Is There Light at the End of the Baloch Tunnel?
Part Two: The View from India

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Key Points

- Unlike China, which has secured significant economic and strategic concessions in Balochistan, the United States is unlikely to stand in the way of Balochistan’s independence.

- While it is generally understood that the likely response of Pakistan’s western neighbours to any bid for independence in Pakistani Balochistan will be driven by the opposing goals of resisting potential Baloch irredentism and weakening Pakistan, the strength of irredentist sentiment among the Baloch people seems to be overrated.

- Given the lack of awareness about Balochistan within India, the divisions within the Indian intelligentsia and media on the Baloch issue, and the miniscule Baloch population in India, it is not easy to mobilise public opinion to compel the Indian Government, which seems to lack both a clear policy and offensive strategic assets inside Balochistan or in its neighbourhood, to intervene in favour of the Baloch people.

- India’s Baloch policy should be based on a clear-headed assessment of its stakes and its capability to intervene meaningfully. In any case, the Baloch issue should not be used as a bargaining chip or quick-fix to India’s Pakistan problem because instrumentalism and short-termism will harm both the Baloch cause and India’s overall interests.

Summary

This paper, the second of a two-part assessment, evaluates the possible international responses to the Baloch movement for independence. The implications for India of deeper
involvement in the Baloch cause are also examined. The comparisons that are often drawn with the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state are critically examined.

As noted in Part One, the Baloch people live forgotten in a resource rich, strategic territory. They briefly came into the limelight last year after the Indian Government drew attention to human rights violations in Pakistan’s Balochistan province and a few Baloch leaders sought political asylum and support from India for setting up a government-in-exile. These developments raised expectations about India’s ability to facilitate the secession of Balochistan à la Bangladesh/East Pakistan. Those expectations were based on an optimistic view that relied on context-independent comparisons between the Balochistan of 2016 and East Pakistan of 1971 and confounded the desirability of Baloch independence with its feasibility. The first part of this paper suggested that the Baloch people have to be viewed as embedded within post-colonial Pakistan and the wider region, including Iran and Afghanistan.

In this paper, it is suggested that the success of Balochistan’s bid for independence depends critically upon the responses of Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, the US and India. Pakistan has offered significant economic and strategic concessions to China in Balochistan, to ensure that it is not without allies on the Baloch front. Russia will align with China on this issue, whereas the US is likely to be aligned against China. While it is generally understood that the likely response of Pakistan’s western neighbours to any bid for independence in Pakistani Balochistan will be driven by the opposing goals of resisting potential Baloch irredentism and weakening Pakistan, the strength of irredentist sentiment among the Baloch people seems to be overrated.

India would have to take into account these potential international responses to a Baloch bid for independence, but its own response is likely to be shaped largely by domestic factors. Given the lack of awareness about Balochistan within India, the divisions within the Indian intelligentsia and media on the Baloch issue, and the miniscule Baloch population in India, it is not easy to mobilise public opinion to compel the Indian Government, which seems to lack both a clear policy to deal with the Baloch issue and offensive strategic assets inside Balochistan or in its neighbourhood, to act in favour of the Baloch people. India should decide upon the scale of its engagement with the Baloch cause through a clear-headed assessment of its interests and its capability to intervene meaningfully in favour of the Baloch people. The government must not use the Baloch issue as a bargaining chip or a quick-fix to the threat posed by Pakistan because instrumentalism and short-termism will harm the Baloch people and reduce India’s overall bargaining power vis-à-vis Pakistan.
Analysis

International Aspects

Any future Balochistan independence depends critically upon the responses of Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, the US and India.¹ The US will not openly support Baloch insurgents but, unlike China, it is unlikely to impede Baloch independence. The US no longer enjoys freedom of movement across Pakistan and will, therefore, benefit from the creation of a yet another littoral state in the region that would provide it with direct access to Afghanistan and beyond. This will also lessen the stranglehold of China and Russia over Central Asia, which will again benefit the US.

Pakistan has offered significant economic and strategic concessions to China in Balochistan (as well as in other provinces), to ensure, among other things, that it is not without allies on the Baloch front. Gwadar is the terminus of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that runs through the length of Pakistan and connects it with China (see Map 7, next page) [NB: map numbers continue from Part One]. By encouraging China, a very strong state and permanent Security Council member with no human rights concerns of its own, to acquire a long term stake in restive Balochistan, Pakistan hopes to weaken the bargaining power of Baloch rights groups. This reminds of the experience of Sri Lankan Tamils under Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Russia and China will favour the status quo, despite having suffered due to terrorist havens in Pakistan. Russia, with its soft Caucasian underbelly, and China, with serious problems in its western minority provinces, have no appetite for secessionist movements. Moreover, anything that improves the outside options for the Central Asian republics is not in the interests of either. China, for its part, hopes to convert the whole of the region, including Central Asia and Afghanistan, into a cheap supplier of energy and minerals for its expanding economy. In addition, China has cultivated Pakistan as a force multiplier against India. It will strongly oppose a fresh partition of Pakistan, which would swing the balance of power between India and Pakistan entirely in the favour of the former and reduce the degree of freedom it has enjoyed so far vis-a-vis India. This could be another reason why the US is likely to be favourably disposed towards a potentially reinvigorated Baloch independence movement.

The Chinese experience in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, however, suggests that over-reliance upon unrepresentative or unpopular governments to secure lucrative deals has its own limits. China has enjoyed a very long period of close relations with Pakistan, but that could change, even if to a small extent, if the army is cut down to size. Moreover, trouble in the wider maritime neighbourhood could distract China from South Asia.

¹ Other countries that could contribute to the final outcome include the Arab monarchies and Turkey, which are traditionally pro-Pakistan. The former, however, are bitterly opposed to Iran, while the latter is trying to cultivate friendly relations with it. Moreover, Oman, an Arab country, is likely to be relatively favourably disposed towards the Baloch. As a result, West Asia will stand divided in response to a potential Baloch bid for independence.
Baloch insurgents have been attacking infrastructure projects, as well as workers from Punjab and China, in their territory. The future trajectory of Chinese investments in Pakistan, in particular their political-economic instability, has been examined at some length in an earlier FDI Associate Paper. An additional fact would, however, bear noting here. The seven-decades-old Baloch insurgency and the state’s heavy-handed response to it have displaced tens of thousands of people. The massive infrastructure and mining projects are adding to the existing internal displacement through the appropriation of land and water resources and the settlement of more pliable workers from other provinces. Historically, the lack of freshwater has been a key factor in limiting Balochistan’s population. Water is likely to emerge as an important source of conflict, with indigenous Baloch people demanding priority access to water resources of this heavily water-stressed province. These developments cannot but aggravate the ongoing insurgency.
Balochistan’s neighbours, Afghanistan and Iran, will be driven by opposing goals: weakening Pakistan and resisting potential Baloch irredentism. Bilaterally, Afghanistan and Iran would also be potentially locked in a zero-sum situation vis-à-vis an independent Balochistan. Landlocked Afghanistan would gain from the creation of yet another Indian Ocean littoral state as that would reduce the bargaining power of Iran (and Pakistan) over it. Under the Shah, Iran supported Pakistan’s campaign against the Baloch while, at the same time, Afghanistan supported the Pakistani Baloch insurgents. The (Sunni) Arab response to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran drove a sectarian wedge into the region and (Shia) Iran found itself on the receiving end of cross-border terrorism sponsored by Arab countries, which wanted to open another front to divide the attention of the former. Islamabad has, on the other hand, used cross-border Sunni terrorism as a bargaining chip to limit Iranian Shia activism inside Pakistan.

While Iran fears Baloch irredentism, an independent Balochistan would be unlikely to destabilise Sistan and Baluchestan. The Iran-Pakistan border does not divide major Baloch tribes and there is little cross-border co-operation between the Baloch insurgents of the two countries. Pakistan’s Baloch insurgents are secular nationalists, while (Baloch) terror outfits operating across the border in Iran are driven by sectarianism and are propped up by foreign support. The mostly Sunni Iranian Baloch are struggling for their rights under a Shia state, which tolerates the Sunni religious leadership and treats the secular opposition and traditional tribal leadership as bigger threats. On the other hand, their Pakistani cousins are fighting against a Sunni state that adapted the policies of divide-and-rule and indirect rule through traditional leaders that it inherited from the British. The difference in the political setting perhaps explains the ideological divergence between the Baloch movements in the two countries. More importantly, experience suggests that Iran need not fear an independent Balochistan. The independence of Bangladesh did not destabilise India’s West Bengal and the independence of Azerbaijan did not affect Iran’s Azeri provinces. Likewise, Baloch irredentism targeting Afghanistan has its own limits. The separation of Baloch areas of Afghanistan is not going to be easy, as four provinces, including three in which the Baloch are a minority, would have to be bifurcated. That is assuming, of course, that the people are willing to join an independent Balochistan.

There is another noteworthy difference between Pakistan and Iran in respect to the Baloch question. In Pakistan, the pro-independence sentiment is reinforced by ethnic persecution, exploitation of mineral wealth, appropriation of land, demographic engineering, manipulation of the electoral process, denial of a rightful share in the public pie, and a “kill-and-dump” counter-insurgency. On the other hand, the Baloch of Iran mainly suffer from ethno-religious marginalisation and economic neglect and, thus, can be assuaged by greater administrative and cultural autonomy, political representation and economic support. In any case, Iran’s choices will influence the response of the Sunni monarchies in the Persian Gulf region (see footnote 1) and also affect India’s choices.

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2 The Iran-Afghanistan border, which divides the Helmand river basin, is different from the Iran-Pakistan border that passes through a largely arid and barren territory.
Can India play Good Samaritan?

Last year India voiced concerns about Balochistan. This could be seen as part of its ongoing experiments with the co-ordinated use of non- and sub-military options to deal with Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism. It is, however, too early to say if there is a sustainable structural change in India’s Pakistan policy, as the government has not yet elaborated any new policy to deal with the Baloch issue. Last year’s debate on Balochistan in India was driven entirely by a few cryptic statements of the Prime Minister and the National Security Advisor. Speculation over political asylum for exiled Baloch leaders and support for a possible Baloch government-in-exile dampened without further inputs from the government. Subsequent speculations about the government’s motives did not last long either. Most recently, on 1 March 2017, India once again referred to Balochistan at the United Nations. The significance, or the lack of it, of this statement would bear a little elaboration. Unlike the multiple and multi-layered references to Balochistan in India’s statements and replies at the UNHCR’s 33rd Session in September 2016, India has so far raised the issue only once at the UNHCR this year, and that was in response to a statement by Pakistan. While one expected a more nuanced statement, this year’s reference to Balochistan was more or less a mechanical repetition of one of last year’s statements.

The inability of the government (and the ruling party) to sustain momentum can be viewed in three different ways. First, perhaps the government was merely trying to divert attention and score a few brownie points. Second, the government lacks clarity about the objectives of

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3 The history of India’s engagement with Balochistan has been chequered. India refused to accept Kalat state’s offer of accession in the aftermath of Partition. It also seems to have turned down a possible offer from the Sultan of Muscat and Oman to take over Gwadar, where it had a diplomatic presence until 1958, and scaled down engagement with Baloch leaders in the 1970s hoping that it would affect a change of heart in Rawalpindi. Baloch leaders have their own history of ambivalence, though.

4 The Indian Prime Minister referred to Balochistan on two occasions in August 2016. On 12 August, at an All Party Meeting, he suggested that ‘The time has come when Pakistan shall have to answer to the world for the atrocities committed by it against people in Baluchistan and PoK [Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Jammu].’ Three days later, on 15 August, he said, ‘In the last few days the way the people of Balochistan, Gilgit, from Pak-occupied Kashmir have thanked me, it is the honour of 1.25 billion people of India. I thank those people from Balochistan, Gilgit and Pak-occupied Kashmir.’ On 26 September 2016, in her address to the UN General Assembly, the Foreign Minister drew attention to the ‘brutality against the Baloch people [that] represents the worst form of State oppression.’ In September 2016, India referred to Balochistan on four occasions in the 33rd Session of the UNHCR (14, 16, 19 and 26 September).

5 Before joining the government, the present National Security Advisor was reported to have suggested that India could support the Baloch independence movement to check cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

6 Even otherwise, developments such as the Uri attack, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa’s extended hospitalisation (and subsequent death), and demonetisation of higher denomination currency notes left no room for “non-essential” causes in the media.

7 Not much can be read into developments such the appointment of an officer with experience of dealing with the Baloch issue as the head of India’s external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), because the government followed convention and appointed the most senior officer to head the organisation.

8 Over the past few months, the ruling party and its parent and sister organisations invited exiled Baloch leaders to several public discussions across the country.
its Baloch foray. Third, this government is yet to come to terms with the reality that, in large democracies, longstanding policies cannot be changed abruptly due to the difficulty in mobilising domestic opinion, among other things.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a policy statement it is not clear if the government has a long-term plan or if it even views the Baloch issue as a bargaining chip with Pakistan. The government has also not spelled out the parameters for evaluating the desirability and capability of intervening in Balochistan.

In the short run, irrespective of India’s policy towards Balochistan, Pakistan will not dismantle the terror infrastructure built over the years and its patron, China, will continue to try to contain India by, among other things, arming Pakistan and shielding India-centric terror groups. In other words, the government should not be under the illusion that steering clear of Balochistan will affect a change of heart in Rawalpindi and help to roll back Pakistan’s sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. Likewise, it should not defer to Chinese interests in Balochistan under the illusion that Beijing will accommodate Indian interests elsewhere. If India “intervened” in Balochistan, its ties with Pakistan (and China) cannot become much worse than they already are.

While India should not allow its short-term calculus to be muddied by misplaced hopes of better ties with Pakistan (and China), neither should it should be over-optimistic about the long term prospects. New Delhi should not support the Baloch cause under the illusion that an independent Balochistan will embrace secular democracy or provide India with preferential access to mineral wealth and overland access to Afghanistan.

The Bangladeshi experience is sobering. The secular Bangladeshi liberation movement lost ground to religious extremists and to the army, which condoned (and, often, supported) insurgencies and cross-border terrorism targeting India. Until a few years ago, Bangladesh did not provide India with access to the north-east. In the meantime, China, which opposed Bangladesh’s independence, emerged as its main trading partner and defence supplier. Likewise, China could very likely secure deals ahead of India in an independent Balochistan. This is not say that India should not intervene in Balochistan, only that it should first clearly assess the possible outcomes.

While little is known about the government’s policy, knowledge of India’s material capacity to intervene in Balochistan is even more scant. Last year, a well-known Indian commentator observed that India’s National Security Advisor (months before he assumed office) ‘could not possibly have made the claim [“you may lose Balochistan”], unless India had acquired significant “assets” there … over the years. They cannot be acquired instantly. It is these

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9 After all, Suu Kyi’s Myanmar and Sirisena’s Sri Lanka have not turned out too badly for China. Political/ideological inclinations aside, leaders of smaller countries in India’s neighbourhood, including a potentially independent Balochistan, will find it difficult to overcome the techno-economic charm of a rising China. India can counter China’s growing techno-economic influence only by quickly expanding its own indigenous technological and manufacturing base (possibly with the assistance of Chinese investments).
existing assets, acquired, trained and funded over the years, which emboldened [Ajit] Doval to speak as confidently as he did.’

The commentator referred to a 2009 statement by a US scholar – ‘having visited the Indian mission in Zahedan, Iran, I can assure you they are not issuing visas as the main activity’ – as evidence that India has such assets. This statement was quickly picked up by Pakistani commentators. The scholar then clarified that ‘the Pakistanis blew [her comments] out of proportion.’ She added that she ‘meant something far more banal and yet benign, and quite frankly commonplace than what was attributed to me’ and that she had ‘never gone to any lengths to look at that issue [How deeply enmeshed are Indian intelligence activities with the separatists in Balochistan?]’ and did not ‘know anyone who has a line of credible information.’

Despite her prompt disclaimer, she continues to be cited as offering evidence that Zahedan, along with Indian consulates across Afghanistan, are used to promote unrest in Balochistan. Those who cite her forget to give the full picture. India has an embassy (in Kabul) and four consulates (Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat) in Afghanistan, plus personnel working on development projects across the country (Map 8). Pakistan has consulates in all four cities mentioned above. India has consulates in Zahedan and Bandar Abbas and visa centres in Mashhad, Isfahan and Shiraz. Mashhad, it should be noted, is home to more than half-a-dozen consulates. Pakistan, too, has a consulate in Mashhad, in addition to Zahedan. In short, New Delhi does not have exclusive and sinister access to the region and, wherever India is present, Pakistan has an equal or better access. An exception may be in Bandar Abbas, which is far from the Iran-Pakistan border, where India has a consulate but Pakistan does not seem to. India might be able to establish a consulate in Chabahar, if and when the upgraded Chabahar port becomes operational, but it is not unlikely that Iran would allow Pakistan to open a consulate there as well.

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Map 8: Indian Embassies, Consulates and Visa Offices in Iran and Afghanistan

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10 Iran has a much larger diplomatic footprint across Pakistan.
Interestingly, the Indian commentator referred to above also claimed that the Indian Government is only in touch with exiled Baloch leaders and does not have contact with Baloch leaders on the ground. If so, what is the Zahedan consulate doing, then? Zahedan is definitely not the best place to connect with Baloch leaders in exile living in Europe and North America. The other piece of evidence of Indian interference in Balochistan that is often cited is the Indo-Pak Joint Statement (Sharm el-Sheikh, 16 July 2009), which included a sentence on Balochistan: ‘Prime Minister Gilani mentioned that Pakistan has some information on threats in Balochistan and other areas.’ In the intervening eight years, no credible dossier detailing Indian interference in Balochistan has been released, even after the arrest of a retired Indian naval officer allegedly involved in promoting subversion from Iranian soil. In fact, on 7 December 2016, the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs informed Pakistani senators that, ‘So far, we have just statements about the involvement of the Indian spy.’ On the other hand, Iran has dismissed Pakistani allegations that its soil is being used to attack Pakistan. During the Iranian President’s 2016 visit to Pakistan, Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) tweeted that Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff had confronted the visiting dignitary on the issue of safe havens enjoyed by Indian agents in Iran. In response to a question, the Iranian President not only denied having discussed the issue, but also added that, ‘whenever we get close to Pakistan and become more intimate, there are some people who create such rumours. I have heard this more than twenty times, different times ... we didn’t talk about this, of course.’

All that can be said with confidence on the subject of Indian assets in and around Balochistan is that there is not much that is known at the moment.

Formulating a clear policy and building capacity to intervene are only the first steps; building and sustaining domestic support will prove to be more difficult. Once again, the Bangladeshi experience is instructive. East Pakistan bordered West Bengal, one of the most populous states of India and which was well-represented in the Parliament, bureaucracy, media and intelligentsia. Cross-border ties were strong despite Partition and the élite among the Hindu Bengalis who migrated to India from East Pakistan were very influential in India. Equally importantly, East Pakistan had a significant Hindu population that was among the primary targets of the Pakistani army. The people of West Bengal played an important role in raising awareness around the world of the genocidal tactics of the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan and also gave shelter to hundreds of thousands of refugees and the resistance movement.

Balochistan does not share a border with India. The Baloch people in Balochistan’s neighbouring countries are, domestically, a marginalised minority and internationally invisible and can, therefore, not extend much help to their Pakistani Baloch brethren. There are two kinds of people of Baloch origin in India: the pre-1947 Baloch Muslim settlers in western and northern India and post-1947 non-Muslim refugees. Both groups are small and

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11 The rationale behind the timing of the brazen tweet remains unclear, although it appears that the Pakistani Army wanted to weaken public support for the parliament’s stance of remaining neutral in the Saudi-Iranian rivalry (and to divert attention away from investigation of the terrorist attack on India’s Pathankot airbase). There could not have been a better way of doing this than by accusing Iran of hosting Indian spies. Incidentally, Pakistan’s army chief concerned has reportedly agreed to head an anti-terrorism coalition floated by Saudi Arabia that does not include Shia countries.
scattered and have assimilated with related groups in India. They do not enjoy any clout in India, unlike, say, the Sindhi migrants from Pakistan, who are among the main business communities of the country and are quite visible in the public sphere. There are Sindhi colonies and landmarks in most cities in northern and western India. Several Sindhis have been elected to the Parliament and state assemblies; one has even served as Deputy Prime Minister. Not coincidentally, unlike Balochi, Sindhi was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 1967, ahead of several other languages spoken by larger “indigenous” communities that had to wait until the 1990s and early 2000s. Incidentally, unlike Balochistan, Sindh also figures in India’s national anthem, which was composed before partition.

Furthermore, there is little awareness of Balochistan, or the Baloch people, in India. This is reflected in the fact that, beyond the ancient shrines such as Hinglaj Mata of Lasbela, there is not much discussion about other parts of the province. Balochistan’s Mehrgarh is among the oldest archaeological sites of the Sub-Continent that have yielded evidence of settled cultivation. It predates the Indus Valley Civilisation by a few millennia. Sutkagen-dor, the westernmost site of the Indus Valley Civilisation, is also located in Balochistan, right on the Iranian border, but Indian history textbooks focus entirely on Sindh and Punjab provinces of Pakistan.

Last, but not least, the Indian intelligentsia and media are divided on the Baloch issue. One section is more concerned about human rights violations in Palestine than in nearby Balochistan. The other conflates the desirability and feasibility of Baloch independence and is, therefore, wildly enthusiastic about the Baloch cause. In contrast, East Pakistan evoked sympathy across the board. So, given the lack of awareness of Balochistan, the divisions within the intelligentsia and media, and the miniscule Baloch population in India, it is not easy to mobilise public opinion in India to compel the government, which seems to lack both a clear policy to deal with the Baloch issue and offensive strategic assets inside Balochistan or in its neighbourhood, to intervene in favour of the Baloch cause. It is not the case that Indian public opinion cannot be mobilised in favour of Balochistan, only that someone would have to expend considerable political capital to do so.

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12 The Baloch Hindu businessmen were historically linked to the Sindhi or Punjabi trading networks, depending upon which part of Baluchistan they lived in, and seem to have merged with the larger Sindhi and Punjabi business communities upon migration to India.
13 There is hardly anyone in Indian academia, diplomatic circles or media who has spent reasonable time outside the major cities of Punjab and Sindh.
14 I should hasten to add that Indians, in general, have very little interest in, and much less awareness of, Pakistan as a whole. Rajiv Dogra, who served in the Indian Consulate in Karachi, rightly lamented that, ‘for a people who claim shared ancestry, Indians are strangers to the pulse of Pakistan.’
15 The Indian media barely took note when, in the first week of March this year, India once again raised the issue of human rights violations in the province at the UNHCR. The ongoing assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, which is perhaps the most important provincial election ahead of the 2019 parliamentary election, cannot alone explain this aloofness.
16 At the risk of sounding flippant, one could argue that before it adopts a clear policy on Balochistan, the Indian Government should at least consider adopting a uniform spelling of “Balochistan” in its publications. At present, it is using at least two different spellings: Baluchistan and Balochistan.
Conclusion

The Indian Government is not likely to be driven by the unreasonable expectations of social media warriors and jingoistic sections of the media. India is certainly much stronger than it was in 1971 but, for the reasons discussed above, that does not mean that it can easily facilitate the secession of Balochistan. It bears reiterating that while Pakistan has failed to eliminate the Baloch insurgency and integrate the people, the Baloch have, on the other hand, failed to unite against the Pakistani state. The Baloch failed to make use of the apparent opportunity provided in the early 1970s, when the Pakistani state was in disarray after losing almost half of its territory and population. This longstanding impasse highlights the limits of how external intervention can help the Baloch people, who are divided across three countries and led by a fragmented leadership. The difficulty in uniting the Baloch factions should not be underestimated. Even in its smaller neighbours, India has only occasionally managed to put together favourable coalitions and such coalitions have not survived for long. Playing a similar role in distant Balochistan is going to be that much more difficult and the outcome even less predictable.

India should decide upon the scale of its engagement with the Baloch people through a clear-headed assessment of its long-term interests and its capability to intervene meaningfully in favour of the Baloch people. The government must not use the Baloch issue as a bargaining chip with Pakistan because instrumentalism and short-termism will harm the Baloch cause and reduce India’s overall bargaining power vis-à-vis its neighbour.  

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17 The government has hopefully not forgotten the easily avoidable embarrassment caused by its flip-flop on the issue of granting visas to Uighur activists.