



CAMPAIGN AGAINST CRIMINALISING COMMUNITIES

Briefing 2

Baluchistan under state terror: The UK ban on the Baluchistan Liberation Army

For several decades Baluchistan has been subjected to partition, occupation and state terror – with the collusion of the UK government. When the Baluchistan Liberation Army arose to resist this oppression, it was banned by the UK as a ‘terrorist’ organisation. This briefing provides a background to these injustices and the UK’s role.

The land and people

Baluchistan is located in South East Asia extending over 340,000 sq miles sharing its borders with Iran (West), Afghanistan (North), Sindh and Panjab (East) and the southern Arabian Sea coastline. The Baluch people have inhabited this land for thousands of years with their distinct culture, identity and languages (predominantly Baluchi.)

There are only guestimates of the Baluch population – perhaps 10-20 million people worldwide. The majority of about 8-10 million inhabit East/South Baluchistan occupied by Pakistan. About 2-4 million Baluch reside in the Iranian-occupied territory of Baluchistan and about a half million in Afghanistan. There is a large Baluch diaspora living in several places – the Arabian Gulf States, Turkmenistan, Kenya and Tanzania, Australia, Europe and North America.

From nationhood to British colonisation, partition and occupation

For centuries Baluch have lived in tribal communities in sea ports towards the south and interacting with people inland. The first unified Baluch nation state was established in 1666 under the authority of the Khan of Kalat. The Baluch confederacy lasted until the invasion of Baluchistan by the British army in 1839 with the killing of the ruler Mir Mehrab Khan. The British divided Baluchistan into three parts without consulting the Baluch people. In 1871 the ‘Goldsmith Line’ divided Baluchistan into Eastern and Western Baluchistan with the agreement of Iranian rulers. In 1893 the Afghan Amir and the British representative agreed to establish the northern ‘Durand line’, transferring large segments of the Northern region of Baluchistan to Afghanistan. The East remained as British Baluchistan.

As successive Persian states weakened, western Baluchistan broke free in the first decade of the 20th century. The occupation was virtually ended when Bahram Khan Baluch extended his authority over most of the central and southern regions of western Baluchistan. In 1916 he was recognised by the British as the effective ruler of western Baluchistan. With the military campaign

UK ‘anti-terror’ bans: supporting state terrorism

The UK government has been attempting to deter protest by migrant communities against oppressive regimes from which they have fled. A major weapon has been bans on ‘terrorist’ organisations. Through these bans, state terrorism abroad is represented as counter-terrorist activity, thus justifying and reinforcing the UK’s alliance with those oppressive regimes. Such bans attack the right of national self-determination, as well as popular support for that right across countries. The bans are used selectively as an instrument of foreign policy.

Under the UK Terrorism Act 2000, ‘terrorism’ includes simply ‘the threat’ of ‘serious damage to property’, in ways ‘designed to influence the government’ for a ‘political cause’. This broad definition blurs any distinction between military, political and civilian targets. Organisations could be banned on the basis that their activities anywhere fit

the broad, vague definition of ‘terrorism’. It also became a crime to give verbal or symbolic support to a banned organisation, or even to host a meeting with a speaker from such an organisation.

Under the 2000 Act, the Home Office banned 21 organizations including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Hamas’ military wing in 2001. The Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and the Balochistan Liberation Army were added to the list in 2006. The EU ‘terrorist’ blacklist has generally followed the UK’s lead.

More information available at:

<http://www.statewatch.org/terrorlists/terrorlists.html>

<http://campacc.org.uk/campaigns/terror-bans/anti-terror-laws-and-communities.htm>

launched by the Iranian ruler Reza Khan in 1921, Iran annexed western Baluchistan to Persia once again in 1928. The Baluch people always considered Persians as alien occupiers and have resisted them.

Decolonisation, Pakistani occupation and terror

After the departure of the British Empire from the Indian sub-continent in 1947, the Baluch demanded full independence. A tripartite agreement was signed between the UK, Baluchistan and the incipient Pakistani state on 4 August 1947. With this agreement all parties recognised the sovereign status of Baluchistan. It declared independence on 11 August 1947 – the same day that the British left Baluchistan and three days before the creation of Pakistan.

Elections followed and the first two Baluchistan legislative assemblies were formed. Members of the Baluchistan National Party participated in the election as independent candidates, winning 39 of the 52 seats in the House of Commons.

In October 1947 M. A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, met the Khan of Kalat and demanded the accession of Baluchistan to Pakistan. Baluchistan's two houses of parliament unanimously rejected Jinnah's proposal. By February 1948, having failed to cajole the Baluch to abandon national sovereignty and expecting strong resistance, Jinnah advocated a dictatorial system of government in Baluchistan. On 27th March 1948 Pakistan's army invaded Baluchistan and arrested the Khan of Kalat and most members of Baluchistan's houses of Parliaments.

Struggle for Baluch self-determination and democracy

In the 1920s a small group of Baluch intellectuals began a movement that demanded equal national rights for the Baluch nation. They established Anjuman-e-Ithad-e-Balochistan (Association for Unity of Balochistan). Its principal aims were: 1) ending the colonization of Baluchistan from foreign powers, 2) unifying Baluchistan, and 3) establishing an independent united Baluchistan. In 1931 the Kalat State National Party was also formed. Both parties were secular and sought an independent unified democratic Baluchistan. In the 1930s the Anjuman held two conferences to discuss such issues. As a result the Anjuman General Secretary was arrested and imprisoned in January 1934.

As soon as Pakistan began its illegal occupation of eastern Baluchistan in 1948, the Baluch began their resistance, and were met with mass arrests and long terms of imprisonment. Further Baluch resistance resulted in at

least one major military campaign by the Pakistan army in Baluchistan in each subsequent decade. Baluch defiance led the Pakistan army to occupy Kalat in 1958 and to extend the occupation to other parts of Baluchistan. The Khan of Kalat and other political leaders were arrested on charges of sedition and many Baluch rebels were arrested, sentenced to long imprisonments and 7 were hanged.

Pakistan launched another military campaign in Baluchistan in 1962. The resistance lasted until 1969. Until this period the resistance movement in Eastern Baluchistan was localised. But the last two military campaigns affected almost every family in Baluchistan.

In the December 1970 general elections, the National Awami Party and Jamiat-ulema-i-Islam Party secured the majority of seats in the Baluchistan assembly. In a pre-planned and well-orchestrated show the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Pakistan army dismissed Baluchistan's elected government on dubious grounds.

The dismissal of the Baluchistan government resulted in one of the bloodiest wars in the history of Baluchistan. To crush the Baluch movement the Prime Minister of Pakistan appointed the infamous 'Butcher of Bangladesh', General Tikka Khan. At the height of the war over 90,000 Pakistani troops supported by 30 US Cobra attack helicopters, supplied by the Shah of Iran, confronted over 60,000 Baluch fighters. The war lasted four years, from 1973 to 1977. It is estimated that thousands suffered as a result of this conflict. In one estimate it is said that the Pakistan army suffered 5400 casualties whilst there were 15,000 Baluch casualties.

The most recent bloody conflicts were initiated by the Pakistani military dictator Parviz Musharraf, whose forces systematically targeted Baluch intellectuals, students and political leaders. In August 2006 the Pakistani army killed one of the leading Baluch leaders, Nawab Akbar Bugti and an unknown number of his guards. This pushed many young Baluch to turn to support the armed struggle. Balaach Marri reportedly headed the Baluchistan Liberation Army; he was assassinated by Pakistani agents a year later in November 2007. Brahamdagh Bugti initiated the Baluchistan Republican Party (BRP) and headed the armed wing of the party.

Pakistan's terror campaign – supported by the western powers

Facing continual Pakistani military assaults, the Baluch people had no alternative but to organise defensive resistance organisations. The most prominent has been the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), a democratic, secular organisation which is regarded as a symbol of

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freedom and justice by the Baluch. Due to its popularity among the Baluch masses and its successful campaign in pushing Pakistan aggressors from their homeland, the Pakistan army and the Pakistan establishment invested enormous resources to counter it.

At the beginning of the Cold War in the 1950s, Pakistan became central to US geopolitical strategy which led to military aid and training. After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the US and its ally Saudi Arabia, pumped up military and financial resources to launch an 'Islamic Jihad' for the liberation of Afghanistan by supporting groups including Mujahedeen, Al Qaeda and Taliban. With the collapse of the USSR, Pakistan and its allies supported the Taliban to take over Afghanistan. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, the US launched its 'War on Terror' with the invasion of Afghanistan. The Pakistani establishment launched its own war against the Baluch liberation movement, with the silent approval of the West.

Pakistan's most violent military aggression towards Baluchistan was conducted by General Musharraf. All Baluch democratic political parties, human rights organisations and the media in Baluchistan were banned. Thousands of Baluch intellectuals, political workers, students and Baluch leaders were imprisoned, tortured and killed during this military campaign. In their report on 5th March 2010 the Asian Human Rights Commission has estimated that 4000 Baluch men, women and children were abducted by Pakistani intelligence agencies. Baluch human rights sources estimate that there have been 8000 abductions. Among the disappeared persons are 168 children and 148 women.

Persistent persecution by Pakistan and Iran

The removal of General Musharraf from power has not relieved the oppression in eastern Baluchistan. It has remained under the grip of the Pakistani military intelligence services: the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence, and the Para-military (FC). These agencies are not accountable to any government and operate with impunity.

On 3rd April 2009 the Pakistani secret agencies abducted three prominent Baluch political leaders; Baluch National Movement President Ghulam Mohammed Baluch, his deputy Lala Munir Baluch, and Baluch Republican Party Secretary General Sher Mohammed Baluch from their lawyer's office. After being tortured to death for about two weeks, their mutilated bodies were dumped on the outskirts of Turbat, a city in eastern Baluchistan on 8th April 2009.

Rasool Bux Mengal, the joint secretary of the Baluch National Movement, was abducted by Pakistani agents

from Uthal on 23rd August 2009. His badly tortured body was found on 30th August 2009 in Bela in Lasbela district. He was found hanging on a tree; his torturers had carved the phrase 'Long live Pakistan' on his body. Jan Muhammad Dashti, a prominent Baluch intellectual and the owner and publisher of the Daily Asaap, survived an assassination attempt on 23rd February 2009. On 20 July 2010 a leader of the Baluchistan National Party, Haji Liagat Ali Mengal, was shot dead. Another very prominent and highly respected leader, Habib Jalib was gunned down on 14th July 2010. The Baluchistan Students Organisation's Vice Chairman was shot and critically injured on 9th July 2010. Since August 2010 the Pakistani intelligence agencies have killed about twenty Baluch political and social activists and then dumped their bullet-ridden bodies in open fields.

The Baluch population in the Iranian-occupied western Baluchistan are also suffering from similar treatment at the hands of a repressive Islamist regime in Iran. More than half of the people being hanged or killed under prolonged torture in Iran have been Baluch. This is widely disproportionate since the Baluch are less than one percent of the Iranian population. According to the Human Rights Activists of Iran (IHRV) there is no accurate information on the number and identities of Baluch political prisoners in southeastern Iran because of the tight grip maintained by intelligence services in this region.

Yaghub Mehrnehad, a Baluch journalist who worked for the newspaper, Mardomsalari (Democracy), and was President of the Sedaye Edalat (Voice of Justice), reported that the Iranian regime has not tolerated in Baluchistan even the basic social and cultural activities that people are allowed in other major cities in Iran. On 6th May 2007, along with other members of his association, Mehrnehad was arrested in Zahedan, the capital city of Western Baluchistan. After enduring months of torture, Mehrnehad was sentenced to death by the Iranian regime; in August 2008 he was the first web blogger journalist in the world to be executed.

Britain's criminalisation of Baluch organisation and activists

In 17 July 2006, under pressure of Pakistan's military government, the UK Labour Government proscribed the Baluchistan Liberation Army as a terrorist organisation (see box on terror bans.) The BLA is a separate organisation to the Baluchistan Liberation Front, which is not listed by the UK.

The UK also colluded with the Pakistan military regime in its attempt to extradite two Baluch nationalists and human rights activists to Pakistan. Under the Terrorism Act 2000 the Metropolitan Police arrested Faiz Mohammed Baluch and Nawabzada Hyrbayir Marri on 4th December 2007. Evidence

had been provided by Musharraf's dictatorship, whose Internal Security Services (ISI) is well known for framing political opponents on spurious charges. In reality the Pakistani government wanted to stop their role in exposing Pakistan's crimes in Baluchistan. For its part, Britain wanted the extradition of a Pakistani Taliban terror suspect, Rashid Rauf, for the alleged plot to blow up transatlantic airlines. So the UK's collusion with Pakistan was part of a plan for a prisoner swap between the two countries.

By the time of the trial in early 2009, the new Pakistani government had dropped accusations against the defendants. The trial went ahead anyway. 'Although Musharraf is no longer President, his supporters and allies still hold key positions in the Pakistani military and intelligence services. They continue to persecute and frame Baloch nationalists', said Peter Tatchell, a campaigner supporting the defendants.

Faiz Baluch and Hyrbiyar Marri were eventually tried at Woolwich Crown Court in London. As one absurdity of the prosecution case, both the London activists were charged with 'preparing acts of terrorism' and were described as Islamic fundamentalists. In fact they were exposing the alliance between the Pakistani establishment and such Islamist groups. At the trial, the defence team challenged the accusations and highlighted their source in UK foreign policy. According to barrister Helena Kennedy, 'This case is about classic self defence, not regime change.' As recognised by international law, the Baloch people were exercising their right to defend themselves from oppression, and the accused were contributing to that defence.

The jury acquitted both defendants. When it became clear that they would not be extradited to Pakistan, Rashid Rauf mysteriously escaped from the Pakistani jail. After the trial, Faiz Baluch stated:

This prosecution arose out of the British government's appeasement of the dictator General Musharraf, in order to win his cooperation in the war on terror. The jury has implied, by their not guilty verdict, sympathy with the suffering of the Baloch people. The terrorist who should have been in the dock is Musharraf. He is the one who inflicted terror attacks on the people of Balochistan.

Despite the prosecution's failure, the UK and US governments have continued their collusion with Pakistan's state terror. Under the same pretext of 'terrorist' activities, Noordin Mengal, another Baluch human rights campaigner, was detained and deported by US immigration on 7th July 2008. The Interfaith International, an NGO which was accrediting Mehran Baluch to represent the Baluch people at UN Human Rights Council, was suspended on Pakistan's request on 25th January 2010.

Challenging the ban on the Baluchistan Liberation Army

The Baluchistan Liberation Army is a national resistance movement fighting for independence. Pakistan's terrorism in eastern Baluchistan necessitates Baluch armed self-defence; the BLA's activities have always been within the boundary of Baluchistan, against the occupying forces of Pakistan. While civilian casualties have been caused by both sides, the Pakistani state is responsible for far greater civilian deaths; of course, Pakistan's allies have not accused that state of terrorism. By banning the Baluchistan Liberation Army as a terrorist organisation, the UK criminalises any political 'association' with the BLA anywhere in the world; the UK also denies the legitimate right in international law to self-defence in pursuit of national liberation.

The Baluch experience illustrates how the 'War on Terror' has been manipulated by the Pakistani establishment and military to crush the Baluch resistance. Whilst Western powers say that they are promoting democracy and freedom across the world, they collude with the oppression and occupation of the Baluch. At the same time they criminalise Baluch political representatives and human rights activists abroad through 'terrorism' bans. We should oppose such bans and defend the right to self-determination.

More information:

Baluchistan Human Rights Activists (BHRAA)
bhrw.blogspot.com
www.balochvoice.com
www.balochwarna.org
www.bygwaah.com
www.thebaluch.com & www.crisisbalochistan.com
www.HRCP-net
www.AHRCHK.net
www.petertatchell.net/international/pakistan
www.balochjohd.com
www.gwank.org
www.ostomaan.org

The Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC) opposes all 'anti-terror' bans and special powers.

Our aims include: To oppose crimes against humanity, regardless of who (or what government) commits them.

For more information: <http://campacc.org.uk/>

Published by CAMPACC, October 2010