has been compared to a Rubik's Cube, explores ethnic conflict like a multi-faceted puzzle encompassing a range of interrelated different factors as exploring one or two causes of conflict is unlikely to help one fully understand (and consequently be able to solve) the problem (Byrne & Carter, 2000). These factors include: historical, political, religious, demographic, and psycho-cultural components, all of which are linked together in a dynamic system.

Historical factors: Past stories shape ideas, expectations and possibilities. Different interpretations of historical events can lead to misunderstanding and mistrust between groups. The history of Balochistan is filled with ignorance and oppression from the central government, as well as tales of great fighters like "Dadshah" who rebelled and died fighting for the rights of the Baloch people.

Economic factors: Unscrupulous leaders can use gaps in the distribution of economic resources to gain support for their goals. The economic situation in the region is a clear example of how severe gaps are created as a result of the unjust distribution of resources both at the state and provincial levels.

Political factors: Political factors can be divided into institutional and non-institutional. Lack of reliable institutional methods for settling conflict can lead to non-institutional methods, i.e. terrorism, which in turn can provoke a response from the government. However, even when institutional channels exist, those who partake in them can be viewed as "sell-outs" or conspirators with the state or another ethnic group. Thus, where extreme hostility exists between groups, it will be to gain cooperation, even when institutions for dialogue exist.

Religious factors: Religion can create some definite divisions among ethnic groups. In many societies, identity is mostly defined by religion. Religion can bring a group together due to common beliefs and interests. At the same time, it can polarize a society. Stereotypes can result from such divisions. The Iranian government is founded on and ruled by Shia Islam values. As a result, Sunni Muslims are seen as a dangerous diversion from erosion of the hegemony upon which the government believes its survival depends.

Demographic factors: Location, borders and minority status (real or perceived) can all contribute to an escalation of ethnic conflict. Attempts to change demographic status result in changes in power relations between feuding ethnic parties. Balochistan's proximity to neighbouring Afghanistan and Pakistan with their Baloch populations and its distance from the central government makes it a dangerous and sensitive region for the territorial interests of the Iranian government. Balochistan's proximity to Pakistan, specifically, has introduced many Baloch people to a more violent culture (Maleki, 2010).

Psychocultural symbolic factors: Ethnic groups come together under cultural symbols that also define and shape their political beliefs. They may also create prejudice and stereotypes. Psychologically, people who are as marginalized and oppressed as the Baloch hope for a hero and a fighter who rebels to fight for their freedom. There are many examples of similar fighters such as Dadshah, in Balochistan's history and they serve as a symbol of Baloch identity and psychologically prepared them for a leader, such as Rigi.

Looking at all the aforementioned factors interacting together in ethnic conflict escalation is more likely to result in a comprehensive understanding of the underlying problem in Balochistan. Perhaps no discrimination is worse than religious discrimination for devout Sunni Muslims like the Baloch people. Over the years and during decades of oppression and violence, the Baloch people created a unique Sunni identity. This identity became stronger as the oppression increased. The Iranian government is attacking this crucial piece of identity in every way imaginable. The isolated geographic location of Balochistan reinforces its minority status due to its lack of contact with the rest of the country. The Iranian Balochs' proximity to more powerful and more autonomous Baloch people on the other side of the border is another important demographic factor. Finally, the culture of revenge and the symbolic role of historical

warriors who fought for equal rights for the Sunni Baloch people are psychocultural factors that also contribute to this conflict.

Identity and Construction of "the Other"

Identity plays a crucial role in most ethnic conflicts. It is the backbone of most ethnic groups and how they distinguish themselves. Identity, much like values, is non-negotiable (Senehi, 2009). An ethnic conflict with identity at its core, is thus extremely hard to resolve. Similarly, a threat to identity and a group's way of life can start a conflict, or worse, a war.

Carter (2008) explains how identifying an enemy escalates into dehumanization and the construction of "the other". In an ethnic conflict, one or all sides of the conflict may start viewing each other as "the enemy", which results in shaping group stereotypes which are then used to justify group violence. As the conflict escalates, there is less and less contact between the ethnic groups, which in turn causes a lack of understanding as the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice dehumanizes "the other" (Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Carter et al., 2008). Prejudice adds to the dehumanization of the "enemy"; name-calling and irrational beliefs attribute inhuman characteristics to members of the other group. Dehumanization suddenly makes violence, torture and murder viable options and a "reasonable" way to deal with the enemy; while lack of contact makes dialogue impossible (Bose, 2010). Such an environment is ideal for the emergence or growth of guerrilla groups and terrorist organizations (Carter et al., 2008).

As the conflict escalates, citizens are forced to choose sides; scapegoating occurs and eventually the parties reach a point of "no return". Losing face, power or even lives creates a "do-or-die attitude". The final blow to this situation is the "transgenerational transmission of conflict" (Carter, 2008), which happens when adults project their feelings of anger, hostility and

trauma onto children. Eventually the conflict becomes a part of the groups' identity and children grow up believing that fighting is honourable. In some cases, the "enemy" becomes such an integral part of a group's identity that even if the conflict is resolved, the group needs to find a new enemy as conflict is encoded in its identity (Senehi, 2009).

Before the terrorist organizations began their activities in 2003, Balochistan was hardly ever in the news. The people of Iran were unaware and ignorant of the living condition of many other Iranians living in remote areas. When the terrorist attacks by Jundullah put the Baloch people on the map, "terrorism" became the first image of the region for many Iranians. These "terrorists" were depicted as manipulated agents and spies who are not truly "Iranian". They were depicted by the government as wanting chaos in this country and therefore did not deserve to be a part of it.

Similarly, the Baloch people who have been ignored, downtrodden and oppressed historically feel that the rest of the Iran has no sympathy for them, and do not care about voicing any opinion about their situation. This process results in the dehumanization of many Iranian civilians including the Sistanis, as well as Iranian officials and military forces. This justifies terrorist activities by the Baloch extremists as a "legitimate" way of expressing discontent and fighting for equality. This may explain why the Baloch people support these organizations and their goals, despite the fact that they are against violence and disagree with the unorthodox and violent methods of the extremists.

The Iranian government benefits greatly from the division among the different people of Iran. A dictatorship is not going to survive if people are united, compassionate and determined to fight against inequality. Almost all dictatorships in history have maintained an "enemy" to fight

against; the enemy may change, but it is always present (or created through conspiracy theories). The existence of an enemy, whether real, perceived or imaginary, justifies the oppressive actions of an authoritarian regime and legitimizes the grave measures it takes against those who oppose it. Censorship and imprisonment become routine procedures as any opposition is labelled as cooperating and conspiring with the enemy. Such a mentality is clearly seen in Rigi's confessions and Iran's insistence, despite Jundullah's denial and no evidence that the terrorists are supported by the United States and Britain. After all, everyone hates a traitor.

Basic Needs

The satisfaction of a group's basic needs is crucial to the survival, dignity and development of human beings (Burton, 1990). Proponents of the basic needs theory of ethnic conflict reject the point that the causes of conflict are rooted in human nature and believe it is the struggle to satisfy basic needs that shapes much of human behaviour and social interactions (Burton, 1990). Such needs go further than physiological needs and include needs such as identity, jobs, security and inclusiveness. Basic needs cannot be bargained away, and their satisfaction is not incompatible with the satisfaction of other groups' needs (Jeong, 2001).

Severe poverty, discrimination, lack of opportunities and participation in social and political institutions in Balochistan has deprived the Baloch people of their basic needs, such as identity, education, security, employment, safety and freedom. The denial of basic rights is one of the most common causes of conflict, as these needs also tend to be non-negotiable and crucial to human dignity and a group's very existence (Burton, 1990; Jeong, 2001). In this particular case, the fact that the needs of the Balochs are being intentionally ignored by the government, supposedly as punishment for terrorist activities in the region. This further aggravates the tension

and adds to the humiliation felt by the Baloch people. They then seek revenge hoping to obtain their basic human needs and rights.

Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation is the sense of deprivation of what one believes to be their entitlement or right. It results when group observes that they have less than they deserve in comparison to other groups. In such situations, expectations rise faster than what can be obtained, which in turn intensifies frustration and is a precursor for unrest and violence (Gurr, 2000). Unequal opportunities controlled by the dominant economic ethnic elite within a society are usually to blame for people having such a sense of deprivation (Jeong, 2001). According to Walter Garrison Runciman (as cited in Richardson, 2011, p. 6), there are four preconditions for relative deprivation (of object X by person A) to occur:

1. Person A does not have X

2. Person A knows of other persons that have X

3. Person A wants to have X

4. Person A believes obtaining X is realistic.

Relativity is an important factor in this theory as feelings of deprivation come from a comparison to others, the "social norm" or one's own past. Karl Marx (1847) in *Wage Labour and Capital* helps us to better grasp the notion of this theory:

> A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring
> houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements
> for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a
> palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house
> now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at
> all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one; and however

high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the
neighboring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure,
the occupant of the relatively little house will always find
himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more
cramped within his four walls. (p. 45)

It is not hard to see how the Baloch people are not only relatively deprived compared to most Iranians; they are also relatively deprived compared to the Sistani residents of the province. Even the limited resources that are available in Sistan and Balochistan are distributed in a manner that severely disadvantages the Baloch people.

Terrorism: Instrumental, Organizational and Suicide Terrorism

There are three main approaches to the study of terrorism:

The Instrumental approach to terrorism: In this approach, terrorism and violence are choices made by political actors and are a means to an end; terrorism is seen as "a violent form of coercion" and as a "bargaining process". The non-state organization decides to use violence based on a calculation of the costs, benefits, consequences and success probabilities (Crenshaw, 1987).

The Organizational approach to terrorism: In the organizational approach, terrorism is explained in terms of the internal affairs of the organizations and their struggle for survival. This perspective assumes that self-maintenance is the purpose of any political organization, with the leaders' personal ambitions dependent upon the survival of the organization. This theory explains why terrorism starts and continues, regardless of the political results and how it becomes "self-sustaining" (Crenshaw, 1987).

Suicide terrorism: Numerous studies on terrorism have expressed the importance of considering its roots and causes. Suicide terrorism, specifically, has been the source of much debate and interest. The results of studies on suicide terrorism may come as a surprise, as they contradict many common beliefs regarding this phenomenon. For example, most scholars have discredited the argument that religion is at the root cause of suicide terrorism as some of the leading global terrorist organizations are secular (Pape, 2005; Bloom, 2005; Hoffman, 2006). There are many groups such as the Tamil Tigers, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) who have no religious affiliation or agenda, and yet, are some of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world.

The reasons behind suicide terrorism can usually be placed into three categories, namely strategic, social and individual (Pape, 2005). The strategic reasons behind suicide terrorism arise from the fact that terrorism works, and a terrorist organization is able to gain much publicity and inflict damage with little capital or cost. The social reason behind suicide terrorism comes from local community support that also provides recruitment for the organization. Without community support, most terrorist organizations would be short-lived. Moreover, individual people who go on suicide missions have personal reasons, usually altruistic and related to the common or greater good of the community that motivates them to engage in such fatal actions (Bloom, 2005).

Suicide terrorism is usually a last resort tactic when all else fails (Pape, 2005; Bloom, 2011). Terrorist organizations usually engage in other forms of violence before resorting to suicide missions. After all, with each act of suicide, the organization loses at least one of its most loyal members. It is also the weapon of the weak. Suicide missions allow terrorist organizations to carry out massive actions with little equipment and costs, usually when facing a state enemy

with full military resources and capabilities. Nationalism, ethnic independence, military occupation, revenge and humiliation are only a few of the many causes behind a person wanting to join a terrorist organization and an individuals' decision to commit acts of terrorism and carry out suicide missions (Pape, 2005; Bloom, 2011).

The situation in Balochistan is the combination of an instrumental approach to terrorism and suicide terrorism. Both Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl expressed on several occasions that their goal is equality for the Baloch people. After every effort by the Baloch people to gain equal rights was brutally oppressed by the government, the members of these terrorist organizations felt that there was no other choice but to use physical force including suicide bombings, hostage-taking and ambushing border guards and patrol officers. In addition, since these terrorist organizations would stand little chance if they engaged in direct combat with the Iranian forces; suicide terrorism gives them some leverage and an edge in this "new kind of war" (Kaldor, 2012).

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory arose as a reaction to modernization theory. It explains that all societies go through the same processes of development, and that underdeveloped societies are the "primitive" versions of developed societies striving to turn into the core. Dependency theorists, however, believe that peripheral societies will remain peripheral due to the way they are integrated into the world economic order (Santos, 1970). According to social scientist and former Brazilian President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1979), developed capitalist cores have financially and technologically penetrated peripheral countries. As a result, there is an unbalanced economic structure both within these societies and between peripheral countries and

the core. Consequently, specific patterns of class relations emerge; limitations are imposed on self-sustained growth in the periphery. Cardoso believed that a change in the role of the state is required for the transformation of such situations (Tausch, 2003).

The province of Sistan and Balochistan is in the periphery with Tehran, the capital and home to the central government, as the core that maintains the unequal structure of the economic and political system. Inside the province, the Baloch people are further marginalized by being peripheral to the core that consists of the Sistani people who usually enjoy a higher standard of life and better opportunities than the the Baloch people living in the same province.

World Systems Model

World Systems theory is a mode of analysis that focuses on the world capitalist system, and not the nation-states, as the unit of analysis. World systems analysis divides the economic world into core, periphery and semi-peripheral countries based on the division of labour. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), one of the leading world systems theorists, described cores as the regions that benefited from capitalism, namely the western industrialized countries. Peripheries are described as the countries on the other end of the spectrum, with weak central governments that produce raw material and cheap labour for the core. Semi-peripheral countries are those in-between the two aforementioned categories. They represent either former core regions whose hegemonic position has declined, or peripheries that are trying to improve their position to become core countries. Cores exploit the semi-peripheries, and they in turn exploit the periphery (Wallerstein, 1974).

According to this model, Tehran the capital of Iran and the economic and political centre of the country is the core. Sistan and Balochistan, as one of the most underprivileged provinces,

is a periphery position, since it barely benefits from the central government's financial and developmental plans across the country. The rest of the Iranian provinces are the semi-periphery who do not have the power and resources of the core, Tehran, yet they are also not as underprivileged as the periphery, and have some level of development, technology and wealth.

Internal Colonialism

Internal colonialism is a result of the post-colonial world with the elite of one ethnic group exploiting another ethnic group in its internal periphery. It is a structure of relations based on exploitation and domination between heterogeneous and distinct ethnic groups (Williams, 1977). Internal colonialism is the result of uneven development and describes the exploitation of the minority (ethnic) groups by other groups that have an external economic colonial power. In this model, a dominant ethnic group prevents the autonomous development of another ethnic group (Walls, 1978). The Baloch people are a minority group in Iran in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and religion. Therefore, the dominance of the Shia central government of Iran over the people of Balochistan fits into a model of internal colonialism since the source of domination is internal exploitation of the members of the minority ethnic group by the government representing the dominant ethnic group (i.e. the Sistanis).

Conclusion

The Balochistan ethnic conflict similar to other such conflicts is complex and can only be explained by considering multiple contributing factors. This is partly because even the people in the same ethnic group do not all have the same beliefs and attitudes about the causes of the conflict. Separate living conditions, beliefs, goals and aspirations can create differences between

people in these groups. These differences make it difficult to explain the conflict using a single theory and require different opinions from different points of view.

The theories explained in this chapter have many factors in common such as discrimination, a core-periphery model, the unjust distribution of resources and basic needs and values threatened by the state. These are only a few examples of themes seen throughout these theories. The following chapter uses these theories as a framework to analyze the data acquired through the research. These theories permit me to explain the conclusion that I have reached pursuant to my research for this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

I faced many obstacles in conducting the research for this thesis most importantly, the existence of a huge gap in the literature. Balochistan is a remote area far away from "the centre" of Iran; I have never traveled there and the stories I have heard are second hand at best. The Iranian government controls all broadcast and print media. Furthermore, the government, serving as their own propaganda machine, exclusively runs all television and radio stations. According to an annual report by Reporters without Borders, Iran is ranked 173rd out of 180 countries in preventing people's freedom of expression (Economist, 2015). Iran also ranks second in the World in its imprisonment of journalists. As of December 2014, Iran and China housed one third of all of the incarcerated journalists in the world (Omar, 2014). It is thus not hard to see that even if one is able to find academic resources on Iran, their veracity is dubious. These restrictions also contributed to my inability to perform one-on-one interviews, as I cannot guarantee that the honest expression of opinions would not put the interviewees in danger. As a result, I decided to use the few reliable resources available outside of the country, combined with my first hand experience of having lived in the Islamic Republic of Iran for twenty-three years.

Location

The exact location of the conflict under consideration is in Sistan and Balochistan, the largest province of Iran bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, it is important to note that even though the province as a whole is reported on in many parts of this study, there exists a divide between ethnic groups living there namely, the Sistanis and the Baloch people. The Baloch people are the focus of this study because they face limitations, discrimination and

terrorist attacks. They reside mainly in the southern part of the province while the Sistanis live in the north, and have a distinct culture, religion, language and way of life.

Participants

The articles and interviews I have collected for the purpose of this study are mainly by or with scholars and experts on Iran's minority issues, some of whom specialize in the affairs of Balochistan. I did not conduct any formal interviews for this thesis. Instead, I have used data from existing interviews that are publicly available on Farsi media websites. The reason behind this decision is that conducting interviews with those residing in Iran can pose a danger to the interviewee and to my family still living there. The government of Iran prosecutes people for expressing opposing opinions in any shape or form, including blogs and interviews. I decided that by going through a major news outlet, I am eliminating the chance of putting these subjects in danger. While the opinions of many people are used in this thesis, the main data were analyzed based on interviews of five individuals with various media sources, three of whom live inside Iran. The other two were contacted on several occasions but gaining access to them proved to be difficult due to their busy schedules. As a result, I decided to use past interviews they completed with reliable Farsi news agencies outside Iran.

The following interviewees come from very different backgrounds. A Baloch physician with an interest and great expertise in the socio-political situation in Balochistan, a religious leader, a human rights activist, a journalist and a linguist. The distinct backgrounds of the participants, as well as the independence of their opinions, and the fact that they do not reference each other is carefully arranged in order to strengthen the argument and the analysis in this thesis. In the following sections it becomes clear that despite these differences in background and

profession, these five individuals share a great many opinions on the conflict in Balochistan. The five individuals are as follows:

1. Dr. Abdulsattar Doshoki was born in Balochistan. He is a qualified physician at Leeds University with a Master's degree in International Business and Management from the City University London. Like many others, he took part in the 1979 Revolution but was later expelled from university in Iran and fled to England. In 2002, he founded the Balochistan United Front of Iran. He is a prominent writer, commentator, and analyst on socio-political affairs in Iran and Balochistan and he frequently makes appearances in the media such as VOA, BBC, and Radio Free Europe (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, 2009).

2. Molavi Abdulhamid is also a Baloch. He is a theologian and a Sunni religious leader (Imam Jumu'ah). He is one of the most vocal and active voices for Baloch and Sunni equality in Iran and is frequently interviewed by the foreign media.

3. Majid Maleki is an activist and a member of The Defenders of Human Rights Centre founded by Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Winner. Maleki has traveled to Sistan and Balochistan and has been in direct contact with the Baloch people and their daily struggles, which he discussed at length in an interview I use in this thesis.

4. Mahmoud Barahouyinejad is a local journalist from Zahedan, Sistan and Balochistan. According to his blog, he started journalism in 1997 by joining the editorial board of Roozdaraa, a local newspaper. In 2000 and after the newspaper was banned by the government, he became the editor-in-chief of a weekly local publication. In the same year, he became a member of Association of Iranian Journalists. In 2002, he became the editor-in-chief of a Farsi-Balochi bilingual international weekly publication and soon

became a member of the International Federation of Journalists. He cites "crisis construction" and "political oppression" as reasons for his resignation from this post in 2005 (Barahouyinejad, 2006). I used his 2005 interview with Radio Farda for this study. It is said that he was called to court for conducting interviews with news agencies outside of Iran and he has since stopped giving interviews.

5. Carina Jahani is an Iranian-Swedish professor in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at Uppsala University in Sweden. She resides in Sweden but has travelled to Zahedan and is familiar with the social and cultural issues in the region.

Data Collection Techniques

For the reasons discussed above, I did not conduct formal interviews for this study. Instead, various news stories, articles and interviews from the web made by my five main study participants were used for the purpose of data collection and analysis. In the absence of any free media in Iran, the only option available to me in terms of a reliable source was the Farsi media outside of Iran. In the years after the Iranian revolution, several major news outlets developed or expanded their Farsi sections in order to provide the Iranian people with factual news. For this thesis, the vast majority of the interviews were obtained from the Farsi section of four major news outlets namely, Deutsche Welle (German Wave), Radio Free Europe, Voice of America (VOA) and the BBC. The Farsi sections of Radio Free Europe and the BBC are named Radio Farda and BBC Persian respectively. All four of these news outlets belong to prominent broadcasting companies with a long history of credibility. In many cases, audio files of the interviews are available to confirm the content.

I used my judgment to determine the reliability of some sources, dismissing others as potentially fake or invalid. I have followed Balochistan's news for years and I have become quite familiar with the literature and vocabulary of experts and scholars on this issue. In addition, the consistency of the language and points of view used in the articles and interviews also helped me judge their reliability. If an article or interview went into details and provided specific examples all the while maintaining the same tone, vocabulary and language, I judged the article or interview to be reliable. Interviews and articles with controversial claims and borderline conspiracy theories, featuring prominent faces in the conflict including Rigi, were deemed unreliable and were not included in the data analysis. Wherever applicable, I compared interview pieces and articles by the same author or interviewee to confirm the consistency of ideas and standpoints. Where other interviews or articles from the same author were not available, I researched their background to make sure that their statements were in line with their expertise and previous activities.

A valuable interview with Rigi, and perhaps the most reliable, was conducted with a program aired on VOA in April 2007. VOA faced much criticism for conducting and broadcasting the interview. Shortly after, the program was discontinued and its archives removed from the website, making this interview inaccessible for my study. However, I has listened to the live interview and remember the contents, which I consequently used as a point of reference in judging the credibility of some sources[5]. The validity of all the links were confirmed.

Most of the data sources were in Farsi and I translated the content as needed, into English and made the utmost effort to remain faithful to the original text. All of the interview materials

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[5] In fact, this interview is the reason I became interested in the topic as I discovered that Rigi was the same age as myself.

were in Farsi and accessed online. Considering the fact that the page numbers of online material depend on a variety of factors including screen resolution, font size and the device with which the material is accessed, no page numbers were provided for the direct quotes from the online Farsi material. The description and explanation of some concepts such as Iranian constitution, the role of Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guard and the history of 1979 Revolution were beyond the scope of this thesis. These concepts were simplified in a concise and comprehensible manner for readers who may not be familiar with Iranian society, culture, politics and language. In addition, I have provided an explanation for some terms that are not used in their strict sense in the *Terms and Concepts* section of the "Introduction" chapter.

Data Analysis

This study also references some quantitative data sets that are available from sources such as CIA's Factbook (2012), and Iran's Statistical Centre. However, most of the data analysed is qualitative. After reviewing a number of interviews, I tried to identify common themes inductively. Religious and cultural discrimination, poverty and lack of education emerge as major themes and will be discussed in the next chapter. These common themes, which are in line with the initial hypothesis, are used to draw conclusions and identify a possible way forward for this conflict and possible way forward.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of freedom of expression in Iran, the difficulty of identifying reliable interview sources and the paucity of academic literature on Iranian Balochistan, it was possible to find information and ideas from scholars and people with a good understanding of the Baloch people and their way of life. I found that almost every interview and article (aside from the news

stories) really connected to the issues represented in the hypothesis and the "Context" chapter. It was not hard to see that almost all of those who are given a chance to speak freely are aware of the situation and what is directly behind the violence and the conflict. The complete data analysis and key findings for this thesis are discussed in the fifth chapter.

Chapter five: The Causes of Conflict in Balochistan

Introduction

The literature about the situation in Sistan and Balochistan and the living conditions of the Baloch people is very limited. Inside Iran, the lack of freedom of speech and the threat of imprisonment are the greatest barriers to open research and honest journalism. Outside the country, my lack of access to Balochistan and direct contact with its people makes it difficult to undertake scholarly research about the situation in Sistan and Balochistan. My personal interest in this subject, however, encouraged me to take on this study and put together a thesis with the current accessible data available to me from reliable sources. The results presented in this chapter may be limited in scope as they are informed by a small number of sources. However, certain patterns behind the violence in Balochistan tend to stand out in nearly all of the interviews. It seems that there is a consensus between the individuals whose interviews were used in this chapter despite the fact that they come from different backgrounds and milieus. In this chapter, I present the most important themes and patterns emerging from the five respondent's interviews and articles.

Causes of Conflict

Religious and Ethnic Discrimination. It is nearly impossible to come across an article about Balochistan and not find anything about religious and ethnic discrimination. Religion is an integral part of Baloch identity and culture and the centre of any form of discrimination in the region (Hosseinbor, 2014, Boladai, 2010; Doshoki, 2010b; Doshoki, 2010a; Doshoki, 2009; Shirmohammadi, 2015; Maleki, 2010). Religious discrimination is perceived by the Baloch people as a threat to their "identity and values", both of which are not negotiable (Carter et al.,

2008). Moreover, the fact that the Balochs are a minority, and the only Sunni population in the province, further intertwines religious, ethnic and cultural discrimination.

Dr. Doshoki is most vocal about religious, ethnic and cultural discrimination describing it on several occasions as one of the main reasons behind tension and terrorism in the area (Doshoki, 2009; Doshoki, 2010a; Doshoki, 2010b). He points to the restrictions on, and propaganda levelled against the largest graduation ceremony for Sunni schools in Balochistan in 2010 as a clear example of religious discrimination and violation of Sunnis' constitutions rights. He explains that a few weeks before the interview, the largest graduation ceremony for Sunni religious schools was about to take place on Thursday and Friday. Sunni leaders and intellectuals were invited from all over Iran and neighbouring countries to participate. However, due to the government's pressure, the religious leaders were forced to limit the celebrations to one day, despite the ancient tradition of a two-day celebration. Many of their guests were also not allowed to attend the ceremony. Many governmental websites in Zahedan stated that these ceremonies were against the law. Yet according to the constitution, Sunnis have the right to control their own religious schools (Doshoki, 2010a). According to Doshoki (2009)

> Sunni and Shia people have lived peacefully for decades…
> the problem is not Sunni and Shia people…the problem is a
> government whose foundation and existence and actions are
> based on religion and has to create conflicts between Sunni
> and Shia for its own existence and declaration of power
> in Balochistan

Doshoki believes that restrictions in religious practice, discrimination and a lack of opportunities based on one's religion, as well as the need to shrug off the daily humiliation of the Baloch people, are undeniably contributing to the violence and terrorism in Balochistan, "Oppression, violent supremacy, humiliation and discrimination, have been the usual treatment

of the Baloch people by the government and characteristics of their performance [in the region]." (Doshoki, 2010b).

Molavi Abdulhamid also insists that the people of Balochistan and its Sunni leaders are against any form of violence. He believes that the government must support the Baloch people in ending discrimination and seeking legal channels to increase their freedom, participation and dialogue. "Sunni leaders are against violence…we believe that problems should be solved through dialogue, power sharing and inclusive and democratic elections…most of these problems [in the region] are due to lack of minority rights". He continues to say that some governments are indifferent to their minorities, not paying attention to their people so that these problems emerge (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Abdulhamid, who is also the principal of Zahedan's Sunni School, condemns violence in the region "in any form, with any excuse or motivation" and adds, "Sunnis' hopes are enjoying complete legal freedom". In an interview with Deutsche Welle (2015) he once again insists that the Baloch people are against violence in the region. He adds that Sunni leaders are prepared to assist the government in resolving the conflict through dialogue (Abdulhamid, 2015b).

Moreover, Jahani believes that the Baloch people in Iran feel that the government discriminates against them "…in Iran the biggest discrimination is [the result of the fact] that they are Sunnis and the central government is Shia". She points out that in addition to government oppression, geographic location, and easy access to drugs, "Religious prejudice does not help the situation either" (Shirmohammadi, 2015).

Maleki also confirms that there was no conflict between Shias and Sunnis before the 1979 Revolution, but after the Revolution "Shias tried to spread their ideology which resulted in

Sunni resistance and assertiveness". He adds that due to severe poverty, some families send their children to religious boarding schools in neighbouring countries on the other side of the border. These schools "nurture a culture that results in the [terrorist] activities on this side of the border" (Maleki, 2010).

Barahouyinejad also believes that religious and political threats and oppression are some of the key factors behind the Baloch people's dissatisfaction with the government since the revolution. He points out that Kurdistan and Balochistan, the two prominently Sunni provinces, are amongst the most disadvantaged in the country with some of the lowest rates of development. He blames this on "discriminative and prejudiced views and actions…from past to present" (Barahouyinejad, 2005).

It is clear from my respondents that religion and ethnicity are at the centre of discrimination in Balochistan. Preventing the Baloch people from practicing their religion, and marginalizing them as a result of the fear that its ideological existence is threatened has resulted in Baloch anger, humiliation and use of violence. Any threat to Sunni Islam, or even the promotion of Shia Islam in places where Sunnis have historically been the majority, is a direct threat to the identity, honour and beliefs of the Baloch people and is not tolerated. The government's marginalization of the Balochs has its roots in religion, but the impact goes further.

Poverty and Unemployment. Poverty is without a doubt the second most, if not equally, important problem associated with the conflict in Balochistan. However, Abdulhamid intentionally avoids talking about this topic directly as he still resides in Iran. He can play an important role in the plight of Balochistan and he tries to maintain a moderate position in the conflict. He does imply that people in the region are dealing with many difficulties "Killing and

destroying is no way to bliss nor [equal] rights. It just adds to the [existing] problems and suffering of the [Baloch] people and the region" (Abdulhamid, 2015a). In his interview with Deutsche Welle, he discusses the government's "inattention to people's needs" and asks the government, specifically the (then) newly elected President Rouhani to "attend to problems" (Abdulhamid, 2015b). He suggests, "increased participation" as a way of solving the conflict in Balochistan (Abdulhamid, 2015a).

In contrast, Doshoki blatantly starts his article on Rigi's childhood and youth by saying that "Rigi was born…in a relatively poor family, like most Baloch people" (Doshoki, 2010b). He adds that Rigi rapidly became familiar with poverty that was a result of the government's oppressive system and clear discrimination against the Baloch people:

> In central Balochistan, the majority of Baloch children are forced into working on the street with bare feet and empty stomachs while the majority of non-native children and children of Shia government employees enjoy nice houses, cars and an affluent life.

He believes that these two very different life styles which emerged at the same time in the same place greatly encouraged Rigi to found, and the rest of his friends to later join, Jundullah (Doshoki, 2010b).

Maleki also talks extensively about severe poverty and how most families cannot afford the basics in Balochistan, "I saw a house that did not use electricity at all, because they could not pay for it…they went to bed when it got dark". He adds that people do not know anything about inflation, "…they don't eat anything…just bread and potatoes". According to Maleki, severe poverty has led many children to work in the black market to sell medicine, polish shoes, beg or

move gasoline for smugglers. Regarding young girls, he says that "…everybody knows each other and [people] are traditional and religious…[selling girls [as prostitutes] does not exist in Balochistan. People of the region are very sensitive about their daughters…[instead] they marry them to older man as second or third wives" (Maleki, 2010). He adds, regarding discrimination in the workforce, "Jobs, if available, are for Shias in the region…jobs in the public section or police are not given to Sunnis. These discriminations affect people and as a result of injustice, they are ready to revolt" (Maleki, 2010).

The seven-year drought has forced people whose main living was earned by farming into smuggling goods and drugs, "After people's savings ended, there was no option but to turn to smuggling…first farmers brought in goods, but when they compared the profit with the risks they started smuggling drugs and fuel as well" (Maleki, 2010). Many are arrested and executed. According to Maleki, there is no family that is not affected by the capture and execution of loved ones and who does not hold a grudge against the government. The children of those arrested and executed also have no other option but to smuggle goods and drugs in order to survive.

Ayoub Hosseinbor, sociologist and former instructor and researcher at the University of Westminster in London, also cites "economic deprivation and lack of jobs and chronic unemployment" as important factors in the conflict situation in Balochistan that has resulted in an "unofficial economy" including the smuggling of goods and drugs (Hosseinbor, 2014). Nasser Boladai also confirms that due to Shia ideology in the government, Sunnis cannot access high-ranking jobs (Boladai, 2010).

In addition, Barahouyinejad names the seven-year drought, strict import/export regulations and the fact that eligible workers in the work force were not employed as some of the

factors contributing to the ailing economy and poverty in the region as the "strict government policies regarding cross-border trades has destroyed business and trade in the region. As a result, the economy is 'ill' and the majority of the people in the province who have low or no income, are under immense [economic] pressure as a result". He believes that a discriminatory view of the province, as well as the financial policies of the government, have created a condition in Sistan and Balochistan which even the official government reports admit makes the region one of the most disadvantaged provinces in the country with one of the lowest development and growth rates (Barahouyinejad, 2005).

Jahani (2010) does not go into detail about the economic issues, but she does discuss the impact of unemployment and discrimination in the workforce:

> I was in the Iranian Balochistan last year. When we went to homes and young 15-16 year old girls realized that I am a doctor coming from the West, they asked me for sedatives…young people are not happy with traditional life and are looking for jobs other than farming which either do not exist or are not given to the Baloch people. [Then] they become disappointed and desperate.

Discrimination in Balochistan is not limited solely to religion and culture. As a result of the government's policies, the region has not flourished. The economic situation is disastrous with a high unemployment rate that has created a situation in which illegal trade has become the only option for many, despite its risks. Many children are forced to work in menial jobs for little income because many male and female providers are imprisoned as a result of smuggling and drug trafficking. Living with daily poverty, humiliation and discrimination in the workforce affects almost all families and has created a sense of hostility towards the government.

Lack of Access to Education. Maleki calls the sequence of poverty, illiteracy and violence a "flawed cycle" that has to be stopped. He says, "If children are lucky enough to go to school, they only finish fifth grade, girls until second or third grade. [They] say that is enough for girls". He adds that in the absence of fathers incarcerated for drug offences, children as young as 12 years old are forced to work, usually in the same risky "trades" as their fathers. The number of girls working is higher than boys due to lower wage for women. He adds that discrimination in favour of boys over girls even exists at home, "Inside the family, even mothers set aside the good stuff for boys" (Maleki, 2010).

Barahouyinejad also states that Balochistan is at "the lowest level of education and illiteracy". He adds, "due to the lack of proper policies and planning, the education [level] has dropped drastically". A great setback for the educational system in the province is because eligible native people are not employed in educational positions and the government does not hire qualified teachers (Barahouyinejad, 2005).

Jahani also firmly believes that education is the key to the resolution of the conflict in Balochistan. When asked about the prospects of conflict resolution being successful in Balochistan she says, "Balochistan's problem is a big problem and it seems like the only way to help is to change the society, to raise awareness and increase education" (Baloch & Jahani, 2010).

Lack of access to education, inattention to the educational infrastructure, and the prevalence of illiteracy have resulted in what many scholars call "cultural (educational) poverty" (Maleki, 2010; Barahouyinejad, 2005). This non-material form of poverty can also have material implications as it results in more poverty as well as an increase in violence in the region, both

between the central government and the Balochs and among the Baloch people themselves. The prevalence of domestic violence and violence against women, and in general breaking the law in the daily lives of people is a direct result of poverty, both material and "cultural (educational)".

Key Findings about the Cause of Conflict

The conflict in Balochistan and the emergence of terrorism is a complex phenomenon in which various factors contribute to a vicious cycle of violence. Below in the analysis section, I outline some of the main key contributors to the current situation in Balochistan.

Shia Islam Ideology and Religious Discrimination. Discrimination against the Baloch people is mainly the result of the 1979 Islamic Revolution; before that, the relative freedom of religion allowed Iranians, including Shias and Sunnis, to live peacefully together (Doshoki, 2009; Hosseinbor, 2014). The current Iranian government is a self-proclaimed Islamic Republic and even though the system of governance and parliament is similar to many democracies, the laws of the country are based on Islamic Sharia law. This theocracy includes the constitution, criminal law, family law and the whole justice system rulings. Even though many different groups and parties, from all spectrums of political beliefs participated in the 1979 Revolution, the new regime in Iran was founded on Islamic values with the leadership of a religious figure, the grand Ayatollah Khomeini. As a result, the new Islamic Republic's existence, especially in the first decade when meaningful opposition and war existed, became extremely dependent on Shia Islamic values. Any threat to this "Shia identity" has been perceived as a threat to the foundations upon which this new regime has been built and a direct threat towards the power holders in the political system. According to this interpretation, the government must solely be

based on Shia governance so that no Sunni Muslim can ever reach a high-ranking position within the country (Boladai, 2010).

In this situation, Sunni Islam becomes the regime's largest rival. As a traditionally Muslim country for the past 1400 years, the Iranian people are used to Islamic values presented in their society much like the laws and norms in many western countries still reflect Christian values. Sunni Muslims are the second largest religious group in Iran after Shia Muslims. Some of the most prominent ethnic groups, living in important provinces in Iran belong to the Sunni faith, and to make matters worse for the government, many have had conflicts with the central government throughout history. Kurds, Arabs and the Baloch people all reside in provinces close to Iran's borders and have shown the courage to stand up to the central government's discrimination and injustice. It is due to the ideological nature of the current Iranian government that the people in Balochistan are discriminated against by the government, prohibited from freely practicing their religion, and prevented from educating their children in their fiaith, traditions and language.

Humiliation and Lack of Dignity. According to Basic Needs theory, identity, security, safety and freedom are among human beings' non-negotiable needs that are crucial to their dignity and development. The ideology-based discrimination directed against the Baloch people does not just deprive them of their physiological needs, but it threatens their identity, traditions, beliefs, history and very way of life. The problem is now personal, and much more complicated as these needs are not up for bargaining. The destruction of historical and cultural symbols of Baloch identity causes feelings of humiliation between the Baloch people and the government. Hosseinbor points to the beginning of the Islamic Republic and the aftermath of drafting the new Constitution as the beginning of systematic discrimination delivered by the government against

Sunnis. He contends that the government's "efforts" to promote Shia-Sunni coexistence have limited value.

In practice, this "top-down promotion of unity" means political denial of the Sunnis and the annihilation of their religious existence. Hosseinbor argues that Shia religious campaigns and celebrations in isolated Sunni communities are used specifically to "oppress and humiliate Sunnis"; at least, this is how Sunnis perceive the behaviour. This perception does not seem unreasonable in a situation where Sunnis are not allowed to have a single mosque in Tehran and their mosques in other Iranian cities have been demolished (Hosseinbor, 2014). The Baloch people are marginalized and robbed of their identity, as well as of their basic needs and human rights. These feelings of humiliation have resulted in anger and violence between the Baloch people and the Iranian government.

Poverty and Unemployment. The discrimination directed against the people of Balochistan is rooted in a Shia-dominant ideology but has nonetheless left the region severely underdeveloped and underfunded by the government. This has resulted in severe poverty and a high unemployment rate among the Balochs living in the region. The Baloch people have sub-standard living conditions in which their basic needs such as food and water are unmet. In addition to poverty and the lack of basic living conditions, their situation is in comparison, drastically worse than almost all other Iranians including the Sistanis living in the same province. Thus, the Baloch people suffer from the hardships of living a life of poverty and marginalization, as well as the knowledge that they do not have an equal share in the state's resources.

Iran is a country that has been dealing with numerous economic crises due to international sanctions. The Iranian middle class is shrinking every year and most people have

fallen into lower financial classes. Poverty is a familiar concept in most parts of the country. However, the marginalized minority ethnic groups, including the Baloch people, realize that even the limited resources available in the country are not distributed fairly because of who they are and what they think. This gap in financial resources as well as the lack of opportunities brings extra pain, humiliation and anger to the Baloch people.

Drug Smuggling and Substance Abuse. Severe poverty and unemployment lead many Baloch people to live illegal lives in order to earn a living. Smuggling drugs and goods are for many Balochs the only profitable "job". In addition, the dreadful living conditions as well as lack of jobs and educational opportunities have involved many young people in substance abuse, specifically opium that is widely available in the area. Opium is a highly addictive substance that renders the "users" detached and indifferent to their environment. Since withdrawal is hard, painful and expensive, gaining access to opium becomes a high priority for the users, and justifies illegal actions and even violence.

As a direct result of the rise of substance abuse in Iran and its increasingly problematic nature, the government's "war on drugs" has a near zero tolerance policy for those caught smuggling and distributing drugs. This policy has resulted in the imprisonment and execution of hundreds of Baloch people, as well as many other Iranians, on drug-related charges. It can also serve the government as an excuse for prosecuting and executing those Baloch who are politically active. Even though it is clear that smuggling drugs should not be taken lightly, the Iranian government uses force and violence against these crimes in the region without addressing the root causes of the problem. A genuine intervention to mitigate the proliferation of drugs should include healthcare plans to support those who need to withdraw from the drugs, as well as the creation of opportunities for people to earn a living legally. Judicial punishment and the

creation of a climate of fear without any effort to understand what has caused the problem has proven to be fruitless for decades as the number of people with substance abuse issues is on the rise in Iran (Dareini, 2015).

Lack of Access to Education. The chronic rate of illiteracy and children's lack of access to education is one of the most important underlying problems of the conflict in Balochistan. It has left many people illiterate, with women and girls particularly at a greater disadvantage. Low levels of education in the province translate into even more unemployment and poverty, as well as more violence. Education is the door to a bigger world. Educated people have more options in every aspect of their lives, not only due to the skills they learn, but also because educations allows individuals to have a better understanding of the world around them, as they gain the ability to assess and analyze and make more informed decisions. Moreover, uneducated people are easier targets for dictatorships as they usually are easier to manipulate and control. Without having a quality of sufficient education, the Baloch people are unable to improve their situation and many may not fully realize the harm imposed on them by indirect violence in the society. Dialogue is the best way forward to find solutions and to avoid violence, and this is founded on the relevance and importance of education.

Second Class Citizens. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the rule of Shi'a Islam, the Baloch people have continuously been discriminated against by the central government based on their ethnicity and religion. They have suffered immensely because they are different from the majority. They desire to stay culturally independent and loyal to their traditions. Poverty has become an inseparable part of people's lives in Balochistan as a result of severe economic discrimination. The lack of infrastructure and investment in the region has led to high rates of unemployment and an underprivileged educational system. Lack of access to education and poor

performance in schools consequently leads to even more poverty and unemployment among the Baloch. They are politically persecuted in a country already notorious for its lack of freedom and for having an unfair justice system. The Baloch are among the poorest in a country where about 18 percent of the population live below the poverty line (The World Factbook, 2015; The National, 2008).

The Baloch people are culturally and religiously oppressed in a country with one of the worst human rights record. Nasser Boladai believes that the goal of the Baloch people is to be "recognized as Iranian citizens, not as second, third or fourth class citizens" (Boladai, 2010). With almost everything taken away from them, the Baloch people are second-class citizens who live in a country whose treatment of its "first-class" citizens is appallingly poor.

The Pursuit of Equal Rights. In a situation of extreme poverty and unemployment, where people have a lack of access to education and healthcare, there is no freedom of religion and culture and people have lost their human dignity. Consequently some Baloch people took up arms against the government and from 2003 onward founded Jundullah as a paramilitary organization to fight for equal rights for all of the Baloch people. Bomb attacks, hostage taking, road ambushes and suicide missions became a means to express discontent in an environment that closed all other doors due to the government's systematic oppression and discrimination of Balochs before organized acts of terrorism ever started (Doshoki, 2010b; Doshoki, 2010a; Baloch et al, 2010; Boladai, 2010; Shirmohammadi, 2010; Hosseinbor, 2014). The Baloch fighters did not choose to use only acts of terrorism, neither were terrorist acts Jundullah's only agenda. During an interview with Deutsche Welle, Masoud Baloch responded to questions regarding Rigi's popularity by stating that interviews and research both inside and outside of Iran shows that his popularity had risen since his arrest. He explained that this was due to the fact that

Rigi's activities in the region was mainly to reduce oppression, to keep young people away from drugs, and to consolidate tribal conflicts within the Balochs (Baloch et al, 2010).

Experts have pointed to the fact that in the last few years, activists and civic society groups have been severely oppressed by the government (Doshoki, 2010b; Shirmohammadi, 2010). The execution of Yaghoub Mehnahad, a law-abiding peaceful activist demonstrates the extent of the oppression inflicted by the government (Doshoki, 2009). During President Khatami's term, negotiations between Jundullah and the government started, but they did not continue after Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. Others believe that negotiations continued even after Rigi was arrested, but that the officials rushed to have him executed (Shirmohammadi, 2010). Nasser Boladai states that the emergence of Jundullah was due to the government's oppression of non-violent protests and civil activities (Baloch et al, 2010). He insists that equality is all the Baloch people and Jundullah ask for so that with the eradication of discrimination there will be no support for violence in Balochistan (Boladai, 2010). As a last resort, acts of terrorism become a strategy to which officials and civilians both fall victim. Above all, the Baloch people are the major victims of terrorism in the region.

State Terrorism. The government has even more reason to use violence against the Baloch people because of the acts of terrorism carried out in Balochistan. This time the use of violence and state terrorism is almost entirely justified as no one tolerates the killing of innocent civilians. Even the Baloch people are against the use of violence in the region (Shirmohammadi, 2015; Baloch et al, 2010; Hosseinzadeh, 2014; Doshoki, 2010a; 9, Shirmohammadi, 2010). However, it is important to understand that the definition of terrorism can vary depending on one's point of view. The central government of Iran has initiated "state terrorism" by creating extremely discriminatory situations in Balochistan (Doshoki, 2009; Boladai, 2010; 13, Doshoki,

2010a). The government has demolished several Sunni mosques (Doshoki, 2009; Hosseinbor, 2014) and has used "state violence" against the non-violent ways of the Baloch people through arrests and execution of non-violent opposition members (Doshoki, 2009, Doshoki, 2010b); some of whom have been executed without proper trial in retaliation for Jundullah's terrorist missions, even though they did not have any connection to the group and their only crime was being a Baloch Sunni (Doshoki, 2009). Now the state is using even more violence against the "terrorists".

In an interview with Fars News Agency with regards to Rigi's execution, Ali-Akbar Fassihi, advisor to the Speaker of the Islamic Parliament of Iran stated, "One execution is not enough for him, if possible, he should have been revived and executed for the number of people he has killed". He goes on to say that his execution was a lesson for those who want to follow Rigi: "…such is the consequence of rebellion and treason" (Shirmohammadi, 2010). Shortly after two revenge terrorist attacks following Rigi' execution, Ayatollah Khamenei the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic asked the officials to make sure that "traitors meet the consequences of their actions". In April 2015 Ghassem Rezaei Chief of the Police's Border Forces stated that "[the proper] response to these [terrorist] groups is not soft diplomacy" (Shirmohammadi, 2015). It is clear that Iranian officials will not refrain from promoting violence (instead of soliciting justice) even in the public media.

Construction of "the Other". The Iranian government has ultimate control over all broadcast, print media and publications. Television, radio, newspapers and books are all of the propaganda tools used by the government to promote its agenda. It is through these powerful channels that the government creates an image of the "other". The government does not mention the discrimination and hardship it imposes on the Baloch people. It portrays the "terrorists" as a

small group that is causing chaos in the country and who are allied with the state's "enemies". The Supreme Leader blamed "heretics and those connected to foreign spy agencies" for the 2010 bombings. Ahmadinejad blamed the United States and NATO, while the Chief of Police blamed "neighbouring countries" for the bombing (Boladai, 2010). Jahani says that for years the government just accused the Balochs of terrorism, noting that "this is not the solution and humiliation must stop". She believes that if the government negotiates with the Baloch, they can put an end to the violence (Shirmohammadi, 2015).

Hosseinbor (2014) believes that after the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and the rise of competitive powers in the (Middle East) region and in an effort to consolidate national power, the government of Iran started treating the Balochs as "others" and systematically marginalized them. In his interview with Deutsche Welle, Doshoki (2009) also states, "[when] the Islamic Republic does not approve of someone…they are immediately labeled as "…working for the US or working for Israel". The Islamic Republic's labeling against those who oppose it, specially the Sunnis, is well known".

It is true that most Baloch people are against the violence that is damaging the region even though Baloch people have joined the terrorist organization from the Baloch population. They are not foreigners or immigrants; even though they may not be a good representative of the average Baloch, it is preposterous to blame so many different entities for the conflict without exploring the real reasons behind it. All of the Baloch people, including those who carry out terrorist activities, are Iranian citizens who deserve the same rights as any other citizen even if they are guilty of crimes against the state. The government creates an image of "the other" when it portrays them as wanting to destroy the unity of Iran. The "other" in this case is depicted as a foreigner, a non-Iranian, and a violent animal that kills the innocent and deserves no mercy.

By manipulating these images, it becomes easier for the Iranian government to further isolate Balochistan and impose harsher punishments on its people. The government uses its power to manipulate the public about what is truly going on in Balochistan. It constructs an image of the Baloch members of the "terrorist" organizations as "the other". Suicide bombers, hostage takers and the killers of civilians are easy targets for the government's propaganda. By separating the "terrorists" from the Baloch people, the government claims that these individuals are only a few bad apples, tricked into using violence by Iran's "enemies" in order to bring chaos and terror into the country. Thus, they deserve no mercy, no diplomacy, no dialogue, only an iron fist.

Culture of Revenge. Tribal life in Balochistan is a double-edged sword. The culture of respect for elders and heads of families in tribe can be used to promote peace, or the leaders and elders may promote violence which will contribute to more conflict and violence within Baloch society. The culture of revenge among the people of Balochistan combined with the violence that already exists in the area, justifies the use of even more violence and terror where the victims are prominently the Baloch people. As the famous saying goes "An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind"[6]. Masoud Baloch (Baloch & Jahani, 2010) points out that most of the Baloch organizations recruits are people who have lost a family member to murder or execution by the government. Where tension exists, it is important to stay calm and flexible in order to find a solution for both parties. Rigid and traditional concepts that are also a part of Baloch identity make it very hard to promote peace, forgiveness and healing. Yet a Baloch person may bring shame and dishonour on his family and tribe by refusing to take revenge on an enemy.

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[6] This old saying is attributed to many historical figures, most famously Mahatma Gandhi. However, there is no evidence of this quote originating from him. The oldest documented use of the quote is attributed to Mr. Graham speaking against capital punishment in the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada in 1914. More information can be found at http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/12/27/eye-for-eye-blind/

Cycle of Violence. In the current situation in Balochistan, both the government and the Baloch fighters and terrorist organizations have continuously have perpetuated violence and terrorism in the region. Each side retaliates against an act of violence by the other party, which in return is answered by even more violence and so the cycle continues.

The issues of identity, ethnicity and religion are non-negotiable for the Baloch people. Thus, it is apparent that the government's efforts to suppress Baloch identity are faced with active resistance. In the past, peaceful opposition and resistance movements faced prison, torture and execution so terrorist groups formed using deadly force to resist the state. Needless to say, terrorist groups must contend with brutal force from the Iranian government, leadings to even more arrests and executions of suspected terrorists. The terrorist groups in Balochistan seek revenge for these actions by initiating more terrorist activities and hence, the cycle of violence is constantly perpetuated, as the government of Iran does not pursue diplomacy in this matter. Even when the terrorist groups decided to negotiate, the process became a trap set by the government, a trap that led to the arrest and execution of Rigi, the leader of Jundullah.

The construction of "the other" on both sides of the conflict helps perpetuate the cycle of violence as neither party sees the use of terror and violence against the other as problematic. Each act of terror is answered with prison, torture and execution, and more terror follows in revenge for those lost to the government's atrocities. The government keeps on manipulating the public about the roots of the problem and creates an image of an enemy whose destruction is supported widely. The violence in the region continues, as the Baloch people are desperate and are left with few options for their rights.

The general consensus between scholars and experts seem to suggest that terrorism is a "reaction" to the sub-standard living condition in Balochistan and the result of long-term discrimination, oppression and the humiliation of the Baloch people. Dr. Doshoki (2009) believes that Jundullah and Rigi were the direct result of discrimination, injustice, and state violence in Balochistan (Shirmohammadi, 2010; Doshoki, 2009) and that many Baloch see Rigi as a response to state violence (Baloch et al, 2010). In a 2010 article written after Rigi's execution about his rise and fall, he summarizes Rigi's "short but adventurous life" in one sentence: "Rigi was a result and outcome of his time and place and he fought against both with utmost violence" (Doshoki, 2010b). In this article he talks about Rigi's forcefulness and brutality in armed conflict as well as his wit and skill in becoming an internationally known figure. Dr. Doshoki goes on to explain how Rigi was born into poverty, injustice and chose violence after two of his brothers died in armed conflict with the government and one got executed. In an interview with Deutsche Welle after Rigi's arrest and regarding hopes of a less violent Balochistan, he states that the conditions under which Rigi emerged in Balochistan are still there and says "I do not see any hope" when it comes to eliminating violence, "unless the Islamic Republic changes its views of the Baloch people" (Baloch et al, 2010). Jahani (Baloch & Jahani, 2010) also believes that the situation in Balochistan is "not very hopeful".

Talking about religious discrimination, Abdulhamid states that most of the violence is due to the government's lack of attention to minority [religious] rights. He states that Sunni leaders and community are ready to help the government solve these problems and adds that through dialogue and counselling "we can convince those who are causing these insecurities not to [use violence and] kill. The government as well should try and solve the problems [that exist in the region]" (Shirmohammadi, 2015). Even though Abdulhamid refrains from making bold

statements due to his status in Iran, by linking these statements, it can be concluded that he also believes that there is a connection between violence and the inattention and discrimination caused by the government to the Baloch people.

In his interview, Maleki (2010) identifies three main reasons for violence in the region: geographical location, religion and culture, and government. He explains that lack of resources in the region as well as the unkind environment results in people having harsh personalities in order to survive. The proximity to Pakistan, which has a violent culture, also contributes to people having such harsh attitudes. He adds that the Shia government's discriminatory policies in the region created resistance among the Sunnis. The constant discrimination and injustice has resulted in the evolution of a rebellious mentality and behaviour, which combined with a tribal way of life and having a grudge against the government for jailing or killing their prosecuted loved ones have led to violence (Maleki, 2010).

Nasser Boladai (2010) also believes that the root causes of Jundullah activities and the 2010 bombings are the result of Islamic Republic's performance in Balochistan. He says that despite the government's accusations of external help from foreign governments for Baloch organizations, Balochistan is an "internal issue of Iran" and that the main fault is with the government for refusing to solve the problems in Balochistan so that the Baloch people can be treated properly. He says that all the non-violent activists in Balochistan, and even Jundullah, have asked for is a change in policies to improve the political, social, cultural and economic situation in Balochistan, "If someone fights against a government which respects people's rights and supports them…people will definitely not support him or his group" (Boladai, 2010).

In his article "Conditions for the Emergence and Growth of Religious-Political Radicalism and the Current Tensions in Sistan and Balochistan", Hosseinbor (2014) shows a direct link between the anti-Sunni policies of the Islamic Republic as well as poverty, unemployment, discrimination and corruption by the government and the tendency of Baloch Sunnis to move toward radicalism as well as the rising political tensions in the region.

Conclusion

Balochistan's resources are limited in number so it is not hard to see that my interviewees stressed a number of key points. For example, they argued that the discrimination, poverty and a culture of violence that exists in Balochistan are common knowledge among scholars, experts and even "ordinary" people who are interested in a peaceful resolution to the conflict. There is simplicity about the issue despite its complexity. People who are deprived of their basic rights and dignity may revolt and resort to any means necessary to regain what is theirs. Systematic governmental discrimination based on ethnicity and religion, as well as poverty and the people's lack of access to education, have contributed to an extremely poor quality of life for people living in Balochistan that has created a very volatile mix of poverty and violence. A culture of violence and revenge combined with the government's severe oppression of any opposition, led to an escalation of terrorism by two key terrorist organizations operating in the area.

An effective solution to the situation in Balochistan will be accomplished only in a democratic Iran. Even though the situation in Balochistan is one of the worst cases of ethnic discrimination and oppression across the country, most Iranians are also suffering from the lack of freedom, severe poverty and different types of discrimination. Many regions in the country have a poor infrastructure and the people suffer from illiteracy and high unemployment rates.

The people of Iran are hurt and angered by the many acts of terrorism carried out by paramilitary organizations in Balochistan. While many Iranians have become more aware of the government's actions regarding the situation in Balochistan and the possible causes of the conflict in recent years, it is still imperative that the people of Iran be more informed about the condition the Baloch people have lived through for many years.

Scholars and academics play an important role by raising this awareness about the plight of the Balochs. The Baloch people, as well, should be included in these processes and given a voice by those who are able to empower them. Their stories must be told and heard. Iranian identity must be given a makeover. Sadly, many Iranians (most of whom are educated) with whom I have spoken are not even aware of the ethnic diversity in Iran. The image of an "Iranian" is imposed on the people by the government, through its exclusive access to the media; it is that of a Shi'a Muslim Farsi-speaking Persian. This image leaves little room for about 40 percent of the population to live their lives the way that their ancestors did. Anyone who dares speak of autonomy and independence in Iran is immediately branded as a separatist by the government; a sin that cannot be forgiven and will not go unpunished. Educating and creating awareness among the Iranian population is an absolute necessity for any peace process to be successful in Iran as a whole and in Balochistan in particular. This is the first step towards solving the Balochistan conflict and eradicating terrorism in the region.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

So far in this thesis, I have explored how history, culture, geography, education, economy and terrorism are all part of a bigger puzzle in trying to understand the root causes of conflict in Balochistan. Even though the situation is complicated, the satisfaction of the Baloch people's basic human needs would by no means undermine the safety and comfort of citizens living in the rest of the country. Iran's current regime is the key obstacle in bringing about peaceful changes. However, grass-root movements can always bring about hope and change even in the darkest times. The efforts of civil society are not insignificant; they can be the most effective way of forging social change. In this chapter, I outline some of the key findings of the study and discuss a model for peace in Balochistan. I also share my perspectives about where we can go from here, and what future research is needed so that the Balochs can achieve peace in Balochistan.

Key Findings of the Study

The conflict in Balochistan is a result of the Iranian government's policies against the Baloch people and can be explained in part by the combined primordialist and instrumentalist approach to the analysis of ethnic conflict. An ethnic minority group, the Balochs have lived in Balochistan for hundreds of years, have distinct features as well as a certain way of life, traditions and culture. They speak the Balochi language and adhere to Sunni Islam. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, their traditions, culture and religion have been attacked by the central government that sees them as a threat to its own existence. Elements within the Balochs formed two paramilitary organizations to unite the Balochs to fight for their freedom.

The different factors presented in Social Cubism theory also help us better understand the many components of this conflict. Historically in the ancient literature of the Balochs, an insurgent rebel that rises and fights against the ruling regime's humiliation, discrimination and injustice of his people is regarded as a hero (Doshoki, 2010b; Baloch et al, 2010). This has created a "fascination with resistance" that results in the Baloch people's support for fighters and organizations that carry out acts of violence in the region, without preoccupying themselves with the details of such acts and how they are incompatible with some of Baloch values (Doshoki, 2010b). Several factors contribute to the feelings of injustice and discrimination held among the Baloch people. The unjust and disastrous economic situation, unemployment and lack of infrastructure and the unfair distribution of resources have resulted in severe poverty and sub-standard living conditions for the majority of Baloch people. Politically, they are oppressed and unable to participate in their community's governance. Moreover, there are no existing policies and channels to solve conflicts in the region and due to the long-term distrust between the Baloch people and the government, many may refrain from "negotiating" with the government for the fear of being labeled as "sell-outs". Religion is also an integral part of Baloch identity and has led to the Balochs' "othering" by the government and their marginalization for being a minority.

Balochistan's location makes it hard for the government to supervise and control the area, leading to more oppression as a result of the fear of rebellious activities escalating. Balochistan's proximity to Pakistan and Afghanistan who are known for their extreme ethnic violence, adds to the promotion of a culture of violence is the region. The Baloch population in both countries is another reason for the government's paranoia providing an excuse to accuse the Baloch of having the support of external actors or "foreigners". A combination of these factors results in the government's oppression and continuous humiliation of the Balochs that anger them. The

humiliation angers the Baloch people. This humiliation and anger result in the Balochs' glorification of rebels from the past, symbols of resistance and bravery, and intolerance of injustice; this may be why despite being against violence, the Baloch people support both paramilitary organizations in the region.

The Iranian government's agenda includes the promotion of an "Iranian identity" that is Shia and Farsi speaking. Even though the government succeeds somewhat in manipulating the public about its "celebration" of diversity and different ethnic groups, in practice the only people with rights are those who belong to their idea of what is a true "Iranian". This has resulted in the Baloch people becoming marginalized culturally, politically and economically. Moreover, after the violence erupts in the region as a result of the government's discriminatory policies, the "terrorists" are now "the other". They are depicted as "non-Iranian" by the government who paints a different picture of them as working with the enemy even though they are part of the Baloch people and generally supported by them. Constructing an image of "the other" for the enemy results in their dehumanization and provides the justification of state violence such as torture and murder. This dehumanization process happens on the Baloch side as well and the grudges and animosity it holds against the central government justifies the violent actions against the state, with civilians frequently caught in the crossfire. In this situation everyone has to choose sides and a hidden policy of either "you are for us or against us" results in the formal or informal prosecution of those accused of cooperating with the "enemy". Finally, these images are passed on to the next generations resulting in a protracted ethnic conflict with no hope for peace in the near future.

When thinking about the emergence of terrorism by the Baloch paramilitary organizations in Balochistan, one does not need to look further than the living conditions of the

Baloch people for the over three decades. The Balochs' basic human needs such as identity, jobs, food and security are denied on a daily basis and their human dignity is ignored by the state. These needs are not negotiable; they are basic and vital to the respectful human existence of the Baloch people. In addition, the Baloch people suffer from an unjust distribution of resources and a socio-economic gap exists between themselves and many other Iranians. They suffer from knowing that they are unemployed while their jobs are given to others living in their province. They also have to breathe in toxic air because they are purposefully ignored and that they are among the poorest Iranians while many of their compatriots enjoy lavish lives.

Jundullah and Jaish-ul Adl's terrorism agenda was an instrumental approach to this ethnic conflict. These organizations were not founded on terrorism; they came into being to reclaim the rights of the Baloch people. In an environment of absolute oppression, with no safe existing mechanism to oppose the government's policies, acts of terrorism are used by these organizations as a means to an end and suicide terrorism is used as a last resort to raise the people's voice to gain negotiating power. Jundullah's violence and terrorist actions shocked and angered the Iranians, the organization became known all over the world. It is the only paramilitary group for which the United Nations has issued four statements denouncing it. Even though much of this attention was negative, Rigi succeeded in attracting attention to the region (Doshoki, 2010b).

To end the violence in Balochistan, the entire government's attitudes, policies and system need to change. Currently, Balochistan has a core-periphery relationship with the central government that maintains an unequal economic structure. It also has a "secondary" core-periphery situation inside the province with regards to the Sistanis. The imbalance of power between the Balochs and Sistanis is also maintained through the government's anti-Sunni

policies that may not be intentional by the Sistanis. If Iran is envisioned within a World System's theoretical framework, Tehran is the core, Balochistan is the periphery and the rest of Iran is the semi-periphery. Even though many other regions in Iran may be impoverished like Balochistan, it is the systematic marginalization of such a vast land and area, and the targeting of a specific group of people that has made Balochistan the topic of this study.

A Model of Peace in Balochistan

One of the most important obstacles to tackle and one that prevents a sustainable peace from emerging in Balochistan, is to avoid zero-sum solutions in which one party's gain is the other party's loss, or where both parties are discontented with the result so that the process does not last long even if it is accepted in the beginning. It is imperative to consider both parties' motivations and needs in developing an overall peace plan. Below I present my own model for creating a sustainable peace in Balochistan.

Determination for Peace and Trust Building. Considering the long history of abuse and violence between the Iranian central government and the Baloch people, no negotiation will start, let alone succeed without having a mutual determination for peacebuilding and trust building. Trust building is a gradual and slow process but it must start somewhere. Small simultaneous steps from both sides can prove helpful in the initial stages. Representatives of both sides must work towards building trust and monitoring every stage of the process to make sure promises are fulfilled. The use of neutral third parties, such as the Arab League or the United Nations can also prove helpful.

De-Escalation. The first step towards achieving peace should be to eliminate the immediate dangers and risks of violence. For this purpose a gun buyback program could be most

beneficial. Armed fighters and civilians alike can exchange their guns for money, food or household essentials such as baby and school supplies without fear of prosecution with no questions asked. The Revolutionary Guard is extremely notorious for committing acts of violence in Balochistan. Thus, if this peacemaking model is ever to be implemented under the current regime, it is imperative that the Iranian army oversees the process. If there is no promise of protection, the Baloch people will not give up their weapons while the Revolutionary Guard stays armed.

Re-Integration of Fighters. The task of welcoming fighters back into the society and in creating a meaningful role for them must follow immediately after the disarmament phase. Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Pakistan so it will not be too hard for fighters to acquire new arms should the peace process lose its momentum and people lose faith in it. The re-integration of fighters can happen both on the societal and economical levels. They can talk publicly about their experience in their Sunni mosques and during the Friday prayers sermon. Jobs must also be created so that they are able to keep busy and feel like contributing members of society. Demobbed combatants are trained by career revitalization programs so that they to go back to the professions they were involved with before they took up arms. Farming, for example, would keep former fighters busy, connecting them to their roots and allow the region to flourish economically.

Political and Social Participation. It is extremely important for the Baloch people to be able to play a role in their future and have a sense of community. The Balochs' freedom to participate in elections, city councils and various public sectors positions would empower them to feel that they belong to their community, society, province and country. This step is crucial to the peace process, as decisions for the Balochs must be made by the people themselves and not

by outsiders who are not in touch with their issues. The society will be able to move towards trust building and development once the worthy talents of eligible Baloch people are selected to various positions.

Re-building Infrastructure, Economy and Creating Jobs. Even though Iran is in a tough economic position, it is by no means a poor country. Iran is one of the richest oil and gas producing countries in the world and suffers from mismanagement more than having just a few resources. A budget can be allocated to rebuild the infrastructure in Balochistan and to create jobs. This is a multi-track intervention process as jobs improve lives, create a sense of belonging and community, improve the economy and bring hope back to the region. After addressing the immediate financial issues, more time can be spent solving the social problems that are deep rooted in Baloch society.

Eliminating Domestic Violence. The improvement of Balochistan's economic situation and its hopes for the future will probably help reduce domestic tension and violence. But more specific efforts must be made to eliminate the culture of violence at the household level. Counsellors can be brought in to help the Baloch people deal with their frustration and anger. Men and women can be taught to use communication skills in their everyday lives in order to solve conflicts and people's misunderstanding of events. They can pass the knowledge and skills on to their children by being proper role models. Counsellors can help couples, parents, teenagers and siblings find other ways of expressing themselves rather than using violence. In schools, children can be taught not to use bullying against their siblings and other children. Education is necessary to show the people how violence has both a trickle-down effect as well as long-term effects as people are scarred and have deep wounds at all levels of society.

Schools and Education. Education is the key to building sustainable peace in Balochistan. As part of the peace process, schools must be revived in Balochistan. Families must be persuaded to send their children to school so they can have a brighter future. Non-governmental organizations can assist in developing educational programs around the country as well as collecting school supplies for Baloch children. The creation of intra-school programs can make it possible for Baloch children to have pen pals from all over the country for extra credit at school in order to prevent the transgenerational transmission of conflict.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Iran and Baloch children were seen playing soccer in the gravel streets during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. Soccer camps can be another way for Iranian children to connect with each other. They would benefit Baloch children as they would be introduced to the outside world, and it would be a great opportunity for other Iranian children to sympathize with Baloch children and to prevent future "dehumanization" and "construction of other".

Drug Return and Rehabilitation. Similar to the gun buyback programs, a drug return program could also benefit the Baloch society greatly. While it would not be ethical for the government to purchase drugs from people, it could be arranged through healthcare facilities for staff trained in drug abuse rehabilitation to exchange a promise of no prosecution for people with substance abuse issues on the condition of admission to rehabilitation and in exchange for their drugs. Smugglers and distributors could also serve time in the facilities as volunteers to escape prosecution or to reduce time served. This type of program would have the benefit of reintegrating former drug dealers as well as bringing down the costs of maintaining the rehabilitation facilities.

Faith-Based Promotion of Forgiveness. The culture of revenge and vendetta is rooted in the Baloch identity; shame and honour run deep within this culture. However, with the help of religious leaders and religious teachings, efforts must be made to promote forgiveness over revenge. There are many verses of the Quran and many Hadith[7] that promote forgiveness even in cases where Islam has given the "right of revenge" to the victim. Raising people's awareness regarding the benefits of forgiveness and freeing oneself from anger is helpful when it comes to breaking the cycle of violence, so that both the perpetrator and the victim can forgive the past and move forward together. This new "culture" of forgiveness, which is part of the Sunni Muslim identity, can later be extended to all aspects of life and society.

Empowering Women. Women are half of society. They nourish and foster future generations and it is imperative that their role in society is properly acknowledged. However, it is extremely important to remain sensitive to the culture and tradition of the Baloch people for peace process to be successful. The first step towards empowering women is making sure, if necessary by law, that girls are able to attend schools. Baloch women can also contribute to society by forming local groups to teach different skills to the younger generation. They can also be included in parent-teacher school sessions alongside male family members in an attempt to acknowledge the important role of both parents in children's lives. Raising awareness and encouraging education is a long-term process. However, putting an end to harmful and abusive practices such as marrying off young girls out of poverty must be given a high priority and dealt with urgently.

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[7] Hadith are collections of statements attributed to prophet Mohammad, and in Shia Islam to the Imams (saints) as well. They are mainly narratives of the prophet's way of life and are one of the main religious resources in Islam.

Sustainability of the Peace Process. Effective conflict resolution institutions must be put in place to keep peace and order in a post-conflict region. For a religious traditional society like Balochistan, I believe committees consisting of elders, tribal and religious leaders will prove most effective in building trust and coexistence. These committees can help the Baloch people transition to a new society. Conflicts regarding family, business and every other aspect of society can be brought to these committees for mediation and resolution.

Extensive assistance, dedication and commitment from healthcare professionals, law enforcement officers, religious leaders and head of tribes, the justice system officials, and education providers and many other local everyday local peacemakers can transform the conflict in Balochistan into sustainable peace. However, it is critical for all involved parties to avoid patronizing the Baloch people. The peace process must focus on empowering the Balochs; they may not be highly educated and need assistance in improving their situation, but they remain the best judge of what is best for them and their children. The future of Balochistan must remain in Baloch hands.

The peace process is not likely to start and develop under the current political situation in Iran and the use of a third party may be imperative. What is clear is that peace will happen gradually and grassroots organizations can play an important role in establishing trust, commitment and cooperation. It is extremely important to make small accomplishments and envision a hopeful future in order to maintain the momentum and commitment of all actors to the peace process.

Future Research

This thesis's reflection on the Iranian Balochistan has limitations mainly due to the lack of available resources and information. The number of resources that were used was small. My inability to conduct interviews limited me in getting answers to the specific questions that were being explored. Furthermore, many aspects of this complicated conflict are well beyond the scope of this study. To fully understand and analyze the situation in Balochistan all of these components must be carefully studied. Future research should examine the historical background of the Baloch people, their way of life and culture. History is an invaluable source of understanding people's motivations and needs, especially considering the traditional life in Balochistan. Moreover, research must be carried out on Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its gradual journey from a popular revolution to create hope for a better future, to a theocratic dictatorship. Even though I was raised in an Islamic Republic and underwent mandatory religious studies, I do not claim to fully understand how the Iranian government's Shia ideology requires the exclusion of any other interpretation of Islam. Future studies can look deeper into what sustains the Islamic Republic's very existence.

This study and its limited resources did not allow me to study Iranian public opinion with regards to the conflict in Balochistan. It would be extremely helpful and enlightening to conduct a survey to understand whether the Iranian people buy into the government's propaganda or not with regards to Balochistan. It is important for the public to have a proper understanding of what is going on and to be ready to show their support for the people of Balochistan in order for a peace process to become reality.

Even though the Baloch people are the focus of this study, they are far from the only minority group that are discriminated against in Iran. Future studies should explore the relationship between the ethnic groups in Iran, their differences and similarities. For example,

Kurds, Arabs and Azeris all have a history of rebelling against the central government long before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and after the Revolution as well. All three groups, like the Balochs, live in regions close to the Iranian borders. Azeris reside in the northwest, Arabs in the south and southwest and Kurds in the west and all share borders with countries with the same ethnic groups. The Republic of Azerbaijan in the northwest, Iraqi Kurdistan in the west and the Arab countries in the south of Iran all belong to the same ethnic groups as their Iranian counterparts who are generally oppressed inside of Iran. With the exception of the Azeris, these ethnic groups are also religious minorities living in Iran and are extremely under pressure and face discrimination. Future studies can look into what this proximity means for oppressed Iranian minority ethnic groups in an effort to better understand the risks of potential separatist movements seeking to fragment the state.

Moreover, it would be beneficial to examine why acts of terrorism are currently more prominent in Balochistan. Kurdistan, for example, has a history of armed conflict with the central government but no publicly known active paramilitary organization carries out acts of terrorism in the region at the moment. Both Kurds and Balochs live in environmentally harsh areas in comparison with the Azeris who reside in the relatively green northwest and have many trades and industries as well as Arabs who reside in the southern oil-rich regions. Exploring the differences in the standards of living of people living in different areas of the country such as the availability of jobs due to the presence of industrial centres and factories and suitable weather for farming, can assist us in understanding what measures can be taken towards building peace in Balochistan and improving the lives of the Baloch people.

Conclusions and Final remarks

This thesis explored the ethnic conflict in Iranian Balochistan and studied some of the causes behind the violence in the region. Due to Iran's many restrictions on the media inside the country, I was forced to turn to sources outside of Iran for reliable information. I picked major news outlets that are internationally renowned and have Farsi sections as my main source of data collection. I used various news stories, articles and interviews to gather all of the information and extracted articles and interviews from well-known experts and scholars regarding the plight of Balochistan.

The people whose statements were used are independent from each other as they are from very different backgrounds. However, there is a consensus between all five interviewees regarding the Baloch conflict. The result of my analysis indicates that the main reason behind the violence in Balochistan is the government's systematic discrimination and marginalization of the Baloch people after the 1979 Revolution, due to their religion. The Baloch people adhere to Sunni Islam and are perceived as a direct threat against the Shia dominated government of Iran who brutally oppresses the Balochs. After years of state violence and terrorism against the Balochs' non-violent activities and opposition, in 2003 a Baloch organization named Jundullah started an armed conflict with the central government that continues to this day despite the execution of its leader.

Jundullah is a designated terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nation's Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon has also condemned the terrorist attacks by the Baloch paramilitary organizations in Iran (UN News Centre, 2009). However, I argue in this thesis that the Iranian government is using a constructive image of "the other" in Balochistan as well as using its monopoly of power of the media to manipulate the situation. The truth is that state terrorism and violence existed in Balochistan before organizational violence erupted there.

The Iranian government has closed all doors and channels of peaceful opposition in Balochistan. Even though I believe that the end does not justify the means, taking up arms was the only option left for Baloch people who are angered and humiliated and have to live in injustice and poverty everyday of their lives. It is easy to label someone carrying a gun as a terrorist and condemn that person to a "deserving" death; yet as long as people have a reason to be violent, violence will not stop. To put an end to violence, one must look at the reasons behind it and truly try to understand it in order to find a just solution.

The story of Balochistan is a history of oppression, discrimination, humiliation, poverty and violence. It is also filled with bravery, determination, resilience and rebellion. My hope is that more studies about Balochistan can open people's eyes about the horrendous situation of its people, and encourage my fellow countrymen and women to think positively about the Baloch people and demand change. Even though the current political regime in Iran makes any significant change impossible, it is now more important then ever for the Iranian people to maintain their unity, empathy and integrity. Trying to understand the root causes of violence and trying to comprehensively understand the causes of violent actions in Balochistan, does not condone the violence. However, only through such understanding will peace, and non-violent negotiation succeed in ending the ethnic conflict so detrimental to the Baloch people and to the unity of the Iranian people.

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