

# NIGHTMARE IN BALUCHISTAN

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by Selig S. Harrison

*Many international crises of the last decade have resulted from the practice of drawing colonial boundaries without regard to ethnic and linguistic realities. In some instances, newly independent governments have had to fight bloody and costly wars with separatist or irredentist movements just to hold their countries together. Some are well-known: the Nigerian civil war, the battles that resulted in the conversion of East Pakistan into Bangladesh, and the recent bitter clashes in the Ogaden Desert between Ethiopia and Somalia. But others seem to pass virtually unnoticed in the West, even though—or perhaps because—their cost in lives and other human and economic resources is incalculable.*

*One such unnoticed crisis, whose outcome could have enormous regional and global consequences, pits the Baluch and Pushtun tribesmen, who live in the rough borderlands of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, against the Pakistani government. Unless that conflict is resolved soon, it could lead to the disintegration of Pakistan itself. This, and a chain reaction of other events, could ultimately result in a superpower confrontation.*

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The emergence of a Communist government in Afghanistan following the April 1978 coup d'état, in which President Mohammed Daud was killed, has given a new aura of credibility to the dire prophecies of Soviet expansionism perennially voiced by the shah of Iran and a succession of Pakistani leaders. In the most familiar of these worst-case scenarios, the shah envisages a closely concerted Soviet-Afghan effort to secure access to the sea by stimulating separatist forces in Pakistan. Moscow and Kabul yield center stage to the 5 million Baluch tribesmen living in the inaccessible mountain and desert country of western Pakistan, eastern Iran, and southern Afghanistan, an area that stretches for nearly 750 miles along the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman.<sup>1</sup> Armed with sophisticated Soviet weaponry, a determined Baluch guerrilla army, using Afghanistan as a staging area, proclaims an independent People's Republic of Baluchistan in part of what is now southwestern Pakistan.

Despite fresh infusions of U.S. and Iranian military aid, the Pakistani armed forces are unable to mount a definitive campaign against the insurgent regime, because another carefully coordinated rebellion breaks out among the 12 million Pushtuns straddling the northwest sector of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The Baluch entrench themselves securely in their new capital at Gwadar, an ancient port city with a perfectly sculpted natural harbor, where Moscow promptly sets up a naval facility. Meanwhile, tribal leaders shuttle back and

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<sup>1</sup> *Estimates of the total Baluch population range from less than 4 million to 30 million, depending on whether one extrapolates from official census figures in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, or talks to Baluch nationalists. The figure of 5 million used here makes some allowance for the political nature of census figures under the tense circumstances prevailing in the area today; it applies only to those who speak the Baluch language and excludes others of ethnic Baluch origins.*

forth across the border to rally their fellow Baluch in Iran behind a Greater Baluchistan reaching up to Bandar Abbas, at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Teheran declares all-out war on the Gwadar regime, calling for direct American military intervention, and Kabul openly joins forces with the embattled Pushtuns, who are seeking to carve out their own independent Pushtunistan.

### *A Legacy of Bitterness*

Is there a serious prospect of Soviet-supported Baluch and Pushtun insurgencies, or are the shah and the Pakistanis exaggerating these dangers to rationalize their requests for military aid from the West? Is the shah looking for an excuse to annex the Baluch areas of a faltering Pakistan, thus re-establishing the boundaries of the ancient Persian Empire? How close is the new Afghan leadership to Moscow, and are the Baluch and Pushtuns likely to be pliant Soviet pawns? Finally, where do American interests lie in this geopolitical witch's brew?

Ironically, the shah's prophecies could prove to be self-fulfilling, for his own hard-line policies have tended to rekindle the deep hostility toward the Teheran government in the Baluch areas of Iran, even though organized resistance has been kept in check for the past decade. Pressures from the shah also contributed directly to the heavy-handed posture against local autonomy assumed by former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. When the elected state government in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan resisted political and economic incursions by the central government in early 1973, Bhutto, prodded by the shah, ousted the state cabinet, imprisoned the principal Baluch leaders on sedition charges, imposed emergency central rule, and sent 70,000 troops to the province, which represents nearly 40 per cent of the land area of the country. The Baluch responded with a poorly prepared insurgency that received only desultory Afghan and Indian support but nevertheless dragged on for four bloody

years until Bhutto's ouster by General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, who reached an uneasy truce with the Baluch leadership in November 1977.

At the height of the fighting in late 1974, American-supplied Iranian combat helicopters, some of them manned by Iranian pilots, joined the Pakistani air force in raids on Baluch guerrilla camps. These AH-IJ Huey-Cobra helicopters provided the key to victory in a crucial battle at Chamalang in early September when a force of some 17,000 guerrillas of the Marri tribe, one of the 27 major Baluch subdivisions, was decimated.

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**“We have minerals, we have petroleum, and we have ports. . . . What would Pakistan be without us?”**

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The conflict, as reconstructed in interviews, was much more extensive than had been generally realized, and it left a legacy of profound bitterness among both the Baluch and the Pakistani military. Allowing for distortion by both sides, nearly 55,000 Baluch were fighting in late 1974, some 11,500 of them in organized, hard-core units. At least 3,300 Pakistani military men and 5,300 Baluch guerrillas as well as hundreds of women and children caught in the crossfire, were killed during the four-year war. A total of 178 major engagements and another 167 lesser incidents during this little known mini-war were officially chronicled by the Islamabad authorities.

Although military conflict between the Baluch and the central government dates from the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the wanton use of superior firepower by the Pakistani and Iranian forces during the 1973-1977 conflict instilled in the Baluch feelings of unprecedented resentment and a widespread hunger for a chance to vindicate their martial honor.

“If we can get modern weapons,” said guerrilla leader Mir Hazar at the Kalat-i-

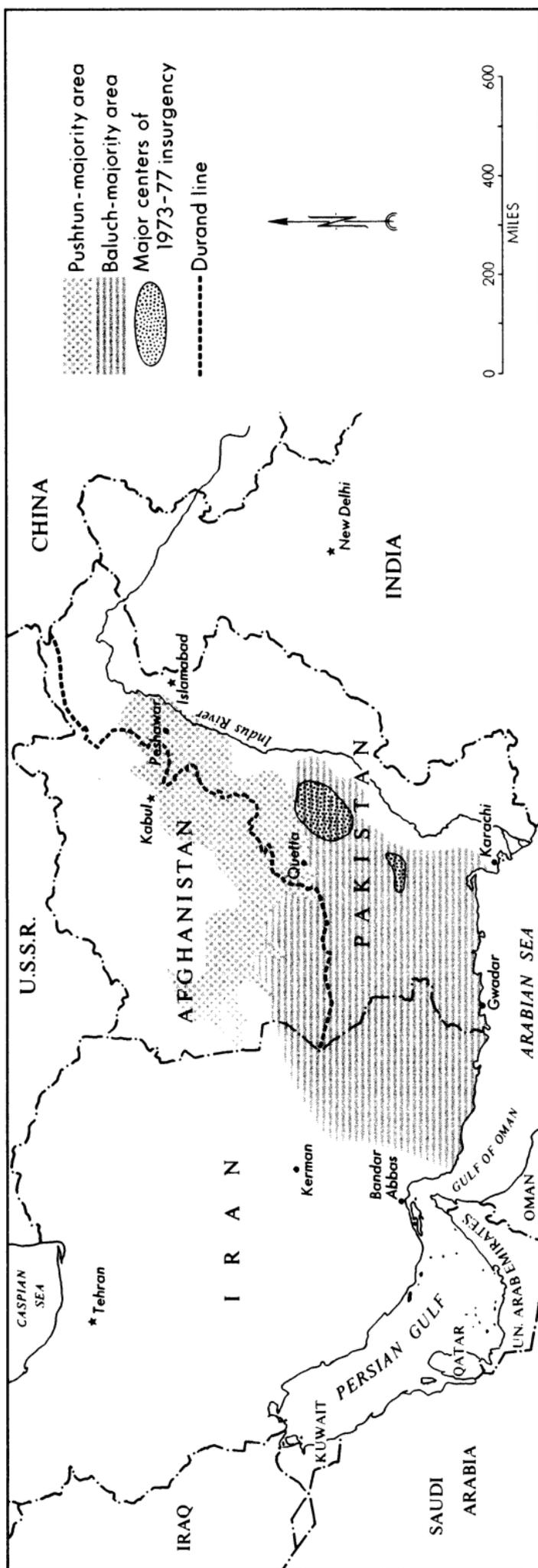
Ghilzai base camp in southern Afghanistan, "it will never again be like the last time. . . . Next time we will choose the time and place, and we will take help where we can get it. In the beginning the Bengalis didn't want independence, but if Pakistan continues to use force to crush us, we'll have no alternative but to go that way."

### *A Lonely Cul-de-sac*

In order to understand the causes of this crisis in the borderlands of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, the interlocking tangle of irredentist issues left by history must be examined. In a blatant display of its divide-and-rule policy, Britain drew its imperial boundaries in the area with a calculated disregard of ethnic and cultural identities. The tribal problem that resulted from this policy has changed relatively little over the years. This aggravated an inherent conflict between ancient self-conscious, mountain-locked cultures and empire-builders from the plains regarded as alien intruders. That conflict still exists.

Striding through the bazaars of rough Pakistani border cities like Quetta (the capital of Baluchistan province) or Peshawar (capital of the Northwest Frontier Province), brandishing their muzzle-loaders and cutlasses, the strapping, bearded Baluch and Pushtun tribesmen in their imposing turbans offer a startling contrast to the well-barbered Punjabi military officers, businessmen, and civil servants who dominate the Pakistani establishment.

The Baluch, originally from the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and ethnically kindred to the Kurds, have a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness, rooted in an arcane language possibly derived from the lost language of the Medean civilization that existed in Asia Minor some six centuries before Christ. There is a recorded folk literature in Baluchi dating back to the tenth century A.D., most of it devoted to the glories of the Baluch homeland or to the gory details of victorious battles against Persians, Arabs, Tartars, Hindus, and other invaders.



“The lofty peaks are our fortresses,” goes a sixteenth century war ballad, “the pathless gorges our friends.” To outsiders, however, the desolate lunar landscape of Baluchistan is one of the least attractive places on earth, alternating abruptly between arid wasteland and precipitous, knife-backed ridges hemming in tight little valleys with just enough water to support low stands of dwarf palms and thorny shrubs. Crossing the area by air, one flies over hundreds of miles of unrelieved rocky brown scrub country punctuated by a few isolated formations of white or coral limestone jutting up in lurid volcanic shapes. Yet the Baluch sense of identity is closely linked to their austere native land, and nothing else seems quite right.

This was dramatically illustrated when Baluch refugees who had taken sanctuary in Afghanistan during the insurgency moved out of the comfortable bungalow encampment provided by the Afghan government on the outskirts of a bustling city. To the consternation of Afghan welfare officials charged with their care, they trudged with their sheep and goats deep into the hills 65 miles away until they found a lonely, rocky cul-de-sac in a dried-up riverbed reachable only by jeep, where they happily re-created their own mini-Baluchistan.

Despite the isolation of the scattered pastoral communities in Baluchistan, a relatively homogeneous Baluch culture and value system has spread over the vast, 207,000-square-mile area reaching from the Indus in the east to the Persian province of Kerman in the west. Shortly before Britain arrived on the scene in the nineteenth century, a more or less parallel Baluch political identity had begun to develop under the leadership of a dynamic chief, Nasir Khan, who established a loose Baluch confederacy that lasted for nearly a century as a tributary of Afghanistan.

The British played rival chiefs against each other, however, and eventually divided the Baluch area into four parts. In the far west, the Goldsmid Line gave roughly one-

third to Persia; in the north, the Durand Line assigned a small, thinly populated strip to Afghanistan; and in British India, where the majority lived, the Baluch were divided between a directly administered colonial area, British Baluchistan, and a puppet principality known as Kalat.

The khan of Kalat, who traced his lineage back to Nasir Khan, collaborated with the British but periodically demanded that all Baluch areas someday be returned to his domain. When Great Britain withdrew from the subcontinent in August 1947, the khan refused to join the newly created state of Pakistan, declaring an independent Baluchistan. Faced with Pakistani military moves against Kalat, the khan offered to accept a confederated status granting control

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**“The real question is . . . whether [Moscow’s] leverage will be used to restrain or encourage Afghan support for separatism in Pakistan.”**

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of defense, foreign affairs, and currency to the central government. But his proposal was promptly rejected, and Pakistan took over Kalat militarily in early 1948, provoking a short-lived insurrection led by the khan’s brother, the first in a series of Baluch uprisings culminating in the 1973-1977 insurgency.

In an interview shortly before his death last year, the khan defended his actions in 1947 as “dictated by the desires of the people.” To support his contention, he produced a copy of the proceedings of the Kalat Tribal Assembly, which included a debate on the issue of independence revealing that one of today’s most prominent Baluch moderates, Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, had been a staunch advocate of independence in his youth and had advanced many of the same arguments used by separatists today. Bizenjo declared on December 14, 1947, that “we have a distinct culture, and if the mere

fact that we are Moslems requires us to amalgamate with Pakistan, then Afghanistan and Iran should also be amalgamated with Pakistan. They say we Baluch cannot defend ourselves in the atomic age. Well, are Afghanistan, Iran, and even Pakistan capable of defending themselves against the superpowers? If we cannot defend ourselves, a lot of others cannot do so either. They say we must join Pakistan for economic reasons. Yet we have minerals, we have petroleum, and we have ports. The question is, what would Pakistan be without us?"

### *A Neglected Province*

The conviction that Baluchistan contains vast, untapped natural wealth is central to the separatist creed. In fact, widespread oil exploration is under way in Baluch areas of Pakistan. Amoco has drilled in the Bambore Mountains, Marathon Oil Co. has begun exploring offshore tracts in the Arabian Sea, and Murphy Oil Corp. has acquired a concession directly adjacent to the Iranian border. Geologists are uncertain whether they will find any oil, however, because much of the region has a history of volcanic activity.

There is considerably greater optimism among experts with respect to other mineral resources, including possible uranium deposits in Dera Ghazi Khan. Significantly, Baluch of both right and left are suspicious that Iran, in league with "Western imperialism," has designs on Baluchistan's possible oil and uranium. More important, a major Baluch grievance against the Pakistani government is that outside interests, backed by the Islamabad bureaucracy, are getting the lion's share of the profits from the state's coal and natural gas deposits. Islamabad maintains that development expenditures in Baluchistan are disproportionately high in relation to more populous areas of the country. But the Baluch respond that most of this spending is related either to the military or to the extraction of resources for the benefit of outsiders and that industrialization has been largely neglected.

Prompted by the loss of Bangladesh, Islamabad made a modest gesture to Baluch sentiment in 1971 by pensioning off the khan of Kalat and creating a unified state of Baluchistan with Bizenjo as its first governor. The Baluch did not regard this as a meaningful concession, however, because the central government merely used the new arrangement to consolidate its day-to-day administrative control over the Baluch areas. Moreover, the boundaries of the new state made Baluch control of the province inherently precarious. Pushtun areas on the fringes were included within its boundaries, and Punjabi farmers were settled with central government subsidies in one of the few arable portions of Baluchistan. To make matters worse, the lack of industrial development has forced job-hungry Baluch to migrate to Karachi and the Persian Gulf.

As for the Pushtuns, the Durand Line left 7 million tribesmen on the Pakistani side of the border and another 5 or 6 million on the Afghan side. Kabul has never accepted this as a *de jure* boundary and voted against the admission of Pakistan to the United Nations in protest against what it considered an imperialist legacy. The Afghans claim that the Durand Line was imposed in 1893 at a moment of political disarray in Kabul and was presented as a temporary boundary to delineate zones of influence for the maintenance of law and order rather than as an international boundary.

Even with its truncated Pushtun population, Afghanistan has a Pushtun majority, although the size of this majority is hotly debated by Hazaras, Tadzhiks, and other Afghan minorities. Afghan Pushtun patriots see the accession of the Pushtun areas now in Pakistan, or the creation of an Afghan-oriented, nominally independent Pushtunistan there, as a way of bolstering their own power at home.

This irredentist aspiration is justified by invoking memories of the Pushtun kings in Kabul who ruled up to the Indus as recently as a century ago and as far as the Persian

Gulf through Baluch tributaries. The Pushtuns claim that they are the original Afghans, citing literature in Pushtu dating back to 770 A.D. and earlier references to the "Pakti" kingdom in the writings of Herodotus.<sup>3</sup> In economic terms, Pushtunistan advocates point not only to oil and mineral prospects even more promising than those in Baluchistan, but to fertile agricultural areas and vast timber wealth as well.

### *The Afghan Connection*

Pushtun nationalism, reflected in attempts to Pushtunize Afghan cultural and political life, arouses sharp resistance from the minorities in Afghanistan, and the new revolutionary government in Kabul has not yet shown its hand on the Pushtunistan issue during its initial period of consolidation.

In most of its pronouncements, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), a Soviet-oriented, Marxist-Leninist party, has stressed proletarian economic and social goals rather than ethnicity. Still, Prime Minister Nur Mohammad Taraki and one of his key lieutenants, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hafizullah Amin, are both Pushtuns of the Ghilzai clan, which has its deepest roots on the Pakistani side of the border.

As was the case under earlier regimes dominated by the Pushtun-descended royal family, the present cabinet, armed forces, and bureaucracy are heavily Pushtun-controlled. There has already been a hint of a harder line on the Pushtun and Baluch issues. In an informal conversation with a foreign diplomat, a voluble cabinet minister in the new regime said that Kabul does not recognize the Durand Line and should "rightfully" rule as far as the Indus.

Moreover, the new regime came to power under circumstances that underlined the intimacy of its long-standing ties with the Pushtun and Baluch movements. One of

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<sup>3</sup> *The Pushtuns also refer to themselves as "Pakhtoons." British writers use the term Pathan, but this is frowned upon as an imperialist legacy by the Pushtuns.*

Daud's last acts was a diplomatic deal with Islamabad in March, concluded under prodding from the shah, that would have ruled out the continued use of Afghan territory by Baluch guerrillas and Pushtun dissidents opposed to the Pakistani government. The March agreement was bitterly attacked by tribal militants, because it would have forced all of those now in Afghanistan to leave and would have barred their future access to the country in the event of renewed trouble in Pakistan. Taraki used this issue to arouse mass support against Daud in the critical interlude between the assassination of Khalq trade unionist Amir Khaiber on April 17 and the coup 10 days later.

However, at the present stage, Moscow and Kabul are not yet playing a directly manipulative role in the smoldering crisis. This could change rapidly if political developments in the borderlands made an adventurist policy appear promising. The critical factor affecting Soviet and Afghan policy will be the evolution of the intense leadership struggle between committed separatists and more ambivalent, old guard tribal politicians who are wary of becoming dependent on Communist help and are willing to settle for greater autonomy within the existing Pakistani and Iranian political structures.

This struggle is in turn closely attuned to the debate in Islamabad and Teheran over how far to go in meeting tribal demands. In the case of Pakistan, where unrest is most serious, the position of the moderates would be greatly strengthened if Islamabad accorded local self-rule to the tribal areas. By the same token, if Pakistani leaders maintain their present hard-line policy toward the borderlands, the old guard elements now in control of Baluch and Pushtun politics may be replaced by militant separatists prepared to work closely with Moscow and Kabul.

Militant Baluch elements identified with Mir Hazar and allied left-nationalist factions such as the Baluchistan People's Liberation Front (BPLF) were getting stronger even before the revolution in Afghanistan,

and the advent of a Communist regime there has accelerated the process of polarization in Baluch ranks. At one extreme, moderate leaders are under growing pressure from Islamabad to demonstrate their patriotic bona fides by diluting their demands for autonomy. At the other, the militants are bolder than ever and are rebuilding a skeleton guerrilla organization in the hills, confident that Kabul will sooner or later support a full-scale insurgency.

### *Militant Demands*

Quetta, the capital of Pakistani Baluchistan, was seething with political intrigue last summer, much of it revolving around a charismatic Baluch political leader, Khair Bakhsh Marri. As the hereditary chieftain of the 113,000-strong Marri tribe, Khair Bakhsh has a built-in place in the traditional Baluch power structure. Yet he also enjoys unique personal popularity as a Marxist-minded reformer who abolished many of the more oppressive taxes imposed on his tribe by previous chiefs. He was one of the first Baluch leaders jailed by Bhutto, and the important role subsequently played by the Marris during the 1973-1977 insurgency has added to his luster.

Before his imprisonment, in his formal role as president of the Baluchistan branch of the outlawed National Awami (Freedom) party, the leading organized political force in both the Baluch and Pushtun areas, Khair Bakhsh espoused a mild socialism, an ambiguously defined autonomy for the tribal areas, and a somewhat strident neutralism. Since his release, he has hinted at a policy change, observing on one occasion that "the situation has taken a delicate turn and we may be forced to adopt an attitude different from the prevalent norms of politics." Privately he warns more bluntly that Islamabad is driving the Baluch to separatism, and he talks of a form of national communism, independent of Moscow and Peking, should an independent Baluchistan eventually emerge.

In the negotiations between General Zia and the Baluch leaders, Khair Bakhsh has emerged as the most uncompromising champion of Baluch demands, insisting that Baluch support for the new regime be withheld until Zia withdraws the Pakistani army from the interior of Baluchistan, pays substantial compensation to the victims of alleged military atrocities, and grants provisional autonomy in all spheres except defense, foreign affairs, and currency. Prior to the Afghan revolution, there were some signs that Khair Bakhsh was preparing to relax his stand, but in recent months he has again taken an increasingly militant posture.

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**“A . . . Peace Corps volunteer recalls a 1974 incident in which a seventh grader was kicked by his Persian teacher for coming to school in a Baluch tunic.”**

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Another equally significant consequence of the convulsion in Kabul has been a major upheaval in the influential Baluch Student Organization in which sympathizers of the BPLF and of various Communist factions have replaced moderate students identified with the National Awami party. The newly ascendent student leaders, many of whom operate underground, berate the older generation of Baluch politicians for their intertribal bickering and their reluctance to bear the hardships of an all-out military struggle for independence.

“Many of the students who come to me say that they see no future in Pakistan,” says Astaullah Khan Mengal, chief of the Mengal tribe and a respected National Awami party moderate. “We talk of a new constitution, of a new type of federalism. They say nothing doing, they can’t adjust to this country. They say, we will have oil, we will have uranium, so why can’t we be independent?”

Notwithstanding the cautious line taken by Kabul so far, most Pushtun and Baluch

separatists believe that the prospects for Afghan help to their cause are much brighter than before. The Baluch are particularly optimistic, pointing to subtle signs that the new regime, true to Marxist-Leninist tenets on the national question, is prepared to treat the Baluch as a separate nationality rather than as a branch of the Pushtuns. Harking back to the tributary status of the Nasir Khan confederacy, previous Afghan regimes have claimed the Baluch areas as part of Pushtunistan.

Deputy Prime Minister Amin indicated in an interview that Afghan handling of the borderlands would be determined by how Islamabad behaves toward the new regime. Charging that some circles in Pakistan have already been fomenting trouble in Pushtun and Tadzhik border areas by branding the revolutionary government as anti-Islamic, he declared that "we will fight fire with fire if necessary. . . . If we are provoked or attacked, we will defend ourselves. We hope that the United States will play a restraining role in the region, but if you choose to pour in arms, we will turn to the USSR, and they are so friendly to us they will give us whatever we need to deal with the situation."

Kabul's Soviet friends have been increasingly in evidence since the April revolution and are undoubtedly far more influential than they were during the Daud period. Although Afghanistan has never had a Communist party openly designated as such, a Soviet-oriented Communist movement began operating underground shortly after World War II and eventually surfaced as the Khalq (Masses) party when King Zahir Shah legalized political parties in 1965. Eschewing the Communist label in order to avoid antagonizing orthodox Islamic groups, the Khalq and a dissident group that broke off from the party, the Parcham (Flag) party, were organized in the manner of Communist parties elsewhere and took a pro-Soviet line in international Communist affairs. In 1977 Khalq and Parcham merged to form the PDP.

Since the coup, Khalq elements led by Taraki and Amin have dominated the ruling party and have successfully resisted Parchamite pressures to give the new regime a doctrinaire communist character. But Moscow appears to endorse this moderate line. The real question is not whether Moscow has increased its leverage over Kabul but whether this leverage will be used to restrain or encourage Afghan support for separatism in Pakistan. Once the new regime has consolidated its domestic power base, it is likely to seek Soviet support for a more aggressive policy in the borderlands, especially if the political situation in Pakistan and Iran continues to deteriorate. Soviet and Afghan interests are not necessarily identical, however, for Moscow may prefer to concentrate on countering Chinese influence in the area and to keep Pakistan and Iran intact in the hope that General Zia and the shah be replaced by more cooperative regimes.

#### *Radicalizing the Pushtuns*

As a practical matter, Afghan policy in the borderlands is likely to be governed primarily by the developing political climate in the Pushtun areas of Pakistan. In recent months, Wali Khan, the principal leader of the Pakistani Pushtuns, has been seeking to negotiate an arrangement with General Zia providing for nationwide elections leading to civilian governments both in Islamabad and in Pakistan's four provinces, the Punjab, the Pushtun-dominated Northwest Frontier Province, Baluchistan, and Sind.

Wali enjoys a considerable following outside of the Northwest Frontier Province, and Zia has attempted to lure him away from his role as a Pushtun leader by inviting him to serve as prime minister in a national civilian government under the aegis of the military. However, Wali has continued to press for elections, and Zia embarked on a new course last summer, appointing conservative Moslem League elements to an interim civilian cabinet.

Should negotiations break down, as seems increasingly likely, Wali will have to decide

whether to assume the leadership of anti-government forces throughout Pakistan, thus diluting his advocacy of Pushtun demands, or to concentrate on consolidating his position in the Pushtun areas, where he is under increasing attack from militant groups.

As is the case in Baluchistan, a gradual polarization is taking place in the Pakistani Pushtun areas between moderates and hard-liners who believe that Wali has wasted his time talking with Zia. Until recently, Wali was relatively immune from serious attack as the son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the famed "Frontier Gandhi," who organized the Pushtun Red Shirts during the pre-1947 independence movement and who is a charismatic father figure among the Pushtuns.

However, in Peshawar, many say that Wali is getting soft and may be letting dreams of the prime ministership blunt his dedication to Pushtun interests. In particular, he is criticized for going along with the March agreement between Zia and Daud denying the use of Afghan territory as sanctuary for Baluch guerrillas and anti-government Pushtun activists.

Ajmal Khattak, a Pushtun poet and former secretary of the National Awami party in Wali's Northwest Frontier Province, has gained in stature at Wali's expense, though he still lacks Wali's mass support. Ajmal took refuge from Bhutto's police in Kabul five years ago and has continued to operate out of Afghanistan since Zia's takeover last year. He stresses that he is still in "friendly contact" with Wali's men, and he recently attended a luncheon given by Taraki in honor of Ghaffar Khan, now 89. However, Ajmal has developed his own network of about 50 base camps in the border areas manned by 700 hard-core followers, mostly members of a militant faction of the Pushtun Zalmai (youth guard), a group originally founded by Ghaffar.

One important factor will be the posture taken by several powerful independent tribes—the Afridis, Mohmands, Mahsuds, and

Wazirs—from more remote Pushtun areas directly straddling the border near the Khyber Pass, where neither Kabul nor Islamabad exercises effective control. These tribes would give Zia the most trouble militarily if they participated in a guerrilla war for Pushtunistan. There are at least 500,000 rifles in their hands, mostly replicas of the British Enfield 303 made in tribal gunshops. The independent tribes have shown considerable support for the Pushtunistan cause in the past, but do not want to jeopardize the benefits they derive from the profitable smuggling operations made possible by their control of key sectors of the border. Moreover, their attitude toward the Taraki government in Kabul is ambivalent. They are attracted by the strong Pushtun cast of the new regime and by its promises of economic reform. At the same time, however, influential Moslem divines have aroused fears that godless communism in Kabul will destroy their Islamic traditions.

### *The National Identity*

In assessing the prospects for Pushtun separatism, it is necessary to emphasize the growing economic links between the Pushtun areas and the rest of Pakistan. In addition, Pushtun areas, for the most part, are not as isolated geographically from other parts of the country as Baluch areas. Under the British, Pushtuns were given important posts in the army and the bureaucracy, and even today, despite Punjabi encroachments, Pushtuns from aristocratic, urbanized families still have more of a place in Pakistani national life than the Baluch. Major economic inducements to Peshawar and increased local self-rule would no doubt seriously weaken separatist tendencies. One such gesture was the recent decision by Zia to start work on the long-delayed Chasmai irrigation system.

Ghaffar and his Red Shirts, however, did not wholeheartedly support the Moslem League plan to create Pakistan but worked closely with Jawaharlal Nehru's Congress party to preserve an undivided India. When the creation of Pakistan appeared inevitable,

Ghaffar asked that the Pushtuns be allowed to choose between joining the new state or forming their own Pushtunistan. The idea of Pakistan was promoted mainly by Moslems in the provinces of undivided India where Hindus dominated. But the Pushtuns and the Baluch lived in homogeneous areas where Moslems had always dominated. Hence they were preoccupied with getting rid of British rule, and had contempt for Moslem League leaders who sided with the British to bring about the partition of India.

In Western press coverage, the political crisis in Pakistan has been presented largely in terms of the personal fate of Bhutto or as a struggle between democratic and authoritarian forces. But the real underlying issue now confronting Pakistan is how to define its national identity. One option is to move

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**“In both Teheran and New Delhi one finds growing pessimism about Pakistan’s future.”**

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toward a more centralized state in which Islamabad would increase its authority over the provincial governments. This approach is supported by many military men and bureaucrats from the numerically dominant Punjab, which represents 58 per cent of the population of Pakistan, and by the refugee industrialists from India, the Mahajans.

It is also supported by many ardent Pakistani nationalists, including some in the Pushtun and Baluch areas, who believe that only a centralized state is suited to the needs of modern economic development and that cultural diversity poses a latent threat to national solidarity. The present military leadership has been moving in this direction but has alienated many of the modernists among its supporters by simultaneously seeking to promote Islamic orthodoxy. The situation has been further complicated by the unresolved question of Bhutto’s future. Zia wants to maintain a dialogue with the leaders of the minority provinces to prevent

them from allying with Bhutto's followers, but he has shown no signs of a compromise on the key issue of provincial autonomy.

In an interview, Zia indicated that he would like to see a more unitary form of government in Pakistan. He suggested that the powers of the president be strengthened and advocated a Turkish-style constitution, in which the army would have a legitimate right to take control in periods of political instability without invoking martial law.

### *A Manageable Separatism*

The failure of the Zia regime to deal more effectively with its multiplying political and economic problems could open the way for separatist activity that would literally tear the country apart. By contrast, the problem is much more manageable in Iran, and the Baluch are not a major factor in the growing anti-shah movement. One reason is that the Baluch areas constitute a relatively small corner of the country. Another is that the Baluch have not posed a significant military challenge to Teheran since they were decisively defeated in 1928. Using sophisticated military surveillance, well-directed largesse to tribal chieftains, and a few cautious economic development programs, the shah has kept organized opposition to a minimum.

Unlike the British and the post-independence rulers of Pakistan, who have given the Baluch some access to education, Teheran has done little until recently to open up its Baluch areas to the outside world. There is no Baluch intelligentsia in Iran comparable to that found in Quetta and Karachi. At the same time, Teheran is acutely aware of the profound cultural tensions between the Baluch and the Persian officials in the tribal areas and has been increasingly fearful of externally stimulated separatist activity.

From 1968 to 1973, Iraq attempted to stir up the Baluch in Iran as an adjunct to its support of Kurdish guerrilla activity, smuggling in weapons and airing radio appeals in Baluchi from across the gulf. Teheran responded by suppressing the slight-

est expression of Baluch identity, rigidly enforcing its prohibition on any use of Baluch language or dress in the schools. A former American Peace Corps volunteer recalls a 1974 incident in which a seventh grader was kicked by his Persian teacher for coming to school in a Baluch tunic.

However, Teheran has also stepped up development spending recently, and the Baluch are benefiting from large-scale smuggling operations between Pakistan, Iran, and Persian Gulf ports, which the government makes no effort to stop. The shah's new prime minister, Jamshid Amuzegar, named a Baluch as chief of the provincial branch of the semi-official Rastakhiz party for the first time. "Maybe before they didn't do enough for us," says G. M. Hossainborr, the new appointee, "but now the situation is improving. We hope that this government will pay enough attention to compensate for the past."

Iranian officials say that they can handle the Baluch if outside powers do not interfere, but they are concerned that a separatist movement on the Pakistani side of their notably porous desert border might prove contagious. Moreover, they argue that Soviet involvement in Baluchistan would probably be accompanied by unrest among other minorities, such as the Kurds, the Azerbaijanis, and the Khuzistan Arabs, and by a revival of the Communist-led rebellion in the Dhofar area of Oman, just across the Strait of Hormuz from Baluchistan. Given the history of foreign manipulation of Iran's minority problems, these anxieties are no doubt genuine, although the shah would probably be preoccupied with Baluchistan even in the absence of Soviet involvement.

Thus he has repeatedly expressed a readiness bordering on eagerness to intervene there militarily. Last fall, after the ouster of Bhutto, the shah asked Arnaud De Borchgrave of *Newsweek*: "What would happen if what remains of Pakistan were to disintegrate? If we don't assume the security of this region, who will do it?"

In effect, Teheran has begun to treat Paki-

stani Baluchistan as a quasi-protectorate, which has aroused considerable uneasiness among Pakistani leaders. Just as Baluchistan dominates the shah's worst-case scenario, Pakistanis have their own haunting nightmare of economic and political disintegration culminating in an Indo-Iranian-Afghan arrangement to divide up the country. Iran would get Baluchistan; Afghanistan would get the Pushtun areas; and India would get the Punjab and Sind.

There is nothing new about Pakistani suspicions of Indian and Afghan intentions, but the inclusion of Iran in this nightmare is a recent development reflecting a subtle change in the tone of relations between

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**“The Baluchistan and Pushtunistan problems are essentially political. . . . Military approaches only play into the hands of the separatists.”**

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Teheran and Islamabad during the past few years. The shah has increasingly emphasized ties with India, and Zia's zealous advocacy of the Sunni brand of Islamic orthodoxy has gradually carried him closer to Sunni Saudi Arabia than to Iran, a Shia stronghold. In a major policy speech on July 5, Zia pointedly emphasized Islamabad's growing links with the Saudis, leaving Iran in a secondary position.

Since the coup in Afghanistan, both Teheran and New Delhi have gone out of their way to reassure Pakistan and to emphasize their desire for regional stability. After conferring with the shah in late May, Indian Foreign Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a significant departure from India's long-standing policy of studied ambivalence with regard to the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan by asserting that “existing boundaries should be respected, with any differences being settled peacefully.”

At the same time, in both Teheran and New Delhi one finds growing pessimism

about Pakistan's future and impatient criticism of Islamabad's failure to pull the country together politically. While Iran would clearly prefer to have a stable Pakistan as a buffer against India, an unstable Pakistan is another matter. Some influential Iranians give the impression that Teheran would not mind an excuse to take over some of the Baluch areas immediately adjacent to the Iranian border. Rather than wait until separatism becomes unmanageable and Moscow intervenes, they cautiously suggest working out a military arrangement with Pakistan in which Teheran would have responsibility for the western end of Pakistani Baluchistan. There are also those in Teheran who are toying with the idea of offering covert support to a Baluch separatism under the aegis of moderate Baluch leaders.

As for Moscow's stance, it should be noted that Soviet ideologists have been vacillating for years over the virtues of Baluch and Pushtun independence. In 1964 Yuri Gankovsky, the leading Soviet specialist on Pakistan, wrote a book stressing that the Baluch and Pushtuns were separate nationalities and that "the dismemberment of India along religious lines has not solved the national problem in the areas constituting Pakistan."<sup>3</sup> In 1971, when the official English edition of his study was published, Gankovsky still considered Pakistan a collection of separate nationalities but no longer cast aspersions on its legitimacy. In 1973, visiting Pakistan for a public lecture, he referred to the Baluch and Pushtuns as "ethnic groups." Another Soviet writer argued in 1973 that Baluch and Pushtun progressives should work for a broad united front with progressives throughout Pakistan, avoiding "bourgeois nationalist" tendencies.<sup>4</sup> This gradual shift in the Soviet line was paralleled by a broader shift in Soviet tactics to counter Chinese influence in Pakistan. Presumably,

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<sup>3</sup> Yu. V. Gankovsky, *The Peoples of Pakistan* (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1971), p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> Beknazar Ibragimov, *The Baluch of Pakistan* (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1973).

the policy could be reversed again to rationalize a separatist policy, but there are no signs of such a flip-flop yet.

There is no evidence of Soviet support for the Baluch during the 1973-1977 insurgency, and the most significant Baluch separatist groups were not Soviet-controlled as of mid-1978. Mir Hazar went out of his way to emphasize that "we will take help where we can get it, but we are not anti-American. Of course, everyone in this part of the world believes that many [American] policies are reactionary, and [the United States has] supported a number of bad governments in Pakistan." In marked contrast to the PDP in Afghanistan, with its long-standing pro-Soviet orientation, the BPLF has so far avoided identification with either Moscow or Peking. Some of its theoreticians are admirers of Che Guevara who come from rich, non-Baluch families in Karachi and Lahore, and see rugged Baluchistan as the most promising arena in Pakistan for the application of their ideas.

There is a variety of other leftist factions in Quetta and Karachi, some pro-Moscow, some pro-Peking, and some linked with Arab nationalist groups, but they are badly divided at this stage and do not appear to be getting significant outside support. Should Moscow and Kabul wish to promote separatism in the tribal areas, they would have to choose among equally unsatisfactory alternatives. They could watch and wait until the present competition for leadership plays itself out, hoping for the isolation of the moderates. Or they could designate a favorite among the left-oriented factions in the hope that their support would provide a standard around which the Baluch could rally. Another possibility is that a change in the popular mood could force some of the moderate leaders to accept separatism. In this case, Moscow would have to deal with strong personalities whose records suggest that they would not be easy to handle. Similarly, in the Pushtun areas, where pro-Moscow groups are somewhat better organized than in Ba-

luchistan, Wali and other moderates have shown considerable sophistication in dealing with the Communists.

In seeking to contain the Afghan revolution, the United States can play a significant but limited role. With respect to Afghanistan itself, the United States should help strengthen national Communist tendencies independent from Moscow and Peking and should refrain from supporting Pakistani efforts to destabilize the new regime that would only lead to a tightening of the Soviet grip on Kabul. With respect to the Baluch and Pushtun movements, American policy should be to encourage political settlements based on greater autonomy within the existing Pakistani and Iranian political structures. As an economic aid donor to Pakistan, the United States should promote equitable economic development policies designed to moderate the discrimination in the borderlands. More important, as the principal source of military supplies for Islamabad and Teheran, Washington should discourage ham-handed counterinsurgency programs. The Baluchistan and Pushtunistan problems are essentially political, and military approaches only play into the hands of the separatists.

The developing crisis in the borderlands should not be viewed as a superpower rivalry but as one of the world's more exotic examples of the dilemmas involved in fashioning viable nation-states out of ethnic and linguistic diversity in a Third World setting. Pakistan is unusual because its tribal minorities constitute only 17 per cent of its population but have historically occupied 57 per cent of its land area. Islamabad has to find the right mix of a centralized and a federal structure, and political science offers no universal guidelines for determining the proper formula. In the light of its experience in Bangladesh, Pakistan has little choice but to move toward a loose federalism. A failure to do so could well lead to the further breakup of the country, regardless of whether Moscow and Kabul seek to accelerate the drift to Balkanization.