

Is the Obama Administration Backing London's Plan To Dismember Pakistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

Jan. 8—Those who think Pakistan's only problem is the rising tide of jihadism in that country are grossly mistaken. There are indications that the London-led project to separate Balochistan from Pakistan has now been given an impetus. The objectives are many. To name a few: It would weaken a belligerent Pakistan; create a buffer between Pakistan and Afghanistan; secure a strong foothold along the southeastern borders of Iran; and undo China's long-term plan to link up the Karakoram Highway in the north to the Arabian Sea, by a land-bridge running through Balochistan.

The British plan to separate Balochistan is a longstanding one. Britain's Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) arranged a seminar on the Balochistan province of Pakistan in collaboration with the so-called Balochistan Rights Movement on June 27, 2006 in the House of Commons. The seminar was an one-sided attack on Pakistan for "colonizing" Balochistan and suppressing the Baloch people. Its chairman Stephen Twiggs, is a member of parliament from Enfield Southgate, who chairs Labour Friends of Israel (LFI), a Westminster-based pro-Israel lobby group working within the Labour Party. Twiggs has been involved with the FPC from its inception in 1998, and as a member of the board from 1998 to 2006. FPC wields considerable influence in Westminster, and is also consulted routinely by the Foreign Office and Downing Street on matters relating to the Middle East. Tony Blair is known to consult its members about Middle East policy.

In June 2006, Pakistan's Senate Committee on Defense accused British intelligence of "abetting the insurgency in the province bordering Iran [Balochistan]" (**Figure 1**), according to the Press Trust of India,

FIGURE 1



Aug. 9, 2006. Ten British MPs were involved in a closed-door session of the Senate Committee on Defense regarding alleged MI6 support to Baloch separatists. Also of relevance are reports of CIA and Mossad support to Baloch rebels in Iran and Southern Afghanistan.

U.S. military analyst Lt. Col. Ralph Peters, writing in the June 2006 issue of *The Armed Forces Journal*,

suggested that Pakistan should be broken up, leading to the formation of a separate country, “Greater Balochistan” or “Free Balochistan.” The latter would incorporate the Pakistani and Iranian Baloch provinces into a single political entity.

Fresh Cry To Break Up Pakistan

Although at the time, for the George W. Bush Administration, and later, the Obama Administration, the dismemberment of Pakistan had taken a back seat—not because Pakistan was an ally, but to ensure help from Islamabad’s security and military apparatus in finding a way out of the Afghan mess—it is likely that the option to create an independent Balochistan was very much on Washington’s agenda for a long while.

Now, as the relations between the United States and Pakistan have soured to a point that many in Washington consider that the differences between the two are irreconcilable, particularly on security matters, the pro-British Obama Administration has seemingly joined hands with the “break up Pakistan” faction in Washington.

U.S. expert on Balochistan, Selig Harrison, writing for *The National Interest* Feb. 1, 2011, urged the Obama Administration to create an independent Balochistan, and laid out the steps that the United States should take to make that happen. He said that Washington should do more to support anti-Islamist forces along the southern Arabian Seacoast. First, it should support anti-Islamist Sindhi leaders of the Sufi variant of Islam, with their network of 124,000 shrines. Most important, it should aid the 6 million Baloch insurgents fighting for independence from Pakistan in the face of growing ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) repression. Pakistan has given China a base at Gwadar in the heart of Baloch territory; an independent Balochistan would serve U.S. strategic interests, in addition to the immediate goal of countering Islamist forces.

Subsequently, M. Chris Mason, a retired diplomat with long service in South Asia, and a senior fellow at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington, in an article titled, “Solve the Pakistan problem by redrawing the map,” for the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on Dec. 21, 2011, let it all hang out. “The permanent solution to the Pakistan problem,” he wrote, “is not more of this chest-beating appeasement. The answer lies in 20th-century history. In 1947, when India gained independence, a British Empire in full retreat left behind an unworkable mess on both sides of India—called Paki-

stan—whose elements had nothing in common except the religion of Islam. In 1971, this postcolonial Frankenstein came a step closer to rectification when Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, became an independent state.

“The answer to the current Pakistani train wreck is to continue this natural process by recognizing Baluchistan’s legitimate claim to independence. Baluchistan was an independent nation for more than 1,000 years when Great Britain notionally annexed it in the mid-19th century. The Baluchis were never consulted about becoming a part of Pakistan, and since then, they have been the victims of alternating persecution and neglect by the Pakistani state, abuse which escalated to genocide when it was discovered in the 1970s that most of the region’s natural resources lie underneath their soil. Since then, tens of thousands of Baluchis have been slaughtered by the Pakistani army, which has used napalm and tanks indiscriminately against an unarmed population.

“Changing maps is difficult only because it is initially unimaginable to diplomats and politicians. Although redrawing maps is the definition of failure for the United Nations and the U.S. State Department, it has, in fact, been by such a wide margin the most effective solution to regional violence over the past 50 years that there is really nothing in second place. Among the most obvious recent examples (apart from the former Soviet Union) are North and South Sudan, Kosovo, Eritrea, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, East Timor and Bangladesh.

“An independent Baluchistan would, in fact, solve many of the region’s most intractable problems overnight. It would create a territorial buffer between rogue states Iran and Pakistan. It would provide a transportation and pipeline corridor for Afghanistan and Central Asia to the impressive but underutilized new port at Gwadar. It would solve all of NATO’s logistical problems in Afghanistan, allow us to root the Taliban out of the former province and provide greater access to Waziristan, to subdue our enemies there. And it would contain the rogue nuclear state of Pakistan and its A.Q. Khan network of nuclear proliferation-for-profit on three landward sides.”

Other Players in the Fray

Twiggs’ orchestrations in the FPC are not the only Israeli footprints in the new-fangled Great Game to create a buffer-state between Pakistan and Afghani-

stan, and Pakistan and Iran. The Iranian government accuses Jundullah, a terrorist group that has carried out a myriad of terrorist actions in the area bordering the Sunni-majority Balochistan-Sistan province of predominantly Shi'a Iran over the last decade. Jundullah came into existence in Balochistan in 2003, and Iran has claimed that it was working hand-in-glove with the U.S., Israel, and al-Qaeda, perpetrating acts of terrorism and supporting separatism. Jundullah planned its terrorist acts against Iran from military camps in Pakistan, Tehran claimed.

More evidence of Israeli involvement, however, becomes visible on the Baloch diaspora's website, Government of Balochistan (GOB) in Exile. The website says the Baloch diaspora established the newly formed "democratic, liberal and secular" government in Jerusalem in 2006. Its address is: The World Baloch Jewish Alliance Building: P.O. Box 5631: Jerusalem, Israel.

Another arch-enemy of Pakistan, India, which would like to weaken Islamabad's influence in Afghanistan and promote its own, has long been accused by the Pakistani security agencies of aiding and abetting the Baloch secessionists with a wink and a nod from Washington. New Delhi vehemently refutes those accusations.

Nonetheless, a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, leaked by the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks, disclosed that there was enough evidence of Indian involvement in Waziristan and other tribal areas of Pakistan, as well as Balochistan.

The *Express Tribune*, which is part of the *International Herald Tribune* group, reported on Dec. 3, 2010, that, according to the WikiLeaks cable, a draft of a presentation shared with the U.S. by Pakistan's National Security Advisor Mahmud Ali Durrani, stated that Pakistani parliamentarians were also told that India and Russia were involved in the insurgency in Balochistan. The *Express Tribune* reported that ISI chief Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha said that India has estab-



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The Gwadar Port in Baluchistan, Pakistan: China envisions the port to become a transshipment hub for the landlocked Central Asian States, Afghanistan, and Western China.

lished nine training camps along the Afghan-Balochistan border, where it is training members of the Baloch Liberation Army. He also claimed that "India and the UAE (reportedly due to its opposition to construction of the Gwadar Port) were funding and arming the Baloch. Pasha also claimed that the Russian government was directly involved in funding/training/supporting the insurgency."

The article also said "former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf had also raised the point with US officials in September 2007." According to a memo, he had asked the U.S. to intervene against "the 'deliberate' attempt of Kabul and New Delhi to destabilize Balochistan."

Why Balochistan?

President Obama has clearly stated that the drive to build up American military presence in the Asia-Pacific region stems from identifying two enemies of the United States—China and Iran. While Iran is the immediate one, China is potentially the greater *bête noire*.

Prior to, or after, issuance of those statements, a number of developments have occurred rapidly in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Besides Washington's

distancing itself from Islamabad, the U.S. has begun openly to court the Taliban, an avowed Wahhabite enemy of Shi'a Iran. Vice President Joe Biden has reminded us recently that President Obama had never identified the Taliban as an enemy. The Taliban has also opened an office in Qatar, a vassal-emirate of Britain, and where the U.S. has military installations; they hope to negotiate with the U.S./NATO to resolve the Afghanistan imbroglio, and to stake a claim in Kabul.

The American plan is seemingly to wean the Taliban away from Pakistan, and bring to power in Kabul a force that is avowedly anti-Iran. Since Iran has been identified by Obama and his Administration as its enemy, the enemy of Iran, the Taliban, may soon become Washington's friend.

In order to bring pressure on Iran, the U.S. has also tripled the size of the Shindand Air Base in western Afghanistan, about 20 miles from the Iranian border. Having been in the works since the Fall of 2010, completion of the "Far East Expansion" makes the base second in size only to Bastion Field in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The project is part of a \$500 million military construction effort to support Regional Command West, and turn Shindand into the premier flight-training base in Afghanistan. The expansion is slated to become the new living and work area for more than 3,000 Coalition forces and government contractors. Their relocation will make possible the construction of a new 1.3-mile NATO training runway, scheduled to begin early 2012.

So, what is now on Washington's mind? To begin with, the Obama Administration may have concluded that in order to "deal" with Iran, the U.S./NATO would like to create a "trouble-free" Afghanistan, which, in Washington's book, means putting Kabul, and, in essence, all of Afghanistan, under the control of the "friendly" Afghan Taliban and separating the group from its loose ties with Pakistan.

It also means that if and when Balochistan becomes

FIGURE 2
The Karakoram Highway (KKH)



an independent country, London and Washington will secure a direct access to Central Asia using the Arabian Sea. Such an arrangement would smooth U.S./NATO logistical requirements and pose a permanent threat to the security of Iran's Strait of Hormuz, a stone's throw from the western tip of Balochistan. In the interim, a vigorous secessionist movement unleashed within Balochistan will enable the anti-Iran crusaders to weaken Iran's northeastern region through irregular warfare.

In the long term, perhaps, the London-Washington objective is to prevent China from coming into the Arabian Sea in the south from the Karakoram Highway (Figure 2) in the North, thus establishing a supply line which would enable a faster development of its western part bordering

Central Asia. London and Washington believe that by preventing the economic development and security of western China, they would be in a position to set up satrapies on the southern flank of Russia, another potential major enemy.

The China Angle

One of the first indications of China's long-term interest in Pakistan was construction of the Karakoram Highway (KHH), or "Friendship Highway," jointly, by the governments of Pakistan and China, completed in 1986. It connects the northern areas of Pakistan to the ancient Silk Road. It runs approximately 1,300 km from Kashgar in the Xinjiang region of China, to Havelian in the Abbottabad District of Pakistan. An extension of the highway meets the Grand Trunk Road at Hasan Abdal, west of Islamabad. The highway cuts through the collision zone between the Asian and Indian continents, where China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India come within 250 kilometers of each other.

On June 30, 2006, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Pakistani Highway Administration and China's state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) to rebuild and

upgrade the KKH. According to S. Fredrick Starr, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, and chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, a new North-South phase of the corridor is underway. Examples of this thrust are: the rebuilding of the KKH; the new route running from southwest Xinjiang across Tajik Badakhshan; the planned U.S. highway bridge over Pansh, linking Tajikistan with Afghanistan's main north-south routes; the improvement of existing highways from the Urals and western Siberia to Central Asia, and their extension to Afghanistan; and developing road and rail routes from Iran's port of Bandar-Abbas, north across Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to Russia.

China, meanwhile, has integrated its western and central regions, and is now in a position to use the KKH and other links for expanding trade with West and South Asia. To further strengthen the KKH, a railway line alongside it, connecting Pakistan and western China, is now under consideration as an integral part of the TEC (Trade and Energy Corridor) project. The railroad is intended not only for trade but also to transport oil and gas by tankers, in case a pipeline is not a viable option. This rail track will be linked to Gwadar, where oil-refining and storage facilities are now under construction. (Source: "Prospects of Pakistan becoming a trade and energy corridor for China": Fazal-ur-Rahman.) In other words, China envisions the Gwadar Port to become a transshipment hub for the landlocked Central Asian states, Afghanistan, and Western China.

The second leg of China's Pakistan policy is the development of Gwadar Port on Pakistan's Makran coast in Balochistan, not far from the Strait of Hormuz. The Gwadar Port project got underway soon after 9/11. On March 22, 2002, China flew in Vice Premier Wu Bangguo to lay the foundation stone, and the first phase of the project was completed in 2005. The overall cost is estimated at \$1.16 billion; the Chinese contribution to finance the first phase was \$198 million, while Pakistan invested \$50 million.

Since the completion of Phase I, Pakistan has taken some interesting decisions. On Feb 1, 2007, Islamabad allowed the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) to sign a 40-year agreement with the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), one of the biggest port operators in the world, and its subsidiary Concessional Holding Company, for development and operation of the tax-free port and duty-free trade zone. The concessions given to the operators had already been approved by Shaukat Aziz,

former prime minister of Pakistan, on Jan. 23, 2007.

However, a decade-long war in Afghanistan, and rapid deterioration of security conditions within Balochistan have stymied progress in the development of the Gwadar Port. According to Pakistani Sen. Ismail Buledi, the Port of Singapore Authority is relying only on government cargo, thus grossly deviating from the master plan of the government. He added that the port should be given to China, so it can be operated according to the master plan. "If the Gwadar Port is marketed well, the regional ports will lose considerable business," he said. "It is time we took right decisions. Otherwise Gwadar Port may lose this opportunity to the fast developing Iranian port of Chabahar."

It is evident that in the Chinese scheme of things, the key to the success of its Pakistan policy lies with the Gwadar Port. In choosing a port site to link up with the KKH, Gwadar's location is ideal. It is on the Arabian Seacoast in the southwestern tip of Pakistan's strife-torn province of Balochistan, and faces the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz. However, it seems that both London and Washington are ready to use their muscles to prevent China from achieving that goal.

THE EURASIAN LAND-BRIDGE

An EIR Special Report

**'The New Silk Road'—
locomotive for worldwide
economic development**

(1997) 260 pages \$100
(EIR 96-007)

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