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Buffer Zone, Colonial Enclave or Urban Hub? Quetta: Between Four Regions and Two Wars

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Quetta is a city with many identities. It is the provincial capital and the main urban centre of Balochistan, the largest but least populous of Pakistan's four provinces. Since around 2003, Balochistan's uneasy relationship with the federal state has been manifested in the form of an insurgency in the ethnic Baloch areas of the province. Within Balochistan, Quetta is the main shared space as well as a point of rivalry between the two dominant ethnic groups of the province: the Baloch and the Pashtun.¹ Quite separately from the internal politics of Balochistan, Quetta has acquired global significance as an alleged logistic base for both sides in the war in Afghanistan. This paper seeks to examine different facets of Quetta – buffer zone, colonial enclave and urban hub – in order to understand the city's significance for state building in Pakistan.

State-building policy literature defines well functioning states as those that provide security for their citizens, protect property rights and provide public goods. States are also instruments of repression and the state-building process is often wrought with conflict and the violent suppression of rival ethnic and religious identities, and the imposition of extractive economic arrangements (Jones and Chandaran 2008). Quetta provides both a vantage point as well as a possible explanatory variable for the metric of state building not only in Pakistan but also, potentially, across the border in Afghanistan.

State building was a matter of low priority during the period of colonial rule in Quetta's hinterland compared with strategic, military and political concerns. This imbalance continued in the post-colonial period. Besides all of its other identities, Quetta represents an urban enclave in a predominantly tribal terrain. It provides a historical-institutional vantage point into the role of the city in state building, with implications for current and future projects of the various emerging stakeholders and elites – the Pakistani central state, provincial patrons, ethnic nationalists, Islamic clerics and international players in the region.

This paper argues that the multiple facets of urbanism in Quetta – as border city, as hub of provincial/ethnic political mobilisation, and as a site and source of inter-group rivalry – are closely interconnected, and that the main unifying theme between these three facets of Quetta is the history of institutional development in predominantly Baloch and Pashtun 'tribal' territories to the west of the river Indus. It is shown here that the 'contribution' of a city to state-building depends quite largely on which aspect of a city's identity became salient, given the interests and balance of power between various identifiable elites. The first section locates Quetta as a city between two wars – the Baloch nationalist insurgency in Pakistan and the conflict in Afghanistan. Quetta's own experience of political violence is analysed using the

¹ Baloch and Brahui ethno-linguistic groups have politically united for the cause of Baloch nationalism. Besides exceptional mention of Brahuis and Baloch as distinct categories, the term 'Baloch' is used in this paper to refer to the collective Brahui-Baloch proto-national identity.

available secondary data to identify major lines of conflict running through the city. This serves the purpose of drawing political linkages and discontinuities between Quetta and its hinterland, and also understanding the city's role in the wars surrounding it. The second section places Quetta in its geographical setting in order to highlight its historic and contemporary strategic and economic significance. The western boundary of the district touches Afghanistan, but it is the link with the Chaman-Spin Boldak border post to the north of Quetta leading to Kandahar that underlines the significance of the city's cross-border credentials. Lately, Quetta has become known internationally as a conduit and base camp for both sides of the war in Afghanistan: the US-led forces and the Taliban. The third section provides a context for understanding the urbanity of Quetta through a description of migration and settlement in the city. As the colonial enclave and urban hub, political representation and economic participation are points of contest between different communities living in Quetta. A history of migration and settlement expands the understanding of ethnic and urban identity in the city, which play an important role in the urban political sphere. The fourth section is the last of the descriptive sections, and hence ties the city's political and institutional makeup to the state-building project. Formal and informal institutional developments in Quetta and Balochistan are traced and contrasted in order to provide a background to the state's interest and formal presence in various administrative aspects. Sections five and six explore different facets of Quetta with relevance to the politics of state building in its vast hinterland: the former introduces the elites involved in negotiating political settlements and proposes that a political economy of rent framework provides a powerful interpretation of Quetta's significance for the main local, provincial and national interest groups; the latter analyses Quetta's position as a border, colonial and urban enclave in a terrain dominated by tribal and kinship networks with reference to the state-building project. In conclusion, it is argued that the state-building project as driven by the centre envisions a certain role for the city to play. Eventually, the currently conflict-ridden and contested Quetta can be transformed to be a source of resilience and cohesive state building if the political will of the state-central elite wishes.

Between Two Wars

Quetta straddles two significant conflicts that have shaped the priorities of regional and global powers with respect to Pakistan, Afghanistan and their expansive neighbourhood over decades. One – the war in Afghanistan – is well known internationally; while the second – the Baloch nationalist movement – has played a critical role in internal Pakistani politics on several key turning points in the state's history. Both conflicts are deeply implicated in propelling and disrupting rival attempts at state building. A brief overview of the two conflicts is provided here – with more detail on the Baloch nationalist movement since it is relatively little known and understood outside the region. The immediate security impacts of these conflicts on Quetta are analysed using available secondary material on politically-motivated violence affecting the city. This analysis is used to draw conclusions about Quetta's interaction with the two long wars in its hinterland.

Afghan wars since 1979

Although war and instability have been persistent features of Afghanistan's political history, it is useful to take the Soviet military intervention in the country in 1979 as a cut-off point. It is not that the period before this date did not witness political stability and conflict within Afghanistan, or indeed Balochistan's and Pakistan's implications in that conflict. The post-

1979 period, however, marks a qualitative shift both in terms of the scale of violence and instability and the extent of cross-border involvement (Edgar 2003).

It is useful, also, to divide the post-1979 period into five distinct sub-periods: 1979 to 1989, 1989 to 1992, 1992 to 1996, 1996 to 2001 and then since 2001. While many factors link all of these sub-periods with one another, there is value in identifying the main protagonists and their relations with one another. The first period (1979 to 1989) is clearly marked as a face-off between Soviet and Soviet-backed Afghan forces and Afghan *mujahideen* groups backed by Pakistan, US, Saudi Arabia and others. By the end of this period vast parts of Afghanistan lay waste, and a qualitatively new relationship had come into being between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Quetta saw the influx of hundreds of thousands of Afghan displaced persons, and (after Peshawar) became the second most important conduit for Afghan Mujahideen (UNHCR 2005).

The second phase, between 1989 and 1992 – after the withdrawal of Soviet forces but the continuation of the conflict in the shape of a civil war between rival Russian and US/Pakistan-backed factions – brought with it the realisation that the war in Afghanistan and its connection with Pakistan could carry on for a considerable period of time. The collapse of the Najeeb government in Kabul and the internecine civil war between rival *mujahideen* factions marked the third phase from 1992 to 1996. The Afghan displaced persons remained in and around Quetta, and the end of this period saw active use of Quetta (and Chaman) as a base from which an emerging Taliban force challenged the *mujahideen* groups in Kandahar (Rashid 2001).

In the last two phases – Taliban ascendancy and the civil war between the Taliban and their rivals grouped within the Northern Alliance (1996 to 2001); and then the war between the Taliban and western-led forces (2001 to date) – Quetta continued to play an important but under-stated role. Conspicuous attention was drawn to it with frequent mention of the ‘Quetta Shura’ of the Taliban, and infrequent but high profile attacks on US and NATO supply convoys on the Karachi-Quetta-Chaman route (Canfield 2009).

Baloch nationalist movement

The Baloch nationalist struggle has culminated in two widespread insurgencies (1973-1977, and 2003 onwards) and three localised uprisings in 1948, 1958 and 1963.² All were guerrilla movements that were eventually crushed by the Pakistan army. The first was launched when the army moved to overthrow the Khan of Kalat on treason charges. The second insurgency followed the imposition of One Unit, under the leadership of the deposed Khan of Kalat’s brother.³ In October 1958, the Pakistan Army moved against the insurgents and arrested Khan. This generated violence throughout the province. A guerrilla movement was organised by Nauroz Khan, who was arrested, and some of his comrades were hanged on charges of treason (Harrison 1981a). In 1963, following the building of garrisons in the province by the Pakistan army, Sher Mohammad Marri organised a new guerrilla movement. The insurgents

² Most accounts use the year 2005 as the starting point of the most recent Baloch insurgency. We choose to use the year 2003 since our review of conflict in Quetta based on news reports (see Tables 1 and 2) illustrates an escalation of incidents of violence directed against security forces and symbols of state apparatus. Generally, sabotage of infrastructure, targeted killings and the use of rockets, bombs and grenades for ambushing security forces are methods employed by the Baloch Liberation Army and other Baloch nationalist armed wings.

³ In 1955, the Government of Pakistan integrated West Pakistan’s four provinces into one administrative unit so as to counter the demographic majority of East Pakistan.

took to various base camps from where they ambushed and sabotaged the army. The protagonists accepted a ceasefire in 1969 at the dissolution of the One Unit Scheme 1970. Around two thousand people (including military officers) died during this (ICG 2006).

The second major insurgency was between 1973 and 1977, when the Pakistani government imposed emergency rule and ousted the civilian government of Balochistan, imprisoning principal Baloch leaders on sedition charges. The army sent in 70,000 troops to fight close to 50,000 militants, and enlisted the help of Iran to quash the uprising, which resulted in heavy losses on both sides: 3,300 troops and 5,300 militants were killed in battle (Harrison 1978). Many of the militants belonged to pro-Soviet left wing groups who opposed overwhelming centralisation of Pakistan's federal system and the constant interference of the centre in provincial affairs. Economic grievances played an important role as the natural resources of the province were directly exploited by the centre without any redistribution of the wealth created. The period also coincided with the increasing sphere of communist influence in neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as Tehran's warning to the federal government to suppress nationalist demands before they spilled over to their country, or destabilised the already fragile Pakistani state (Harrison 1981b).

More recently (2003 onwards) a province-wide low-intensity armed conflict began between the Pakistani security forces and Baloch militants. The situation reached a crescendo in 2006 when a symbolic head of Baloch resistance, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, was killed by the government in an army operation.⁴ Bugti was a traditional tribal chief who at times enjoyed good relations with the Pakistani central state. He had served as a governor of Balochistan as well as its elected chief minister, and had also cooperated, over the decades, with petroleum companies with field operations in his gas-rich district. Bugti's relations with the federal government broke down in 2005 and tension escalated to such a point that the octogenarian leader took refuge in a hideout in the mountains in Kohlu district, from where the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) carried out armed resistance. According to Baloch nationalists, thousands of people have been taken by the armed forces and detained in undisclosed locations. By the end of 2005, it was reported that close to 84,000 people belonging to the Dera Bugti district were displaced as a result of the conflict. These displaced people lived in makeshift camps in various districts, including Quetta (ICG 2007).

Bugti was hailed as a nationalist martyr by the entire Baloch political spectrum, and his killing sent a wave of outrage across Baloch society (Gazdar 2006). It sparked off the biggest Baloch nationalist urban protest across Baloch-dominated towns and cities throughout the province and beyond. Riots ensued and the provincial capital was paralysed for several days. During the army's operation in Balochistan in 2005 and 2006, the police reported 488 instances of rioting in Quetta (Gazdar et al. 2009). Subsequent protests – at the killings of Baloch leaders or on other conspicuous issues – have drawn similarly widespread responses in Baloch urban areas suggesting a significant urbanisation of Baloch protest.

⁴ Nawab Akbar Bugti was a tribal chief and politician. He had held important positions in the provincial government (1958, 1973-1974 and 1989-1990) and actively supported the Baloch nationalist cause. Bugti's fort in Dera Bugti was placed under siege by the armed forces for two months in 2002 on accusations that he supported saboteurs engaged in blowing up gas pipelines and disrupting supply to the rest of the province and country.

Violence in Quetta

There are a number of organisations that report on politically motivated violence and human rights abuses in Pakistan. Most of these organisations rely on media reports in the first instance, and follow up investigations in selected cases. Data compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) were used to assemble statistics on political violence in Quetta.⁵ Table 1 summarises the number of bomb attacks in Quetta from 2003 onwards. These attacks peaked in 2005 and 2006, coinciding with the period when the BLA and other similar organisations were actively engaging Pakistani security forces in Kohlu and elsewhere. Virtually all of these incidents were related to the Baloch insurgents, and the targets were installations such as gas pipelines, railway lines and the electric grid infrastructure. By way of comparison, it is useful to note that in Balochistan as a whole over two thousand rockets were fired in 2006 (HRCP 2007). The scale of such military-style operations in Quetta, therefore, was minuscule in comparison with the rest of Balochistan.

Between 2003 and July 2009, 315 people were killed and 782 were injured in various incidents of violence.⁶ The BLA claimed responsibility for most of the killings,⁷ which targeted officials of the Pakistan army, Frontier Corps,⁸ intelligence agencies and members of the Punjabi community (seen by the militants as representative of the Pakistan army, which is comprised mostly of Punjabis), and members of the Hazara and Baloch communities (on suspicion of spying for the government against Baloch interests). According to security experts, the number would have been much larger had the three militant groups not declared a ceasefire in September 2008 (Daily Times, January 3, 2009).

Table 1: Violent Incidents by Type

Source: Authors' compilation based on SATP data timelines from 2003 to July 2009.

Year	Rockets fired	Bombings	Hand grenades
2003	7	22	1
2004	4	41	3
2005	20	48	2
2006	10	41	11
2007	0	29	18
2008	3	21	8
Jul-09	2	4	7

There was a visible shift, therefore, in the tactics of the Baloch insurgents from around 2006 onwards when they began to target individuals instead of carrying out rocket and bomb

⁵ SATP findings were cross-checked against other reporting organisations, notably the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP 2007), and were found to be more inclusive than the latter.

⁶ Authors' calculation based on SATP data. According to news reports, most incidents of protests or acts of violence by Baloch occur close to Saraib Road, a Baloch-dominated area.

⁷ Other prominent militant separatist groups include Baloch Republican Army (BRA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF).

⁸ The Frontier Corps in Balochistan is dominated by ethnic Pashtuns. Its function is to support policing and is a paramilitary force stationed across the province. It is widely perceived as an enemy by Baloch militants, as it is the most conspicuous manifestation of the presence of the central state apparatus in most parts of the province.

attacks on infrastructure installations. It is possible that in the post-Bugti situation the recourse to targeting for assassination individual members of the security forces and civilians from ethnic groups marked an escalation of the violence by the Baloch insurgents. There were few voices among Baloch political leaders who could openly condemn the killing of ethnic Punjabis and other civilians (Daily Times, June 3, 2008; Interview, Yasmin Lehri, October 13, 2009).

Table 2: Total Lives Lost in Various Acts of Violence

Source: Authors' compilation based on SATP data timelines from 2003 to July 2009.

Year	Government officials and security personnel	Non-official civilians			Total
		Shia	Migrants from elsewhere in Pakistan	Ethnic/sectarian origin unknown	
2003		68		1	69
2004	3	48		11	61
2005		5		2	7
2006	14		4	14	32
2007	38		2	10	50
2008	22	12	3	16	52
Jul-09	15	20	4	5	44
Total	92	153	13	59	315

The tally of deaths caused by acts of political violence in Quetta suggests, however, that the Baloch insurgents are only partly responsible. Nearly half of all deaths in acts of politically motivated violence were of Shia Muslim civilians who died in suicide attacks or targeted assassinations carried out by Sunni extremists.

Sectarian violence in Quetta is also ethnic by nature. The Hazara community living in Quetta is predominantly Shia, while the Baloch and Pashtun are mostly Sunni. Since 2001, the nature of violence has taken a sectarian and indirectly communal turn, with non-state actors targeting the Shia community. According to calculations based on SATP data, between 2003 and 2004, 116 Shias were killed and 215 were injured in various acts of violence that targeted religious processions and ceremonies. The majority of the victims belonged to the Hazara community. The organisations that have taken responsibility include those such as the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*.

Although it is widely acknowledged that the perpetrators of anti-Shia (and anti-Hazara) violence are often from Baloch communities, there is little direct linkage between these acts and the Baloch insurgency. Rather Hazaras and Baloch informants are both keen to point out that anti-Shia and anti-Hazara is the hallmark of the Afghan Taliban and their allies and supporters in Pakistan.⁹ Despite their apparently shared enmity with the Pakistani security forces, there is a deep history of suspicion between Baloch nationalists and pro-Taliban militants (Pakistan Observer, July 30, 2009). The links between the Pakistan army and the Taliban have not been forgotten, and it is still believed that the latter were encouraged to counter secular Baloch nationalism (Interview, Malik Siraj Akbar, October 12, 2009). The Baloch further feel that the government is consciously supporting Islamisation as a counter to Baloch nationalism through investment in *madrassahs* instead of secular education (Grare 2006).

⁹ Evidence from fieldwork suggests that in recent years the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* has attracted membership from Baloch districts such as Mastung and Kalat. While these are Baloch dominated districts, the Hazara Democratic Party's leadership separates these actors from the broader Baloch Community. This forgiving attitude is not repeated for Pashtun members of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, and the Pashtun community is charged with supporting these miscreants. This mistrust towards Pashtun stems from years of suffering prejudice at the hands of the Pashtun in Afghanistan.

Paradoxically, despite its multiethnic and multi-sectarian make up, Quetta has historically witnessed relative peace between its major communities. One possible reason given for the absence of open conflict between Baloch and Pashtun residents is that, by and large, they do not inhabit the same spaces. The area outside of the city centre and cantonment is divided along clear ethnic lines.¹⁰ The leaders of the two largest groups – the Baloch-Brahui and the Pashtun – go the extra length to try and prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions into violence. No major flare-up has occurred between these two communities since the late 1980s, when a dispute over transport routes led to widespread violence.

The conspicuous change is with respect to the position of migrants and their descendants from outside Balochistan – particularly ethnic Punjabis – and the Shia and Hazara in recent years. The targeting of these two groups (the first allegedly by Baloch insurgents, and the latter by pro-Taliban forces) manifests a clear and bloody – albeit still restrained – entry of the two wars into Quetta.

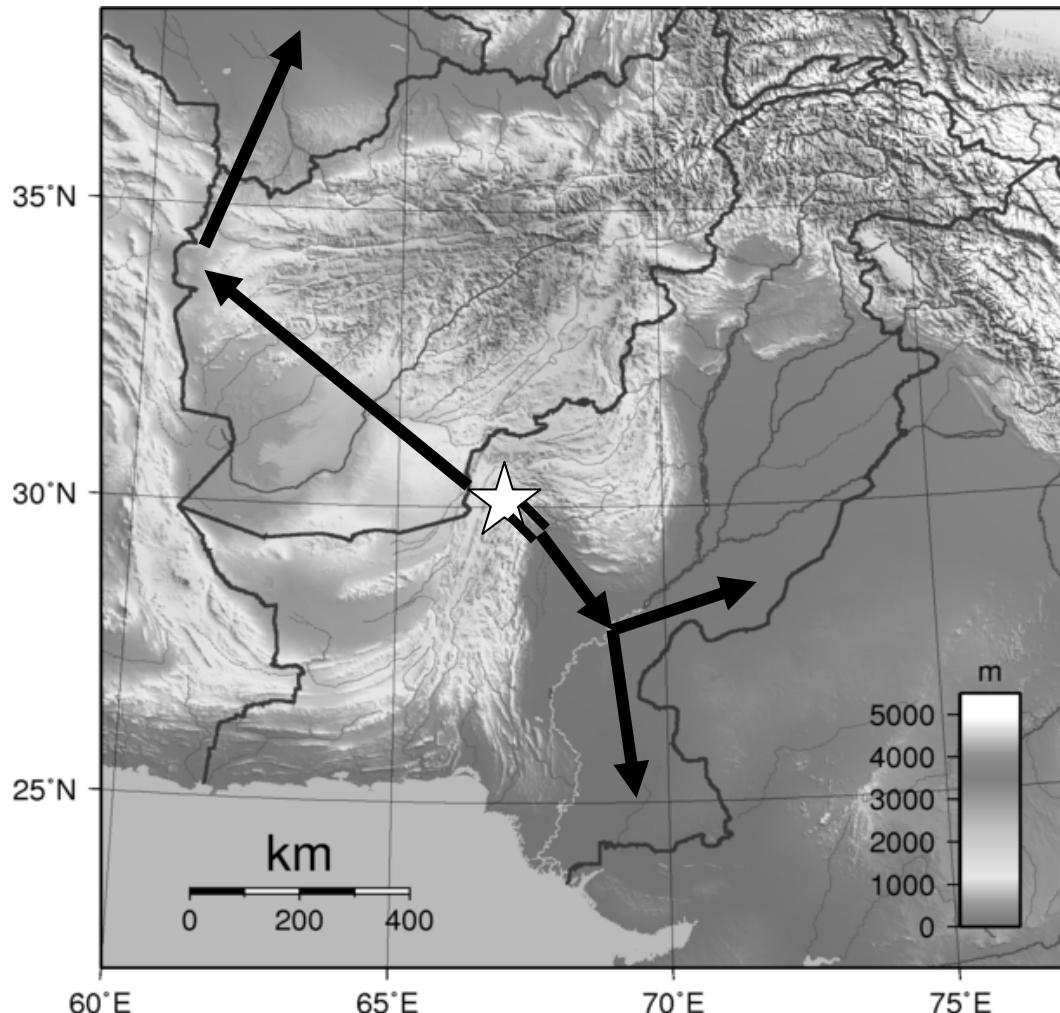
Between Four Regions

Natural transit point

Quetta owes its origins in the eighteenth century to political and military developments in Persia, India, Afghanistan and Kalat. It is located at the eastern tip of an expanse of lowland stretching from north-western Afghanistan down to the northern part of Balochistan. The lowland is bounded by the Hindu Kush range of central Afghanistan to its east, the Suleiman ranges to its south, and the Iranian plateau to the west. It serves as a passage between modern Iran (and historical Persia), the eastern Caspian and Central Asia into the Indian plains. The Quetta valley is just above the Bolan Pass in the Sulaiman range that opens into the Kachhi plains, which form part of the Indus basin. The Kachhi plains lead into Sindh and onwards into western India in the south, and to Punjab and north-central India to the east. Quetta guards the most accessible land route between Kandahar in western Afghanistan and the Indus plains and beyond – and therefore between Iran and Central Asia and the South Asian sub-continent (Map 1).

¹⁰ During fieldwork, the authors observed that Baloch, Pashtun and Hazaras mostly live in largely exclusive community settlements. This is especially true for new settlements on the outskirts of the city centre. Settlers or Punjabis, however, do not have such an exclusive settlement and are spread over the various residential areas in Quetta.

Map 1: Topographical Map of Balochistan showing Quetta's position vis-à-vis Transit Routes
 [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_Topoography.png. GNU Free documentation license, version 1.2. Arrows and symbols added by authors]



The valley's strategic location between major historical regions of economic and political importance meant that it was a frequently used route for trade, transit, military movement and population flows. Yet the valley itself remained relatively obscure until the colonial period. The other major land route between the Indus floodplains and Central Asia – further north through the Khyber Pass, along the Peshawar-Kabul axis – was by far the more important one in terms of economic, political and strategic considerations.

There are several reasons for the relative obscurity of the Indus-Bolan-Kandahar route (through Quetta) compared with the northern Peshawar-Khyber-Kabul alternative. The Khyber Pass leads directly onto the Punjab plains and onwards to the north Indian heartland that was the focal point of several large and powerful empires. From the Bolan route travellers or invaders would have to then traverse the Thar desert before reaching the resource-rich Gangetic plains. Another difficulty with the southern route is the relative sparseness of water and vegetation along its length. Trade caravans and armies could not rely on frequent replenishments. Perhaps a related factor was the presence along the Bolan and below it of Baloch tribes, at least since the fifteenth century, and the perception that they would offer resistance to military movement and extract tolls from trade and transit (Naseer 2000).

These factors may have contributed to the relative unimportance of the Indus-Bolan-Kandahar passage – and hence the historical obscurity of Quetta. The route was nevertheless not entirely without significance. There is much evidence of strong trade connections between the lower Indus basin (Sindh, particularly Shikarpur) and Kandahar and Herat into Persia and Central Asia in the pre-colonial period (Markovits 2000). Even if it was of secondary significance to the imperial politics of Mughal India, this route did represent an important connection between Central Asia, Persia, western Afghanistan and the Indus.

Political and ethnic boundary

A political factor – perhaps linked to geography – that was important from at least the early eighteenth century onwards was the existence of two distinct tribal confederations to the north and south of the Quetta valley. Quetta represented the southern-most reach of the Afghan kingdom and the northern border of the Baloch-Brahui Kalat state. The valley was nominally under the tutelage of Kalat, but only just. Its border or buffer status between these two major political entities has left an imprint on the region's current ethnic demography. While Quetta itself is not dominated by any one ethnic group, districts all around it are either predominantly Pashtun (north and north-east) or Brahui-Baloch (west, south and south-east).

Brahui and Balochi are distinct languages and early British population censuses regarded the two as separate ethnic groups. In the evolution of Balochi ethnic nationalism, however, the term Baloch has been taken to encompass Brahui and Balochi speakers. Not only Brahuis but members of a number of other linguistic groups in the southern part of Balochistan chose to be identified as part of the ‘Baloch nation’, and as distinct from ethnic Pashtuns and other ethnic communities of the region. Brahuis are, of course, the most prominent non-Balochi speakers to have engaged in Baloch nationalist politics. The two groups are politically united and have joined ranks for adding voice to their demands for provincial autonomy in the current political scenario. It can be argued that their identification as Baloch acquired official recognition when the 1998 Population Census of Pakistan reported all Brahui-speakers as Balochi-speaking (Government of Pakistan 2001a).

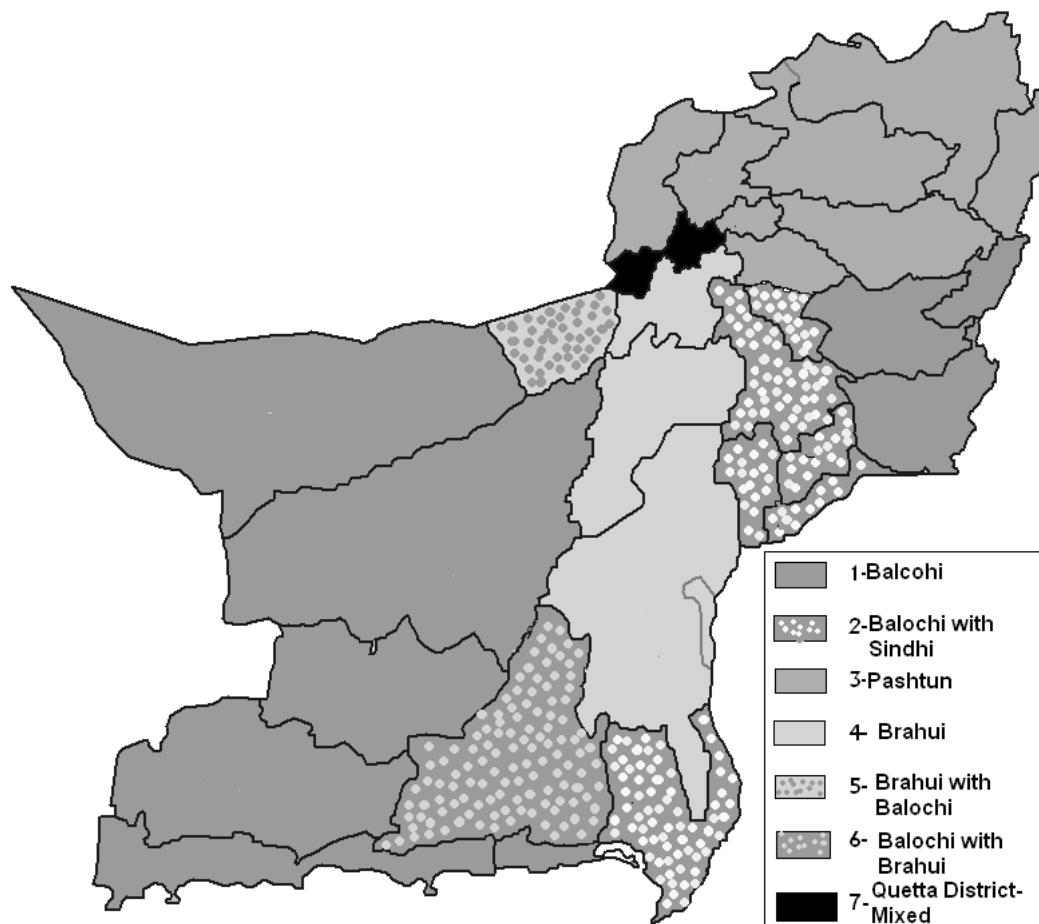
Quetta district is in a valley surrounded by hill ranges. The valley floor is around 1,200 metres above sea level, while the surrounding hills all rise to above 3,000 metres. Gaps between hill ranges are natural routes for road and railway links. The northern Takatu hills lead on to relatively plain terrain towards the Chaman-Spin Boldak border with Afghanistan, and onwards to Kandahar. The gap in the Mashlak range in the west opens out into Nushki and from there to the Iranian border at Zahidan. The Lak Pass is a gateway through the Chiltan range in the south that separates Quetta from Mastung. Below Mastung there are alternate routes towards the Bolan Pass and Kalat respectively. The Zarghun and Murdar ranges to the east need to be circumvented in the north in order to reach accessible routes towards Punjab via Loralai and Barkhan.

There are many contending claims relating to ethnic demography in Balochistan and the ones that relate to the Baloch-Pashtun divide are particularly conspicuous. Baloch nationalists often argue that there is a conspiracy to deprive the Baloch of their demographic majority in ‘their own home’, which is Balochistan. Some Pashtun nationalists claim there is no such majority to begin with. Interestingly, however, these rival claims do not question the ethnic domination of the other group in any particular part of the province other than Quetta. There is a relatively clean ethnic segregation between the two groups along district boundaries. This

can be illustrated easily using the population census of 1998, even though some aspects of the census remain controversial (Map 2).¹¹

Map 2: Linguistic Map of Districts in Balochistan

Source: Authors' compilation based on district census reports 1998.



Even within the Baloch-Brahui ethnic group, Quetta's geographical location acts as a narrow corridor linking the Balochi-speaking areas of eastern and western Balochistan, which are otherwise separated by a north-south Brahui-dominated corridor. The Khanate of Kalat emerged in the central highlands that divide the western and the eastern Baloch. The western Baloch region extends into the Sistan-Balochistan province of present-day Iran. To the east, the areas of Baloch domination reach out into the Indus basin, within districts in northern Sindh and southern Punjab.

According to the 1998 population census no single ethnic group dominated Quetta (see Table 3). Pushto-speakers were the largest single group with 30 percent of the population. The 1998 census merged Balochi and Brahui as one group and found their total number to be

¹¹ In an interview with the authors, PkMAP leader Ahmed Achakzai narrated that the Pashtuns boycotted the 1998 population census, because they anticipated under-reporting. It is often claimed by Pashtun as well as some non-Pashtuns that the actual Pashtun population of Quetta currently exceeds 2.5 million. This appears to be an exaggeration, given our own estimates based on census data that the entire population of the city was a little over 1.5 million.

somewhat smaller than the Pushto-speakers. There were significant minorities of Urdu and Punjabi speakers, as well as a large number of ‘others’, most of whom are presumed to be Persian-speaking Hazaras. The Urdu and Punjabi speakers and other migrants or their descendants from other parts of Pakistan (and undivided India) are often referred to as ‘settlers’ in Balochistan. In Quetta, the ‘settlers’ are a politically significant group that historically consisted of all people of Indian/Pakistani origin who were deemed not to be indigenous to Balochistan.

Table 3: Population of Quetta by Ethnic Group in Percentages

Source: Population census reports.

	1901	1911	1921	1951	1961	1981¹²	1998
Pashtun	30.1%	20.3%	11.4%	21.7%	27.2%	36.5%	30.0%
Baloch	1.9%	1.8%	0.9%	3.8%	4.2%	5.1%	27.6%
Brahui	16.1%	18.6%	13.4%	14.5%	14.7%	17.1%	
Other indigenous to Balochistan	3.0%	0.2%	1.5%	8.9%	8.3%	8.8%	17.5%
European	7.3%	7.0%	6.7%	0.3%	-	-	-
‘Settler’		52.1%	66.1%	50.7%	45.5%	32.5%	25.0%

Natural resources and rent economy

In comparison with the more densely populated regions of Pakistan, Balochistan’s economy remains under-developed. Also in contrast to these regions – where economic activity is dominated by agriculture, industry and service sectors – Balochistan’s economic prospects rest on the exploitation of minerals, marine resources and its strategic location.¹³ In other words, all of the key sources of potential economic development are also sources of economic rent, and rents are closely linked with geography. Balochistan’s internal geo-politics and Quetta’s position within Balochistan needs to be understood within this economic context.

The Dera Bugti district of Balochistan led gas production in Pakistan for several decades. Although new gas fields have been found in other provinces, Balochistan continues to contribute around a third of Pakistan’s total output of natural gas. There are also thought to be significant unexploited natural gas and oil resources in the Dera Bugti, Kohlu and Khuzdar districts of the province. All of these districts are in the Baloch regions. Other significant mineral resources include copper, gold, zinc and uranium – also all in the Baloch regions. There are already significant international investments in copper and gold mining in the western district of Chaghi, and in zinc extraction in Dhadhar in central Balochistan. Other less valuable but nevertheless significant resources include marble and coal, which are more evenly distributed across the province.

Apart from land-based natural resources, Balochistan enjoys the largest share of Pakistan’s coastline. Its coast extends for 770 kilometres, making up 70 percent of Pakistan’s coastline, but contributes only 30 percent of the landed catch, indicating potential for substantial growth

¹² The 1981 population census reported the languages spoken data by households. There was no comparable data set in the 1972 census report.

¹³ The only part of the province where intensive crop farming is significant is the Kachhi plains. Industrial development is mostly limited to Hub, which is a suburb of Karachi.

(ADB 2004). The newly commissioned deep-water port in Gwadar, on the south-western corner of the province, is only the third modern port available to Pakistan. The coastline offers possibilities of trade and transit for land-locked Afghanistan and central Asia. Pakistan's importance as a potential energy corridor between the major energy-rich and energy-deficient regions of Asia is largely due to the territorial expanse of Balochistan. Much of the 2,700 kilometres of the proposed \$4 billion Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline happens to be in Balochistan.¹⁴ In the current scenario, the Chaman-Kandahar route has significance as a supply route for US and allied forces in Afghanistan.

Balochistan's economic potential is clearly tied up with its geography – both in terms of natural resources as well as the possibility of trade and transit. The development of this potential immediately raises questions about the appropriation and distribution of economic rent. Balochistan's economic development is highly dependent on the realisation of economic rents and the sources of rents are disproportionately located in the ethnic Baloch-Brahui regions of the province. Within Balochistan, Quetta also enjoys economic significance since it straddles two important land routes – between the coast and Afghanistan and central, and between Punjab and the Iranian frontier. But in comparison with other parts of the province, particularly the mineral-rich south, east and west, and the coastline, Quetta and its immediate surroundings are relatively minor potential contributors to the province's economic development.

Quetta is significant, however, if the institutional arrangements for rent appropriation and distribution are located at the provincial level of government. Not surprisingly, the tussle between provincial and federal government over the ownership of economic rents represents one of the most important political issues facing Balochistan and its relations with the rest of Pakistan. The constitution of Pakistan regards oil and gas as federal subjects. Ports and shipping are also within the domain of responsibility of the federal government. While non-petroleum minerals are formally under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, here too the federal government has become an active stakeholder in international joint ventures in some projects.¹⁵ Political mobilisation in Balochistan, particularly among the ethnic Baloch, is unsurprisingly dominated by questions concerning the 'ownership' of natural and strategic resources.

Whose City?

Settlement of Quetta District

The political significance of Quetta's geography can be understood through its administrative territorial division. Land-revenue administration formed the original basis for the division of territorial jurisdiction across South Asia (before and during British rule). A territory was classified formally as rural or urban depending on its relative economic reliance on agriculture and the size and concentration of its population. The smallest territorial unit in rural areas is the revenue village or *mouza*. Land administration in these areas has been managed historically by the provincial land-revenue department, which has a presence at the sub-district level. Urban areas are formally under the administration of a municipal authority,

¹⁴ The pipeline was originally conceived as a trilateral deal between Iran, Pakistan and India. Currently, the agreement considers continuing the pipeline to India at an appropriate time. It envisions 1,100 km of pipeline in Iran, 1,000 km in Pakistan and 600 km in India to transfer 150 million cubic meters of gas a day

¹⁵ A major copper-gold extraction joint venture at Saindak in the Chaghi district, for example, has the federal rather than the provincial government as the main local partner.

which in most cities progressively acquired land from the provincial government for urban development.

Quetta district consisted of two sub-divisions – Saddar and City. All of Saddar and part of the City sub-division were designated as rural. Even within the City sub-division, urban Quetta consisted of under a third of the total area. However, the urban segment, consisting of Quetta Municipal Corporation and the Quetta Cantonment, accounted for around three-quarters of the district's population. It is these two areas – namely the municipality and the cantonment – that are of primary interest in terms of urban demography, economy and politics. Around 65 percent of the district population was in the municipal area while another 10 percent resided in the cantonment (Table 4).

Table 4: Population of Rural and Urban Quetta District

Source: Population census reports.

	Rural	Urban	Cantonment	Municipality	Total
1891	N/A	18,802	7,500	11,302	-
1901	21,313	24,584	11,067	13,517	45,897
1911	23,179	33,922	16,901	17,021	57,101
1921	20,495	49,001	21,781	27,220	69,496
1941	17,929	64,476	28,016	36,460	82,405
1951	25,031	84,343	28,094	56,249	109,374
1961	35,437	106,633	27,140	79,493	142,070
1972	94,354	158,026	20,367	137,659	252,380
1981	95,847	285,719	40,877	244,842	381,566
1998	194,804	565,137	76,091	489,046	759,941

Devolution reforms across Pakistan in 2001 merged urban and rural areas into district governments. Quetta, like a number of other significant cities, was designated as a city-district government. City districts are divided into towns, which are further sub-divided into Union Councils. The reforms replaced municipal government with a three-tier administration – city, town and Union Council – with municipal functions shared between these three levels. The new governance system, however, did not significantly alter the division of land administration. The devolution reforms were closely associated with the military regime of General Musharraf (1999-2008), and some aspects of these reforms might be maintained in the post-Musharraf period. It is possible, nevertheless, that the unification of the entire district's civil municipal administration under the City District Government of Quetta (CDGQ) will be retained.¹⁶

The new division of Quetta district, into Zarghun and Chiltan towns, and then further into 70-odd Union Councils, has been guided by the need for creating relatively equal local electoral units. Given the high concentration of the district population within the old municipal limits, the former urban segment has been divided into the two towns; Zarghun, named after the hill ranges to the east of Quetta, has inherited most of the territory to the east of the railway track that runs in the north-south direction through the district; while the Chiltan hills ranges to the

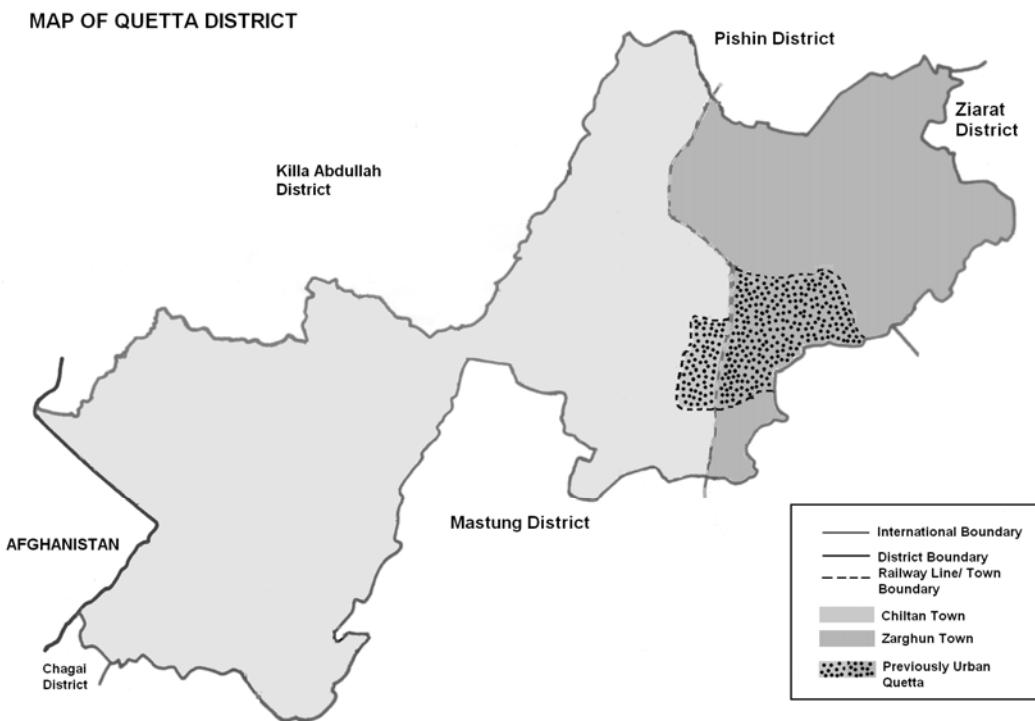
¹⁶ The cantonment areas of urban Quetta are not under the formal jurisdiction of the city government.

south of the city have provided the name for the second town west of the railway line (Map 3).

The new administrative geography of Quetta obscures the historical political significance of the municipal and cantonment areas. The fact is that the former urban segments of Zarghun and Chiltan towns have more in common in terms of institutional development than the former urban and rural segments within the respective towns. The former urban segment of Quetta – the municipality as well as the cantonment – was carved out by the British colonial state from land conventionally thought to ‘belong’ to tribes through a combination of negotiation and coercion. The territory formally designated as ‘urban’ in land-revenue administration terms, therefore, could be regarded as the geographical manifestation of the colonial state in an otherwise tribal region. The colonial state likewise populated its urban enclave with migrants (also referred to as ‘settlers’) from beyond the immediate tribal hinterland, in order to maintain its functional effectiveness.

Map 3: Zarghun and Chiltan Towns and previous Urban Quetta

Source: Authors' sketch within district boundaries.



The residual effects of the colonial project can be seen in the current ethnic demography of Quetta district and its urban segment. While ‘indigenous’ groups – Pushto and Balochi (and Brahui) speakers taken together – formed a comfortable majority in the district as a whole, they were a minority in urban Quetta (see Table 5). Settlers are commonly associated with the governmental machinery, both colonial and post-colonial, and taken together they are more numerous than the Pushto as well as Balochi (and Brahui) speakers.

Table 5: Total and urban population of Quetta, by ethnicity (1901 and 1998)

Source: Authors' calculations based on Hughes-Buller (1989) and Government of Pakistan (2001b)

	1901		1998	
	Total	Urban	Total	Urban
Pashtun	30.1%	11.0%	30.0%	23.7%
Baloch/Brahui	18.0%	2.3%	27.6%	24.6%
Other indigenous	3.0%	1.5%	17.5%	20.7%
Settler	41.5%	71.8%	25.0%	31.0%
European	7.3%	13.4%	0.0%	0.0%

There have been steady changes over the decades that have eroded urban Quetta's status as a colonial enclave surrounded by a tribal hinterland. Some of the surrounding 'rural' parts of the district have become urbanised due to migration, and the 'indigenous' populations have been augmented by other groups. Urban Quetta itself was progressively 'indigenised' as Baloch and Pashtun populations increased, and gained greater political power through representative government as well as employment in government departments. Even the presumption that land administration in urban Quetta was insulated from tribal arrangements came to be challenged as property values increased and various groups asserted their historic communal claims.¹⁷

Migration Trends from Census Data

The national population census identifies any person who was previously a resident in a district other than the district of enumeration as a migrant. In 1998, nearly ninety thousand persons or around 12 percent of the total population in Quetta were recorded as migrants. Around two-thirds of the migrants originated from outside Balochistan, with Punjab contributing the largest share. Many of those recorded as having come from outside Pakistan are migrants from India who arrived in Quetta at or after independence in 1947.

Population-census data suggest that migration from within Balochistan was not a significant contributor to Quetta's population growth. Only a third of all migrants, or around 4 percent of the total population at the time of the most recent census, was from other districts in Balochistan. The patterns of internal migration are, nevertheless, noteworthy. Migrants from Balochi/Brahui-speaking districts outnumber those from Pushto-speaking districts by nearly two to one. This is despite the fact that Pushto speakers originally dominated Balochi/Brahui speakers in Quetta. But Pushto-speaking areas outside Balochistan – namely NWFP and FATA – contributed as many migrants to Quetta as the Pushto-speaking districts of Balochistan.

¹⁷ The Quetta Development Authority finds it very difficult to enforce bylaws and regulations because employees fear 'tribal associations' of those involved in breaking regulations (Interview, Yousaf Khan, October 14, 2009).

Table 6: Migrants in Quetta by place of origin (1998)

Source: Authors' calculations based on Government of Pakistan (2001b)

	Number	Per cent
All migrants	89,946	--
Migrants with identified place of origin	81,981	100.0%
Balochi/Brahui-speaking areas within Balochistan	19,388	23.6%
Pashto-speaking areas within Balochistan	10,406	12.7%
Pashto-speaking areas outside Balochistan	9,687	11.8%
Punjabi/Seraiki-speaking areas outside Balochistan	27,611	33.7%
Sindh	7,767	9.5%
Other countries	7,122	8.7%
Place of origin was not identified	7,965	--

National population-census data only enumerate certain classes of foreigners, such as those who qualify as legal long-term residents. In actual fact Quetta has witnessed significant demographic change that is not captured by the national census statistics. The most notable omission is that of displaced people and migrants from Afghanistan post-1979 who were first registered as refugees and currently enjoy the right to live in Pakistan through a renewable agreement between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the UNHCR.

The population of Afghan origin has been the subject of extensive political debate and controversy. Baloch nationalists claim that Pashtun Afghans have been accommodated in Quetta as a deliberate policy of changing the ethnic demography of the city. Pashtun nationalists have denied this charge, while also at times defending the presence of Afghan Pashtuns in the province and the city. There are minor controversies also about the size of the Hazara population and its augmentation due to Afghan migration (Interviews, Quetta, October 11-14, 2009).

In 2005, UNHCR carried out a census of Afghans in Pakistan with the collaboration of the Pakistan government. According to the UNHCR census there were over 3 million Afghans in Pakistan. Of these 337,000, or around 11 percent, were in Quetta. The estimated population of Quetta in 2005 based on the national population census was just over a million. Quetta's population including persons of Afghan origin, therefore, was 1.3 million and every fourth resident was an Afghan. The UNCHR census provides information about the ethnicity of the Afghan population at the provincial but not the district level. Assuming that the ethnic breakdown of Afghans in Quetta was the same as in Balochistan as a whole, it is possible to estimate the impact of Afghans on the ethnic demography of Quetta.

An overwhelming majority of the Afghans in Quetta, as in Pakistan as a whole, were Pashtuns. They were followed by Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, and other smaller groups including Turkmen and Baloch. It is significant, however, that some of the minority ethnic groups among Afghans were disproportionately represented in Balochistan. While 25 percent of all Afghans in Pakistan were in Balochistan, over three-fifths of the Afghan Baloch and Uzbek, and over two-fifths of the Hazara, were in the province. The ethnic demography of Quetta changes significantly if the ethnic Afghan population is taken into account. Pushto-speakers emerge as a clearly dominant group, constituting over two-fifths of Quetta's population, and are twice as numerous as Balochi/Brahui-speakers (see Table 7). The ratio of

settlers (those speaking Punjabi, Urdu, Seraiki and Sindhi) also declines to a sixth of the population. ‘Others’ who include Persian-speaking Hazaras retain their share – given that the Afghan population also includes a large number Hazaras.¹⁸

Table 7: Ethnic demography of Quetta (excluding and including Afghans)

Source: Authors’ calculations based on Government of Pakistan (2001b) and UNCHR (2005)

	Excluding Afghans	Including Afghans
Pushto	30.0%	42.0%
Balochi/Brahui	27.6%	21.7%
Punjabi	16.0%	12.0%
Urdu	6.0%	4.5%
Seraiki	1.6%	1.2%
Sindhi	1.4%	1.1%
Other	17.5%	17.6%

The most recent official census of 1998 is seemingly outdated since it also ignores the recent migrant influx from drought-stricken districts in Balochistan. As mentioned above, the extended drought (from 1997 to 2002) affected the livelihoods of a majority of the pastoral population who were dependent on livestock, agricultural and horticultural farming.¹⁹ The drought affected 23 of the 26 districts of the province, of which seven districts (Khuzdar, Kharan, Chagai, Mastung, Kalat, Loralai and Killa Saifullah), situated in northern and central Balochistan and close to Quetta, were reported to have been worst affected (Oxfam 2001). As a result, the drought led to intra-province migration to larger cities, including Quetta. While official migration data is not available, a widely held opinion on the recent increase in the population of Quetta is that it is a result of immigration following the 1997-2002 drought (Interviews, Quetta, October 12-14, 2009).

Afghan Migrants and Quetta Politics

The influx of Afghan migrants into the city was a major demographic and social phenomenon, but also a test of Quetta’s resilience as a city. The population of the city increased by a third within a period of several years, and the incoming migrants were mostly poor people from rural areas with little experience of urban living. The Afghans also potentially endangered the sometimes fragile ethnic balance of power – through significantly shifting the numerical argument in the favour of the Pashtuns.

In the event, while Afghan migration into Quetta was matter of concern and even alarm to many of the city’s stakeholders, open conflict between migrant and host communities was relatively rare (Collective for Social Science Research 2006). The Baloch nationalist narrative was the most suspicious of Afghan migration, the state’s motives for encouraging this population movement and its implications for Baloch future in the city and the province. Pashtun political elites were divided and at times inconsistent in their attitudes towards the Afghans. They welcomed fellow Pashtuns from across an artificial border. The pro-Soviet

¹⁸ The language spoken by Hazaras is known as Hazaragi which is a variety of the Persian language

¹⁹ It was estimated that the drought affected as many as 7,810,521 ruminants, and the quality of ground water severely deteriorated (Oxfam 2001).

secular nationalists, however, also found fault with the migrants when they were seen as tools of Pakistani and US interference inside Afghanistan. The Islamists among the Pashtuns, while wary of the ethnic nationalist overtones of ‘owning’ the migrants due to their ethnicity, nevertheless celebrated their arrival as a sign of Islamic solidarity. For the settler communities – i.e. Quetta residents with origins outside Balochistan – the Afghans were merely one additional factor contributing to the indigenisation of the city.

A more detailed examination of Afghan social networks in Quetta, and the relations between different groups at the community level, reveals a complex interplay of factors (Collective for Social Science Research 2006). The class and social identity divisions among Afghans in Quetta closely mirrored those in the ‘host’ communities. The small number of middle-class Afghans were accommodated in the few formal settlements emerging in the city at the time as tenants, and even property owners. Some groups, such as the Hazara, found refuge among their ethnic kinfolk who were well-integrated into the city. Quetta Hazaras who are descendants of migrants from an earlier era have become an entirely urbanised community with relatively high levels of education and entry into professions and formal sector jobs. The newly-arrived Afghan Hazaras also began to get assimilated along these lines, and integrate into urban and political life through alliances with Baloch political parties.

Many of the Pashtun and Baloch migrants who were classified as Afghan refugees were semi-nomadic tribes who had traditionally travelled around Afghanistan and the Indus plains via Balochistan. Some became urbanised in refugee camps on the promise of food rations and other subsidised provisions. Both the Baloch and Pashtuns have similar codes of social behaviour in which the tribe, kinship and lineage determine social inclusion and exclusion (Swidler 1992). Solidarity is premised on loyalty to tribal codes and conflict is played out through the same. These unwritten codes also determine rules of negotiation, dispute resolution and stakes over common resources. Tribal affiliation transcends territory and is invoked and reciprocated across distances (Gazdar 2007b). For these reasons, most of the Afghan refugees collectively migrating to Quetta were absorbed into the city with relative ease.²⁰

In many cases, Quetta was the chosen destination because migrants had relatives settled there (either recently or during earlier conflicts). Once migrants reached Quetta, their existing social networks arranged for their accommodation and livelihoods. There were many cases where Afghans had revived old and defunct social ties based on ancient histories of migration or kinship relations. Ethnic identities were often trumped by patron-client relations. For example, the settlement in Jungle Bagh, which was home to five hundred Afghan Pashtun migrants, was developed on land owned and controlled by Baloch Raisani chiefs, who allowed Afghans to settle on paying a fixed rent per household. In some cases, the inhabitants have succeeded in attaining Pakistani identity documents and acknowledged the help of their landlords in this regard. For the landlords, the migrants could be a source of votes, and certainly a base of support in case of conflict with rival local tribes (Collective for Social Science Research 2006).

The fact that the nature of the political transaction was well-known to Afghans and local Pashtuns and Baloch alike facilitated such contracts. The close familiarity between the groups also meant, however, that while Afghans easily bypassed formal Pakistani laws and regulations of nationality and residence – through acquiring identity documents for example –

²⁰ Various interviews conducted during fieldwork for the Afghans in Quetta research show that most migrants choose their destination based on family ties and experience of previous migration to the same locality.

there was no possibility for an Afghan to pass himself off as a Pakistani in front of an ‘indigenous’ Pashtun observer. A Pashtun tribesman had precise – even genealogical – knowledge of the territorial origins of other tribesmen regardless of the international border. Baloch ethnic anxieties about an inflated Pashtun presence in Quetta is somewhat ameliorated by the assurance that the customary institution of hospitality and refuge does not extend to permanent settlement even among their Pashtun counterparts (Gazdar 2007a).

State-Building in Tribal Hinterland

From Afghan to Brahui and British Control

The valley that now comprises Quetta was conferred as ‘*shal*’, or a gift, by the founder of the Afghan state, Ahmed Shah Durrani, to the mother of Naseer Khan, the founder of the Kalat tribal confederacy in 1751. The backdrop to this political gesture lay in the late seventeenth century when the Persian Safavid Empire controlled Kandahar, and Brahui tribes had begun to unite politically around Kalat. Ahmed Shah Durrani had served as a military commander under the Persian king Nadir Shah, in his campaigns against the declining Mughal power of north-central India. Naseer Khan, in turn, had fought under the command of Ahmed Shah in these wars. When Ahmed Shah rose against the Persian Safavids in order to assert his control over Kandahar, Naseer Khan supported him. The Quetta, or Shal as the gift came to be known, was in consideration of this alliance (Hughes-Buller 2002).

Despite having significant strategic value, Quetta never became a centre of power, which remained concentrated in Kandahar to the north and Kalat to the south. This changed after the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-1842). The Quetta fort and the valley were leased to the British army by the Khan of Kalat during their mobilisation for the war in 1839; and the British army advanced from Punjab and set up its base at Quetta. Having been defeated in Kabul as well as been subjected to increasing difficulties in Quetta, the British army retreated in 1842 and the Khan of Kalat regained political and administrative control of the city. The British however continued diplomatic and political engagement with the Kalat State. They signed a treaty with the Khanate in 1854, which pledged an offensive and defensive alliance. The treaty permitted deputation of British political agents (in Kalat) during the next twenty years and allowed safe passage to British expeditions passing through the Bolan on their way to Kandahar and Afghanistan (Bruce 1900).

Between the two Afghan wars, the Khanate developed the political, administrative and judicial institutions of a functioning state, and these survived its interaction with British colonial power. The core territory of Kalat was divided administratively into two main provinces: northern Sarawan and southern Jhalawan. The Khanate was a true tribal confederacy with tribes forming its primary units of governance. Tribal organisation easily lent itself to military organisation and this, in turn, formed the basis on which the khanate was structured. The political status of a tribe was partly a function of its contribution to the armed force of the khanate. The larger and more powerful tribes with bigger military contributions and pledges were recognised as leaders (Marri 2005).

‘Forward Policy’ and formalised informality

Meanwhile, Russian advances in Central Asia coupled with the Khan of Kalat’s failure to protect British passage in Balochistan propelled the British into revising the treaty with the

Khanate. The new treaty was part of the ‘Forward Policy’, a political objective of which was to curb the autonomy and ambitions of the Kalat Khanate. The treaty of 1854 was revised in light of the Forward Policy and was superseded by the treaty of 1876. Under the revised terms, the British were allowed direct involvement in the Khanate’s internal matters. The British government became the arbitrator of disputes between local chiefs and the Khan, and British troops were to be located in the Khan’s territory. A British Political Agency was established at the Kalat court, and the Khan was tenable to act in subordinate co-operation with the British government. British economic interests were served through expanding trade possibilities, control of trade routes, land revenue, *octroi* and magistracy in Quetta Tehsil. In return, the collection of transit fees on caravans remained in the hands of Kalat officials, and the Khan’s subsidy was also greatly enhanced (Azad 2003).

British political architecture in the province was influenced by the so-called ‘Forward Policy’, which had been invented in the 1880s by an officer of the Punjab provincial service Robert Sandeman who was stationed in the ethnically Baloch south-western Punjab region and combined his administrative functions with those of policing the frontier (Bruce 1900). Faced with resource constraints and political resistance to direct colonial expansion on the part of the British Indian government, Sandeman devised a strategy of bringing entire tribes and their territories under the sovereignty of the empire through a combination of recognition, negotiation, intrigue, patronage and coercion. But the main innovation of the ‘Forward Policy’, according to its authors, was that it did not require the establishment of the paraphernalia of colonial governance in regions where sovereign control was nevertheless deemed essential in order to assert the territorial boundaries of the empire.²¹ The formula to divide core strategic locations – where garrisons, border posts, railway junctions and telegraph stations might be sited – from the rest of the hinterland proved cost-effective.

The colonial state’s interests were protected by the ‘A’ areas, which were populated by direct crown subjects from Britain or British India, and enjoyed similar legal, political and civil rights as their counterparts elsewhere in directly ruled parts of British India. For the rest, a system of security and patronage through tribal chiefs was established, based on collective responsibility and sanctions. The normal security duties of the ‘B’ areas were devolved to locally raised tribal levies, which were managed through recognised chiefs. The system of collective responsibility was formalised through the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) of 1901. The law enshrined the traditional *jirga* as a system for dispute resolution.²²

Although there were changes and reforms in these arrangements over time, some of their basic features have survived independence, the establishment of Balochistan as a full province and even the extension of franchise (Azad 2003). This is not only the case in Balochistan: its north-eastern boundary touches the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where the legal reach of the state is even less direct; and there are large parts of the North-West Frontier Province that are governed as Provincially Administered Tribal Areas with arrangements similar to Balochistan’s ‘B’ areas. These institutional peripheral territories comprise over half of the land area of Pakistan, and much of the country west of the Indus river.

²¹ These border regions were unlike similarly self-governing regions in the interior of the empire where native states were formally recognised. In the border regions, where the empire was vulnerable to intrusions from the north and the west, the colonial government could not risk putting up with even the pretence of native rule. The border was far too strategic to be entrusted to the likes of Kalat, which might have been available as a proxy.

²² The *jirga* is a traditional legal system of dispute resolution whereby tribal elders and notables (nominated by the deputy commissioner or political agent) form a tribunal to resolve differences keeping in mind customary laws.

In Balochistan, the reform of British-era laws and informal systems of governance came in fits and starts. The Khanate of Kalat was browbeaten into submitting to the Pakistani central state in 1948, when it was merged into the country along with its erstwhile vassal states. In 1955, all regions of present-day Balochistan except for the coastal territory under Oman's control were merged into the West Pakistan province. In administrative terms Kalat was incorporated into the British Baluchistan system of 'A' and 'B' areas. The Oman territory was acquired in 1958; and finally, in 1969, Balochistan emerge as a province and a federating unit of Pakistan as a single entity.

While some aspects of the 'Forward Policy' were eroded through reforms over time, others became less relevant through institutional developments in electoral representation and constitutional-legal interpretation by courts. Local security arrangements remained in the hands of tribal levies until 2004.²³ This is when the division of the province between 'A' and 'B' areas was formally abolished and a provincial police force was planned. General Musharraf's military regime owned this change as a sign of its commitment to the institutional integration of the province into the mainstream. The abolition of the 'A' and 'B' area distinction was, interestingly, part of the conditionality attached to an Asian Development Bank loan to the provincial government (ADB 2004).

In the first instance, the proposed unification of policing in the province was to take the form of all districts being incrementally declared as 'A' areas.²⁴ It was not clear if other options – such as merging 'A' and 'B' areas into an entirely new system responding to the specific policing requirements of the province – were to be considered at a later stage. Quetta, the urban hub, was obscured by Quetta, the colonial enclave, which was spreading out into the hinterland.

There was broad opposition to the plans to convert 'B' areas into 'A' areas in general and the abolition of the local tribal levies in particular. The provincial assembly passed a resolution opposing this move, which was technically a policy of the provincial government. Provincial patrons, ethnic nationalists, and Islamic clerics on both sides of the Baloch-Pashtun ethnic divide were of the view that there were merits in the levies system and great dangers in the imposition of an alien police system. The experience of 'A' areas in Balochistan was widely cited, where the police force was seen as being corrupt, and mostly made up of recruits from outside the province.

The debate on the status of policing in 'A' and 'B' areas inside Balochistan was suggestive of possibilities of a new political settlement with the potential for formalising of an individual-based social contract between state and citizen. It is striking that the provincial assembly – an institution based on modern individual citizenship – emerged as an important source of opposition to the proposed reform. Moreover, even if the opponents of the abolition of the levies did so on narrow self-serving grounds – because they as local patrons were party to the management of the tribal levies – there were frequent references to concepts such as 'community policing', indicating openings for the reform of the levies system along somewhat modern lines.

²³ In Balochistan, FCR was abolished in 1976. Various judgments were passed by the higher courts since the 1950s, but none were fully implemented. The Abolition of Sardari Act was also passed in 1976. All of Balochistan was converted into 'A' areas through an executive notification in 2004 (Azad 2003).

²⁴ A stage-wise plan for the conversion of most of the 'B' areas into 'A' areas was announced at the instance of the federal government (Dawn News, November 5, 2004).

Whatever the real motivations behind the attempted abolition of ‘B’ areas, there was clearly some misjudgement on the part of the central state elite (and the Asian Development Bank) about the nature of the political settlement sustaining the ‘B’ areas. This political settlement included, among other things, the informal acceptance of collective tribal claims to property rights over territories where customary usufruct was practiced. The award of licenses for mining concessions, for example, are invariably made to local tribal elites, even if the land in question has never been surveyed and leased to anyone, and thus is technically the property of the provincial government.

Quetta and British Baluchistan

In 1878, the British demonstrated their absolute control of affairs in the face of a belligerent attitude of the locals in areas surrounding Quetta (which the treaties placed under their control), by forcefully taking the Quetta fort which had been under the control of the Khan of Kalat’s representative. The administration of the district was taken over on behalf of the Khan of Kalat, and Quetta became the administrative centre of the territories under British control (Bruce 1900).

Quetta was an important strategic army base during the second Afghan War, and an appropriate road and rail infrastructure was developed from Sibi to Quetta (Temple 1880). British influence in the province spread further following the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879, under which the Afghan Amir ceded his districts of Pishin, Sibi, Harnai and Thal Chotiali, Panjpai, and the sub-tehsil of Quetta district. In 1883, the British leased the Bolan Pass, southeast of Quetta and Quetta Tehsil in perpetuity from the Khan of Kalat on an annual ‘quit rent’ of Rs. 25,000. The present-day districts of Nushki and Chaghi were also brought under direct British colonial control in order to ensure the safety of the road and rail link from Quetta to the Iranian border and beyond. In 1884, British control over the native states strengthened when the position of a permanent political agent to be based in Kalat was agreed between the Khan and the British government.²⁵

In 1887, all of regions that had come under the direct control of the British Indian Empire (through treaties with the Kalat and Afghan states) were eventually consolidated into a single administrative unit called ‘British Baluchistan’.²⁶ Quetta became the administrative and military seat of the province. In 1895, the border between Afghanistan and Balochistan was demarcated by the British. In 1901, the British policing and judicial system for British Baluchistan and tribal areas was regularised through the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901. The Act formalised the *jirga* system for settlement of disputes referred by the authority to the deputy commissioner. The council of elders was to report findings to the deputy commissioner who would accordingly decide the case.²⁷

²⁵ As a matter of policy, the ‘native states’ under British suzerainty were considered to be in India, but not in British India (Meyer et al. 1909).

²⁶ The British military and government personnel stationed at Quetta still faced occasional raids and attacks from neighbouring tribal areas, but these were eventually subdued by negotiation as well as force. The British entered treaties with tribal chiefs whereby they were granted power and autonomy over internal affairs while not interfering with the British Government’s military access to Afghanistan and strategic control of the frontier. In lieu of this control as well as safe travel and trade passage, the British paid subsidies to these tribal chiefs – a policy known as the Sandeman System (PIPS 2008a & b).

²⁷ The law was revised in 1938 to limit the jurisdiction of customary laws in areas that excluded all railway lines and stations, municipal and cantonment areas and large towns, bazaars and administrative headquarters. In these,

By 1911, the British commanded direct or indirect control over all areas in present-day Balochistan by signing a series of agreements and treaties with the rulers in Afghanistan and Kalat, and with various independent and quasi-independent tribal chiefs. The nature of control at that time was, however, more administrative and political than legal, and there was little hesitancy among the British officials in admitting that in legal terms ‘matters [were] in a bit of a muddle’ (Bray 1989). The 1911 census considered the ‘province’ of Balochistan to be one natural division, which consisted of three categories: the native states of Kalat and Las Bela, British Baluchistan and the Agency Territories. While the latter two areas were under the direct control of the British, they had different political and legal histories.

The areas in Agency Territories were either obtained on lease from Kalat, or occupied at the request of independent or quasi-independent tribesmen. At that time the term ‘British Baluchistan’ was used only for areas ceded by Afghanistan at the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879. It should be noted that in the 1911 census of population, ‘British Baluchistan’ and ‘Agency Territories’ were classified as separate entities. Nevertheless, in the reporting of the data all British-controlled areas were simply categorised as ‘districts’ without making any distinction between British Baluchistan and Agency Territories. Within the British Baluchistan, there was a further subcategory of ‘tribal country’, which encompassed Marri and Bugti tribal areas. It was this area where the writ of the British Indian state was minimal: no revenue was collected from the tribes and there was little or no direct interference in the internal affairs of the tribes. Administratively, the Mari and Bugti tribal country was under the control of the political agent in Sibi, and the territory was administratively part of the Sibi district (of British Baluchistan). Within a decade of the 1911 census, the term ‘Agency Territories’ almost disappeared from official documents. This is evident in the 1921 census, where the province of Balochistan is shown to be consisting of: i) Administered Territories; ii) Indian States; and iii) Tribal Country.²⁸

Post-colonial state building

British Baluchistan was incorporated in Pakistan in 1947 through a referendum in which Shahi Jirga members, and members of the Quetta Municipal Committee (except its ex-officio members) participated within the electoral college. The Khan of Kalat convinced the British government as well as the Muslim League (the ruling party in Pakistan) of his decision not to integrate the states of Kalat, Makran, Kharan and Las Bela with the proposed Pakistan. In 1948, Kalat’s councils of representatives voted for accession, though this did not prevent the breakout of a small revolt for independence. Following accession, the previously independent states came to be known as Balochistan States Union. The amalgamation of British Baluchistan into Pakistan and the accession of the Balochistan States Union resulted in grievances that threatened the stability of the new state. Afghanistan claimed rights over the districts transferred to the British through various treaties and encouraged Pashtun separatist movements, and Kalat and its vassal states and tribal areas persistently rebelled for unwillingly acceding to Pakistan.²⁹ Their bitterness deepened in 1955: with the formation of

government law would apply to offenses. The policing of these areas was divided between levies and the police force, with the levies in tribal and less populated lands (‘B’ area) and police force in administrative centres and populated lands (“A” area) (Azad 2003).

²⁸ The term ‘Administered Territories’ is a substitute for the combination of what was described earlier as British Baluchistan and Agency Territories. Likewise, the term ‘Indian State’ has been used for what was ‘Native State’ in 1911 (Bray 1989; Meyer et al. 1909).

²⁹ Tribal chiefs of eastern Balochistan and the Derajat who had remained fiercely independent of Kalat through

the One Unit, all provinces as well as ‘princely states’ in western Pakistan were merged into a single West Pakistan province.

The political and administrative institutional structure of Quetta remained unchanged through the transition from British rule to Pakistani administration. Quetta and Pishin were classified as one administrative district and remained so until 1975. A chief commissioner was appointed by the federal government to manage provincial affairs. For decision making, there was no elected legislature, but the chief commissioner could consult the *Shahi Jirga*.³⁰ With the evolution of the constitution and eventual creation of Balochistan in 1970, administration and governance structures also evolved.

In 1970, present-day Balochistan came into being as a full province and federating unit of Pakistan with a governor, a chief minister and a provincial assembly. Quetta has since then been the provincial capital. According to the FCR 1901, most of the Quetta district fell into the definition of an ‘A’ area, which made it subject to the laws of the state. In 1976, the administrative structure was strengthened by the formation of the Balochistan High Court.³¹ This coincided with the formal abolition of the privileges of tribal chiefs (or *sardars*) through a presidential ordinance.³² This move was largely taken as a step to limit the powers of chiefs that dissented with the government, as a clause in the ordinance institutionalised grant of favours from chiefs on consideration when seen necessary.

Post-colonial institutional development can be broadly viewed from four perspectives: economic, judicial, political and social. The starting position at the moment of decolonisation could be characterised as one in which informal institutions dominated, or were formalised, over much of Balochistan, while formal ones prevailed in Quetta. The trajectory of change, however, moved more quickly in the case of some types of institutions than others.

Land, though abundant, is the most important economic resource besides human capital in Balochistan. The colonial land settlement – or the system of assigning private property rights – which had comprehensive reach in the directly administered parts of the British Indian Empire, was virtually non-existent in Balochistan. It was claimed that Quetta had been partly surveyed and settled, and it was on the basis of such a settlement that the government’s land acquisitions could take place. As a result, while tribal customs prevailed in assigning property rights in land throughout the province, institutional bodies tasked to administer land development and use existed in Quetta. However, lately the Quetta Development Authority has largely become defunct (when these functions were placed under the City District Government Quetta), and officials explain how land development has by and large been halted because of an unwillingness to interfere in lands with ambiguous tribal claims of ownership (Interviews, Tahir Muhammad Khan and Yousaf Khan, October 12-14, 2009). By and large, in the face of formal institutions, enforcement is lacking for fear of upsetting the provincial elites, who have stakes in the rural segments of Quetta district.

its history, petitioned unsuccessfully around the same time, to be merged into the Khanate.

³⁰In contrast, the previous Balochistan States Union (formed through a merger of the Khanate of Kalat with the vassal states of Mekran, Las Bela and Kharan) was administered by its own assembly and laws.

³¹Prior to this, Quetta lay under the jurisdiction of the Sindh High Court (Azad 2003).

³²Sardars (tribal leaders) served as mediators between their tribes and the government in lieu of being granted favours by the government. The *sardars* also had a vital role to play in the *jirga* system, as they constituted of the *Shahi Jirga*.

The main problem with the colonial land settlement (or its absence) was that in Balochistan most of the uncultivated land was regarded as communal property by convention. Tribal and clan identities were closely tied with well-defined territories, which were jealously guarded through tribal rivalries and feuds. The British system was neither flexible enough to accommodate such expansive communal claims, nor interested in becoming party to inter-tribal rivalries. Post-colonial Pakistan also continued with this reluctance to update or modernise this key economic institution. Therefore, in other parts of the province (such as the tribal areas and former territories of Kalat), entirely different systems of land holding exist.

Law and order, security and judicial functions had also been devolved in the colonial system to local tribes. As mentioned above, in the post-colonial setup there was steady progress in establishing formal security and judicial mechanisms at the higher levels. There was also a steady erosion of informal judicial functions through legislation and the development of constitutional law at the higher courts. Local policing, however, continued to be organised along the lines of the tribal-based system inherited from British times. There was also considerable accommodation for traditional arbitration in the formal judicial system.

The one area where formal institutional development moved the quickest was in matters relating to political representation. The demand for political representation – based on universal franchise – was already strong in the decades leading up to decolonisation. Kalat had acceded to these demands to some degree by setting up a bicameral assembly that functioned in an advisory capacity to the Khan. The assembly was elected, even though franchise was limited. In British Baluchistan, however, there were no formal representative organs. The Quetta Municipal Committee came closest to such a thing, and it too was nominated and not elected. In any case, the nominated members of the committee were disproportionately drawn from ‘settler’ and other non-indigenous groups.

Political parties began to be established early on, with the first major organisation named as the Kalat State National Party (KSNP), having been founded in the 1930s. This party had a modern political agenda, and its nominees were able to win many seats in the Kalat lower house. Political activity peaked in the run up to the partition of India, where the fate of the region was to be negotiated. Many of the leaders of the KSNP were also supporters of all-India parties such as the Indian National Congress and the Indian Communist Party. Today, the KSNP can be correctly regarded as the ‘parent’ of virtually all political parties currently active in Balochistan. Later, the Muslim League was established to represent a Muslim nationalist cause in Balochistan, and it quickly became a party of the more conservative element of the patronage-based elite. Mainstream national parties, like the left-of-centre Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the right-of-centre Pakistan Muslim League (PML), have a small presence in the province, and are widely known to co-opt strong candidates from among the traditional elite rather than mobilise on the basis of an ideological position.

The first ever general elections based on adult franchise were held in Balochistan in 1970 – and in this regard Balochistan was not a laggard behind other regions of West Pakistan. These elections were hotly contested with strong ideological positions on all sides. Quetta had emerged as one of the primary centres of political debate not only in Balochistan, but in Pakistan as a whole. In the 1970s, political cadres organised themselves into groups, reading circles and student organisations. Today, Quetta continues to surpass other districts in Balochistan in terms of political activity. As the political hub of the province and home to increasing numbers of Baloch and Pashtun migrant students, intellectuals and workers, inhabitants have very clear political associations and alliances. Many ethnic nationalists –

both Baloch and Pashtun – continue to be influenced by left-leaning ideas and not surprisingly by the idea of national self-determination.

While the nationalist movements remain strong and continue to attract followers, their main rallying call is based on a politics of ethnic grievance. There are few voices, if any, within the ethnic-nationalist movements that directly address issues in social and economic development. Many regard such questions as diversions from the revolutionary nationalist struggle. It is interesting to note that elections and party politics have remained competitive over much of Balochistan despite the strong presence of traditional elites. The traditional elites are stronger in districts that have longer tribal histories, as opposed to those more accustomed to some form of representation (i.e. previously Sarawan and Jhalawan) (Interview, Malik Siraj Akbar, October 12, 2009). In recent years there has been fragmentation of the Baloch nationalist movement due to the revival of patronage-based politics as well as central state repression (Gazdar 2007a).

Contests and Elites

Pakistan, Afghanistan and ‘external’ powers

Although Pakistan and Afghanistan entered the world’s imagination as sources of security challenges after the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, this period marks only the latest phase of conflict in the region itself. The swift removal of the Taliban regime from Kabul in late 2001 by US-led forces, and the rise of a Taliban and Al-Qaeda led insurgency against these forces in Afghanistan soon after, are only the most conspicuous features of the current situation. Analysis of the present smoothly merges into history, as an almost continuous chain of events can be found linking today’s players and their moves with decisions taken decades earlier. It has been common to invoke original strategic theses such as geopolitics and ‘the Great Game’ in order to understand current realities. The chronological boundaries between various wars are blurred and this contributes to a historicised view of Afghanistan and Pakistan (nowadays AfPak) among some influential circles.

The historicised view is helpful in some respects, and it is certainly an advance over the understanding of war and politics as though the past did not matter. But a historical perspective might do better than simply provide links between successive events. It is speculative to find common strands between the motivations of Mughal India, the British Indian Empire, post-1947 Pakistan, and the current US-led effort in Afghanistan. Similarly, the approach of contemporary Russia and her allies may or may not share significant features with the strategic interests of the USSR in the twentieth century, or Tsarist Russia before then. The agreements between Kandahar Afghans and their Kalat interlocutors of the eighteenth century might or might not be relevant for understanding present-day Afghanistan-Pakistan, or Pashtun-Baloch relations.

A key methodological problem is that histories lend themselves to whichever story one may want to tell about current political conditions. One way of making historical analysis less speculative and more specific is to take the city as a vantage point, and to draw empirical insights from points of interaction between the city and the wider events and processes of interest. Quetta is well-suited to serve this purpose.

In the current war in Afghanistan Quetta appears as a key logistic centre for both sides in the conflict. For US-led forces it is one of the major supply routes. According to the US and Afghanistan governments, Quetta is a safe haven for the leadership of the Taliban as well as a logistical base for their operations inside Afghanistan. The Pakistan government denies these claims but has also acknowledged that some key Afghan Taliban leaders who were arrested in Pakistan were found in safe havens in Quetta city. The city's use as a logistical centre by US-led forces and their allies as well as the Taliban does not, necessarily or in itself, involve Quetta's own politics in the Afghanistan conflict. The critical element in the dual use of Quetta by US-led forces as well as their enemies lies in the control of Quetta by Pakistan's central government. Both the US-led forces as well as their Taliban enemies must operate in Quetta with the approval, and to a great extent under the protection, of Pakistan's central government and its security apparatus. In principle this has three implications for Quetta: first, the central government's security apparatus sees the city as a key strategic asset through which Pakistan can maintain influence within Afghanistan; second, Quetta's involvement in Afghanistan and its political insulation from the Afghan conflict might not be incidental but a policy preference on the part of the central government; and third, there may not be significant incentives for either side in the Afghan conflict to disturb the 'neutrality' of Quetta.

Given this broad framework, there are nevertheless destabilising factors. Exercising control over Quetta – for trans-border influence – might require unwarranted and unpopular interference in the internal politics of Quetta and Balochistan. In fact, this was a key allegation of ethnic nationalist as well as other parties in Balochistan with respect to the prominence of the Taliban-supporting Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) in the province between 2002 and 2008. It was widely alleged that central government security agencies played an important role in engineering MMA election victories in 2002 precisely in order to ensure their own control over the city (ICG 2006). The central government agencies also have a more direct political footprint through the strengthening of their institutional presence in the province and the city, and their close historical association with 'non-indigenous' ethnic groups residing there.

Leveraging access to Afghanistan also implies that the border must remain relatively open and porous, and that groups that physically control the border need to be accommodated. In the case of the Quetta-Kandahar link the key border areas on both sides are inhabited by the Pashtun Achakzai tribe. The town of Chaman is an important Achakzai centre, and has emerged as a major site for legal, semi-legal and illegal cross-border trade (Interview, Farooq Hassan, October 11, 2009). Achakzais are often represented by the nationalist Pashtun Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), and now enjoy a sizeable presence in Quetta city itself.

Even if it were somehow possible to insulate Quetta from the war inside Afghanistan while retaining it as a source of leverage within that country, it is unrealistic to expect that a firewall could be created between Afghan political currents and Pakistan and Balochistan society. In fact, the Taliban went from Pakistan to Afghanistan in the first place, and the war in Afghanistan continues to influence Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular. The societies on both sides of the border share many common features, and these are often articulated through cross-border economic, social, political and ideological networks.

Balochistan and Pakistan

Balochistan's relationship with Pakistan is complex. Balochistan is Pakistan's largest but least populous province. It is also the poorest in terms of social and economic development despite being well-endowed with natural resources and territory. It has a disproportionately low presence in high level government employment, and its small population ensures that its political weight in national electoral politics is but marginal.

These factors have been complicated by the continuity of some features of colonial state building that were premised on an imperial system of rule. The human instruments of British colonial power in Balochistan consisted of a minority of British civil and military officials supported by relatively larger numbers of government employees and associated auxiliaries from other parts of the British Indian Empire. In the post-independence period too, migration and migrants from other parts of the country into Balochistan became associated with the extension of central government power. The origin myth of an independent Kalat state with direct relations with British – and which for a brief moment attempted to exercise sovereign authority over its territory – is sometimes invoked as a powerful reminder of political possibilities beyond Pakistan.

At one level the relationship between Balochistan and Pakistan can be placed within the framework of Pakistani federal politics. Balochistan's issues with the rest of Pakistan are not qualitatively different, in principle, from those of the other provinces. These are mostly about questions of resource distribution, access to state institutions, and recognition and promotion of cultural identities. Balochistan's provincial elite, therefore, is not qualitatively different from elites in other relatively under-developed parts of Pakistan. It consists of traditional tribal leaders and patrons, propertied classes with connections to the central state, and a small but rising educated middle class. Ethnic nationalists among the Baloch as well as the Pashtun, and leaders of Islamist movements, overlap with the kinship, patronage and class-based elites.

Challenges have arisen more frequently than in the rest of Pakistan, however, due to a range of political and historical factors. There have been at least five insurgencies including the present one in which independence has been raised as an explicit demand by segments of the leadership. The demand for Balochistan's independence from Pakistan has invariably come from Baloch nationalist leaders. The attitude of Pashtun nationalists to demands for independence has been nuanced and is discussed further below.

In relations between Balochistan and Pakistan, Quetta plays multiple roles. As an original garrison town it remains the symbol of imperial military power. The settler population of the city – which forms the core of its cosmopolitan elite and working class – is often seen as an instrument of central state control over the city and on Balochistan as a whole. The settlers have often become targets of ethnic nationalists, and recent patterns of political violence in Quetta have seen a rise of physical attacks on them.

But Quetta is also the seat of the provincial government and its civil administrative, representative and judicial organs. In other words, to the extent that Balochistan's issues with Pakistan could be placed within a federal framework, Quetta is the primary site for the province's economic and political aspirations. For Baloch and Pashtun nationalists, as well as mainstream players in the province, control over the civil machinery of state is a critical

political objective at all times.³³ The vehicle through which demands for more favourable resource allocation within the federation can be realised is the provincial government. In fact, most of the economic demands of Baloch nationalists relate to the transfer of rights of ownership of natural resource and other rents from central to provincial government.

Although many regard the federal framework to have failed in responding to Balochistan's aspirations, some of the limited successes of this framework are physically associated with Quetta. Public institutions such as educational and health facilities, a concentration of formal sector jobs (mostly in government), and a platform for intellectual, professional and commercial activities inherited from the colonial period has made the city a site of economic opportunities as well as a base for the nurturing of Baloch and Pashtun urban middle classes.

Finally and most importantly, Quetta is one of the few urban spaces in Balochistan that is open to elites from across tribes and regions. The Baloch nationalist narrative conceals the real and significant distinctions within the imagined Baloch community – between regions, linguistic groups, tribes, clans and races, and classes. Quetta allows interaction between these disparate groups on a relatively equal basis. Kalat, the capital of pre-colonial Baloch statecraft, could claim to speak for only around a third of the entire Baloch territory of the province. While the regions of Sarawan, Jhalawan and Kachhi could find representation there, Kalat was not an obvious urban centre for the tribes of eastern or western Balochistan or the non-tribal people of Makran.

Baloch and Pashtun relations

Political mobilisation in Balochistan is quite largely segmented along ethnic lines. Parties that are virtually exclusive to Balochistan – such as various Baloch nationalist groups and the PkMAP – rarely straddle ethnic boundaries. Other Pakistan-level political parties such as the right-of-centre Muslim League factions or the left-of-centre Pakistan People's Party (PPP) operate across ethnic lines, but even these parties must maintain a careful cross-ethnic balance in their provincial leadership. The main Islamist tendency in Balochistan is the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam (JUI) – literally the party of clerics of Islam – which is predominantly Pashtun but with a significant following also in the Brahui-speaking Baloch areas.

Although the Baloch-Pashtun ethnic divide and attempts at maintaining ethnic balances is all-pervasive in political mobilisation, government jobs and resource allocation, instances of open conflict between the two main ethnic groups are relatively rare. Control over the city of Quetta is sometimes seen as the most conspicuous source of rivalry between the two groups. Baloch and Pashtun nationalists often complain about the exaggerated claims of the other side in asserting demographic majority or hegemony. There are also many zones of the city that are ethnically exclusive. Although major conflicts have been rare as stated above, an important exception (as stated earlier) was a conflict over transport routes in the late 1980s.

While Quetta is seen as a contested resource – and discursive contest is intense whenever there is talk of an independent Balochistan, or a unified Pakhtunkhwa (consisting of all major

³³ In interviews with leaders of the Hazara Democratic Party, National Party (Baloch) and the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (Pashtun), all acknowledged the significance of Quetta as a 'colonial hub' and asserted their stake in urban life in Quetta. Each acknowledged that while they had other majority districts within the province, they would continue asserting their stake in urban and political life in Quetta since a retreat from the city would signify a political defeat.

Pashtun regions of Pakistan) – it is also a factor that dampens open conflict between the two major groups. Sharing Quetta itself sometimes taxes peaceful relations, but there remains strong commitment on the part of the nationalist elites of both groups to stop a skirmish from spiralling out of control. Part of the reason is that both groups are relatively well-armed. Another factor is that besides Quetta, the Baloch and Pashtun political elites have few points of actual contact or rivalry. Outside Quetta there is a relatively clean ethnic demarcation of districts with tiny ethnic minorities on the other side.

Although Baloch nationalists have tended to spearhead movements for greater provincial rights and autonomy within the federation, or for outright independence, many of their demands regarding Balochistan itself are echoed by their Pashtun counterparts. There is a consensus across these groups that Balochistan has received unfavourable treatment in the disbursal of rents accrued from its soil and territory. The main target of complaint is the central state.

The points of conflict between the two main groups are, unsurprisingly, associated with rent disbursal within the province. There are often complaints of unfair treatment whenever one or other group seems to have greater access to power at the provincial and federal levels. Contest over the ethnic demography of the province are also related to rival claims about rational methods for distributing rents through public expenditure and investment.

Islamic clerics

A significant ‘new’ elite in Balochistan consists of Islamic clerics that have been increasing their power in Pashtun and Brahui areas over the decades. The main political vehicle for this movement is the JUI, which professes to be a party of clerics. The JUI has enjoyed political power on several occasions, sometimes in alliance with ethnic nationalists and most recently (2002-2007) in rivalry with them.³⁴ Its support base consists of a large network of local Sunni Deobandi clerics who have been trained in seminaries linked to the JUI and its leadership. The Afghan Taliban enjoyed close relations with the JUI during their period of rule in Afghanistan. The precise nature of the current relationship between the JUI and the Taliban is not easy to gauge.

The clerics’ movement has at times put itself forward as a rival to the traditional patronage-based as well as ethnic nationalist politics in Balochistan, which in turn is seen to be tainted by its association with tribal chiefs. Unlike the patronage-based traditional politicians as well as ethnic nationalists, the clerics’ movement has had little direct interest in Quetta itself. Its relationship with the city is very functional – given that Quetta is the seat of power in the province. The clerics’ movement, however, has displayed little interest or inclination in expanding its influence through the use of urban space available in Quetta. Its main focus has been to leverage the enhanced position of the cleric in mostly rural communities, in order to challenge existing traditional tribal and patronage-based centres of power.

The alleged presence of the Afghan Taliban in Quetta also seems to have relatively little overt influence on political or social life in the city. The Afghan Taliban are thought to maintain a low profile here, even though some Baloch nationalists have raised an alarm over migration and property acquisition on the part of Afghan Taliban and their supporters in Quetta and its

³⁴ The JUI was part of the short-lived first elected provincial government of Balochistan as a junior partner of the left-leaning ethnic nationalist National Awami Party (NAP).

environs. The Baloch warnings about the Afghan Taliban may be interpreted as complaints about an attempted Pashtun takeover of the city.

The clerics' movement and the Afghan Taliban in Quetta are sometimes seen as factors promoted by the Pakistani central state in order to maintain control over Balochistan and extend its influence in Afghanistan. Some extremist Sunni groups also carry out propaganda against the Iranian regime and carry out attacks against Shia Muslims – mostly Hazara but also others – that are thought to oppose the hegemony of orthodox Sunni Islam in the region.

The nexus between the clerics' movement of Balochistan and the central state in Pakistan was arguably at its zenith during the period when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. It continued after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the coming into power of a JUI-led religious alliance (Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal or MMA) in the provincial government in Quetta. The clerics' movement offered an alternative to both the traditional patronage-based politicians, as well as ethnic nationalists, though it ultimately made an alliance with the former. From the point of view of the central state, the clerics provide an opportunity for clipping the wings of ethnic nationalists while also keeping the ambitions of traditional patronage-based politicians in check. There might be other security-related factors too. The clerics, for their part, were primarily interested in gaining access to state resources in order to bolster their political positions vis-à-vis other local players.

How the clerics' movement views Quetta is important: in purely functional terms; as a site where certain types of rents can be captured or denied to others; as a logistic base; or as an important political, economic and social resource in its own right. At first glance it appears that the clerics' movement has little intrinsic interest in Quetta and its urbanity. If true, this would be a useful observation not only about Quetta's position in Balochistan and Afghanistan, but also about the role of the city in the broader 'Af-Pak' region where some variants of the clerics' movement or its offspring are vying for political power against foreign powers and/or secular nationalists.

Within Pakistan, the alliance between the central state and the clerics' movement might also be seen in a more textured manner. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan, the clerics' movement and its offspring in Pakistan succeeded in Pashtun regions to a great extent through the suppression of urban centres. Seeing themselves as righteous and wronged protectors of a rural Islamic tradition, the clerics' relationship with the city was ambivalent or antagonistic. The central state's strategy of cultivating the clerics in opposition to ethnic nationalists and to keep a check on the aspirations of the provincial patrons could, and arguably did, go out of control. The successful clerics were not satisfied with merely denying control over the cities to the ethnic nationalists or provincial patronage-based elites. Their ideological trajectory put them on the path of conflict with the very idea of a modernising developmental state – and thus the very notion of urbanism. They emerged, therefore, as potent challengers to the central state itself, and perhaps more potent than the ethnic nationalists or provincial patronage-based elites they were meant to help control.

The City and State-Building

Buffer zone to border city

Quetta, or Shal, was an obscure corner that frequently changed hands between two major medieval empires without much fanfare. It was then a buffer zone between states that

emerged from the disintegration of the continental empires. The strategic value of the Shal as a bridge between two important segments of the Asian landmass was known – as witnessed by fugitive kings and aspirant emperors. The valley was surpassed by its north-eastern counterpart along the Kabul-Peshawar axis as a major route of trade, transit and invasion. The main consequence of Shal's strategic location as a geographical marker was that it served as a true border outpost – between the Persian and Indian empires, and then between the emerging nascent states of Kandahar and Kalat.

Quetta's emergence from obscurity was quite largely a consequence of its status as an empty buffer zone between two emerging powers. It was the perfect camp for the colonial intrusion that would shape the state-building experiences of Kandahar and Kalat alike. At one level the long history of Quetta validated the hypothesis that a strong border town can and will dilute state-building efforts in the centre. By 2005 Quetta's population was more than double that of Kandahar and Kalat combined. There were almost as many people of Afghan origin in Quetta as the entire population of Kandahar, and Quetta had a bigger and more varied Baloch citizenry than Kalat.

The construction and consolidation of the imperial outpost with its vibrant economy, its strong political and military system and its need for and ability to absorb a cosmopolitan Indian population foreign to the Balochistan soil was set to weaken both Kandahar and Kalat. The fact that the imperial outpost was also the source of political domination ensured that the buffer became the centre. It was not difficult for detractors to find continuity in the post-colonial policies of the Pakistani state – both with regard to Balochistan and Afghanistan. Quetta is still seen by many as a source of the destabilisation of Afghanistan on the one hand, and an instrument of colonial outreach into Balochistan on the other.

The border was a political and strategic resource for the colonial state and so it might appear for the post-colonial one. The border is also a source of economic rents for segments of the central state elites as well as their partners among the local elites. Cross-border trade with Afghanistan, routed through the Chaman-Spin Boldak border, is a major economic activity for Quetta. The same border was, and still remains, a source of rent for the central state elite, which realised the value of controlling access to Afghanistan both during the anti-Soviet war in the 1980s and since 2001.

For local elites the Afghan border offers opportunities for legal and illegal trade. Rents from cross-border trade are substantially disbursed through tribal networks. The Achakzai tribe living on both sides of the border has been a major beneficiary. The fact that the Achakzais have also provided leaders to the Pashtun nationalist cause in Balochistan has enhanced their political influence in Quetta, among Pashtuns in particular, and in Balochistan's provincial politics in general.

Quetta's access to Afghanistan has been a source of power and economic rents for other groups too. Individual and collective owners of land in and around the city sought to enhance their political positions by coming forward as patrons for Afghan displaced persons arriving in the city. Groups also used Afghan displacement to augment their numerical and thus political strength in the city. This form of leveraging was not restricted to the Pashtuns, as Hazara and even some Baloch tribes co-opted long-lost Afghan cousins.

For the clerics' movement the Afghanistan border was an obvious source of power throughout the period when the Pakistani central state elite was openly involved in pursuing its goals in

Afghanistan through Islamic religious parties. The connection between the clerics' movement of Balochistan and the Kandahar-based Taliban benefited the Pakistani central state elite, the Afghan Taliban as well as the clerics' movement in Balochistan.

The border, however, does not dominate Quetta's political and economic life or its collective personality. For the Baloch elite the Afghan border is of relatively limited significance. Afghanistan has at times been a place of refuge for insurgent Baloch groups, some of whom moved there en masse as entire tribes. There are persistent allegations in Pakistan that Baloch insurgents are actively financed and armed by the government of Afghanistan.

For the most part, however, the Baloch elites regard the border with ambivalence if not outright suspicion. It is an established convention – partly reinforced by local bylaws – that cross-border movement and rents from it will accrue primarily to the tribe or clan inhabiting in the proximity of the border. The Quetta-Kandahar border is a Pashtun zone, and the actual boundary is Achakzai territory. Non-Achakzai Pashtuns, let alone the Baloch and others, regard the rent accruing from that border with a measure of equanimity. Baloch, after all, enjoy similar privileges with respect to cross-border movement between the western districts of Balochistan and the Iranian province of Sistan-Balochistan.

Colonial enclave to urban hub

Quetta's most glaring institutional fact is that it was a colonial enclave – an island representing a modern nation-building project – surrounded by vital tribal societies with considerable and varying degrees of military prowess. The very range of political arrangements in its region – including a dependent but formally sovereign Afghanistan, a semi-sovereign Kalat with its own vassal sub-states, tribal territories with degrees of self-governance, administered areas with greater central control, and pockets of central state hegemony -- is testimony to the contested and transitional nature of power. Unfinished state building is written all over the vast hinterland that straddles national boundaries.

The city with its origins as a colonial garrison, its cosmopolitan settler elites and working classes, and its openness to indigenous tribal and ethnic elites was part and parcel of the balance of power. The garrison remained an instrument for projecting first British imperial power and then its successor in the form of the Pakistani central state. Yet it also offered educational institutions, a relatively free press, political representation and formal sector employment to the emerging indigenous elites. The city remained contested between rival settler, indigenous and ethnic elites, and yet offered spaces for coexistence and negotiation. Being the seat of the provincial government in a federal system it acted as a possible channel of rent disbursement – rents accruing from the central state as well as from Balochistan as a whole. It therefore held out future possibilities as well as dangers for established and emerging elites alike.

If development and state building were to be the proliferation of Quetta-like spaces across Balochistan, there was much for the indigenous elites and non-elites to fear. The primary premise of Quetta, after all, was the military subjugation of indigenous people and the introduction of alien settler elites with inbuilt economic and political advantages. If Quetta's history were to be read as one of continuous negotiation, cooption, inclusion and access to the fruits of development, it would be a different story. For the Pakistani central state elite Quetta could be a measure of power or a source of threat. In the event, institutional change was slow and came in fits and starts.

State-building – lessons from Quetta

Quetta's history has been told here as a story of change from an empty buffer zone, to a colonial enclave, and finally an urban hub. As it has grown and changed, confronted major demographic and political challenges, and become a focal point of two wars, the city has not entirely lost any of the three stages of its evolution. Quetta's role in state building in its vast hinterland, however, has depended on which aspect of its personality becomes more salient at any given moment in time.

Quetta teaches us that colonial enclaves evolve into urban hubs only in the good measure of time. The immediate strategic and medium term functional and institutional demands of enclaves create new rents and thus new elites and hierarchies that may limit or slow down the state-building potential of the city. The city as a factor in state-building is not independent of the political (and even the ideological) goals of the central state at any given moment in time. In the Pakistani central state, the elite's objective of seeking influence within Afghanistan, and exercising control over Balochistan's resources, 'garrison Quetta' has played a helpful role. 'Urban hub Quetta', however, was a source of endless threats and challenges as provincial patronage-based elites as well as ethnic nationalists found spaces to mobilise. A central state elite project that did not seek strategic advantage in Afghanistan but focused on internal state building, will have different uses for Quetta. These uses may or may not include significant rent-sharing with Balochistan's indigenous elites and non-elites.

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