

MAKING AND UNMAKING BORDERS IN SOUTH ASIA: THE PARTITION OF INDIA AND THE BALUCHISTAN UNREST

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1. Overview

This paper is part of an ongoing research on the strategic motives behind India's partition.

After seventy years, the memory of this event inflames political and academic debates and is remembered as a soul-breaking event.

The scope of this paper is to prove that longstanding regional and international conflicts sparked in this area, instability, the threat of nuclear wars, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and increasing military interventions from the West originate from territorial partitions. The three Indo-Pakistan wars and in particular the third one, that originated the rise of Bangladesh in 1971, were the direct consequence of India's divide. In Bangladesh the memory of the 1971 civil war, when a new country was founded from former East Pakistan, itself detached from India in 1947, is still determining tensions between opposing groups within the country. The still unresolved Kashmir issue is another example.

The India-Pakistan border area (as well as the Pakistan-Afghanistan border) is one of the most unstable and sensitive places in the world and this instability has longstanding repercussions on the entire South Asian region. For instance, Afghanistan's affairs in the last fifty years have been affected by the consequences of India's partition.

In order to understand the fragmentation processes that followed India's partition and the present instability of South Asia, and in par-

ticular of Pakistan's borderlands, it is necessary to analyse the divide under a different light.

2. India's partition from the military and strategic point of view

India's partition did not have repercussions only on the internal politics of India and Pakistan, but had a remarkable impact on regional and international politics. In order to understand the geopolitical effects of the fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent, the motives of India's partition should be reconsidered, beyond the narrow perspective of internal political factors.

While scholarly interest on India's partition has been concentrated mostly on its political and constitutional implications, as far as Pakistan is concerned, the historians' attention focuses more on the Cold War phase of its history, rather than on the premises to its foundation.

Apart from the responsibilities of Indian and Pakistani politicians to pave the way for the partition¹, Great Britain had a prominent role in India's divide and in creating Pakistan. The commonly accepted explanations of India's partition put the blame for this ruinous event more on Indian responsibilities than on British intentions. The British political correspondence of the period across the partition proves two explanations: one is based on the assumption that the British statesmen acted as mere agents who eased decisions adopted by the leaders of the two main parties at stake, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. The other one is that partition was the only solution to avoid the worst, like a civil war or a massacre that could have been worse than the carnage following the divide. However, India's partition and the birth of three nations that apparently at that time were two, an unscrupulous experiment dividing a state into two parts separated by a couple of thousand miles of northern Indian territory, was too big an

¹ Ayesha Jalal has masterfully explained the tricky balance between Jinnah's conception of a strictly centralised and united state, the claim of the political representatives of the Muslim minority provinces for a separate nation and the reluctance of the leaders of the Muslim majority provinces to swallow the prospect of a separate Pakistan: A. JALAL, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1994.

affair to be simply justified by the incapacity of the two main Indian parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, to find an agreement. Whether all this was unavoidable is open to question. Probably it is true that a prolonged British permanence (especially of the army) for a few years after the end of World War II to guide the parts to a settlement could have been the only possible alternative to the divide, but it was unfeasible. Remaining in India would have been economically unsustainable and politically unpopular. After the war, the British attitude was to get the maximum benefit from the former colonies, especially from India, with the least effort and expenditure. The US pressure to put an end to the colonial rule was very strong, while the international public opinion sympathised more with the colonised people than with the colonisers. Above all, the Indian nationalists would not have tolerated British rule any longer. A prolonged permanence of the British Raj in India after World War II would entail the risk of perpetual unrest, like in Malaysia, Indonesia, or Vietnam. The British government was therefore obliged to respect the pledge made in 1942 that independence would be granted to India after the end of the war. However, the necessity of a quick withdrawal does not seem a satisfactory explanation of an enormous event like the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The existing studies on India's partition, although accurate and illuminating, are based mostly on the *Transfer of Power* collection, selected published records that, probably also for a calculated choice, do not reflect much military and strategic issues. For this reason, these records do not allow a clear reconstruction of British responsibilities in India's partition. On the contrary, the records on which my research is based, mostly from the War Staff, suggest that the seeds of the partition were sown much before 1947 and the British statesmen abetted the divide, when it became clear that partition would be the most profitable choice for British defence requirements in Asia and the Middle East. The British rulers knew it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the colonies after the end of World War II. However, India was too important for the defence of the remaining British economic interests in the Middle East and in South-East Asia not to deserve special attention.

It is well known that in 1942 the demand of independence by the main party of the time, the Congress, became pressing and, after the US's entrance into the war, it combined with President Roosevelt's and his military staff's compelling need to use India as a logistical basis

for the war operations in the India-China-Burma theatre and in the Pacific Ocean. The main cause of the failure of the Cripps mission is widely considered to be the Congress' request for an immediate and remarkable political representation, if not complete independence, and the firm refusal of the British government to satisfy this request. However, I would argue that the main hindrance to the success of the Cripps mission was indeed the request of the Indian leaders to have an Indian defence minister (or defence member of the War Cabinet), although subordinated to the Chiefs of Staff and the British War Office. Defence was therefore the key issue of the negotiations but, strangely, apart from M. S. Shrivastava and B.K. Venkataramani², scholars do not pay the least attention to it, as well as they tend to neglect the other crucial issue of the Cripps negotiations: the provincial option contained in Sir Stafford's proposal. Although apparently all Indian leaders apart from Gandhi did not notice or were not concerned that the provincial option was, in fact, the 'Pakistan options', since it contained the embryo of Pakistan. Cripps too was well aware of the disruptive potential of his proposal³.

In the midst of World War II, the British political and military authorities began to implicitly associate the post-war defence of the Indian subcontinent and its (possible) partition. At the beginning of April 1943, while the India Office, the Viceroy and part of the high ranks of the army were discussing about the post-war defence of India, the Joint Planning Staff of the India Command, following the instructions of the Chiefs of Staff (COS), issued a report "based on a full appreciation of India's strategic problem after the war"⁴. In the early 1940s, therefore, the British started to imagine a post-war world order subordinate to

² M.S. VENKATARAMANI, B.K. SHRIVASTAVA, *Quit India. The American Response to the 1942 Struggle*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 100-123.

³ N. MANSERGH, (ed). 1970-1983. *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*. London. Stationary Office, 1977, vol. I, record no. 296, quoted by N. SINGH SARILA, *The Shadow of the Great Game. The Untold Story of India's Partition*, Noida, Harper Collins, 2005, p. 102; N. MANSERGH, (ed). 1970-1983. *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Note by Cripps on interview with Jinnah on 25 March 1942, Vol. I, pp. 480-481 and Cripps to Azad, 2 April 1942, p. 610, quoted by A.INDER SINGH, *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987, p.76.

⁴ IOR L/WS/1/1341, India Command, Report by the Joint Planning Staff. Appreciation of future position, J.P.S. Paper No. 57, 3rd April 1943, signed J.G. Hewitt Captain, R.N., G.B. Still Brigadier, L. Darvall Air Commodore.

British interests and inspired by “the principle that no power capable of prolonged hostile action against us should set foot South of the arch formed by the HIMALAYAS, the HINDU KUSH, the North PERSIAN frontier, the ELBURZ mountains, and the Northern borders of SYRIA”.⁵

In 1943, the British Empire in India developed a policy complementary with the one it put in place in the Middle-East. Britain’s “vital strategic requirements in the Middle and Far East” were

- (a) the retention of the oilfields in Iraq and Persia
- (b) the protection of its communications along the west-east routes⁶.

If India came under control of an “unfriendly” power, these two conditions could not be secured and the sea routes from India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to the Persian Gulf and Iraq oilfields, and from the Mediterranean to the Far East and Australia, would be compromised. India was “the keystone of the military security of the Commonwealth” in the Far East. The United Kingdom’s task was, after the end of the war, to maintain in India adequate forces not just for local defence, but also against all possible external threats. However, due to the firm position held by Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad regarding India’s defence during the 1942 negotiations, the British prime minister, the Viceroy, and the military chiefs were conscious that once India became independent, the Congress leadership would not be willing to share its military responsibilities with the former rulers. The British statesmen then began to conceive the option to detach a portion of the territory included in the Anglo-Indian Empire to maintain the military control of the Indian subcontinent.

In the following years and until the threshold of India’s independence, the British political and military authorities carefully examined two options. One was an independent India bound to Great Britain by a military treaty. This was the option favoured the most, but was difficult to achieve for the above mentioned reason. It was understood that the Indian leaders would not have been willing to militarily cooperate with Great Britain. The other choice was detaching a portion of

⁵ IOR L/WS/1/1341, draft A Note on the Defence of India after the War. Capitals in the original text.

⁶ IOR L/WS/1/1341, draft A Note on the Defence of India after the War.

former British India to carve out an area where to set up the military bases required for the continuation of the defence of British interests in the region and worldwide. This 'B plan' was gradually prepared and put in action when it became clear that it was the most convenient option for the preservation of British interests in South Asia. That 'detachable' area was Balochistan.

From the Cripps Mission to the end of the war, the British military staff continued to speculate on all possible ways to defend India from external intrusions for the reasons alluded to above. The discussions on the defence of India in the post-war period took an increasingly detailed character throughout 1944. It was deemed, that after the end of the war, an international defence system based on "Regional Zones of Defence" should be created, "within a general system of world security"⁷. In summer 1944 the chiefs of staff delivered a sixty-eight page printed survey, made of several lengthy appendices and reports⁸. Among an amount of other strategic and technical details, the report established that

1. We shall require to use India as a main support area in order to avail ourselves of her manpower resources and growing industries capacity.
2. Airfields in India are essential for the maintenance of our communications to the Far East.
3. Bases in India are important to our command of the Indian Ocean.
4. The continuance of India's cooperation with the Commonwealth in defence is essential⁹.

It was expected India would provide "the greater part of garrisons" for Burma, Malaya, and Siam and, in general, for the South-East Asia command¹⁰. The crucial question was where to locate the Imperial Re-

⁷ Ibid., Note on India's interest.

⁸ Ibid., War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, India – Post-War Defence, 28 August 1944. The survey starts with a Copy of a letter dated 7 August 1944, from the commander in chief in India to the secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, with annexed five reports: C.O.S. (44) 642, C.O.S. (44) 636, C.O.S. (44) 637, C.O.S. (44) 637/I, (44) 91 and relative appendices.

⁹ Ibid., typed note included in the printed survey, Notes for Discussion on Treaty with India, incomplete.

¹⁰ Ibid., Annex II, Chiefs of Staff Committee, C.O.S. (44) 636, Report on the Size and Composition of the post-war forces in India, p. 12.

serve. The ideal place was India and Balochistan seemed the most suitable area¹¹. This option was to be carefully examined, should it be necessary, in future, to locate the Imperial Reserve “elsewhere than in India proper”¹². This does not just mean that the British military did not consider Balochistan as a part of India, but rather that they believed it was possible to easily detach this part of Indian territory. In April 1945, General Claude Auchinleck observed that Balochistan had “few facilities” at that time but, although roads, railways, a port and more airfields were required, these shortcomings were not insuperable and ultimately, strategic considerations prevailed on concerns. General Auchinleck wondered whether a self-governing India would

include Balochistan in its boundaries. The country is a financial burden on India at present – the inhabitants are not Indians – the language is not Indian – in fact Balochistan pertains to Central Asia rather than to India. The population is sparse and it might be possible to colonise the country with Poles or other Europeans who can not (sic) find asylum elsewhere.

The advantage of Balochistan as an “Imperial” enclave containing a strategic land reserve of air and land forces would be great indeed not only to the whole Commonwealth so far as our interests in Southern Asia and the Indian Ocean are concerned but also to India which it would automatically protect against invasion from Afghanistan¹³.

The events following the failure of the “Scheme A” drawn up by the Cabinet Mission on 16 May 1946 are well known. Even though the academic literature on this has concentrated mainly on the political aspects related to India’s partition, the centrality of the strategic implications also require our attention. The core issue from a strategic point of view was the international position of independent India, a question which was deeply connected with Nehru’s views on India’s foreign policy. The British military staff could not ignore that

Nehru has already referred in public statements that it is in his intention that India should remain detached from both the two main blocks in world affairs

¹¹ IOR L/WS/1/1341, Annex II, p. 16.

¹² Ibid., p. 15.

¹³ IOR L/WS/1/985, Note on Balochistan as an “Imperial” enclave, signed by the Command in Chief in India, General Auchinleck. The record refers to a report PHP (45) 15 (o) of April 1945 concerning Balochistan and is among papers of 1946.

and should not become “the plaything of the great powers”. It might well seem to an independent Indian Government that their interest lies in remaining neutral in any world conflict, that they are not vulnerable from any direction except from Russia through Afghanistan, and that if we become involved in war with Russia we should not have the strength necessary to protect India from being overrun in the early stages.¹⁴

Moreover, the Congress’ attitude in 1942 regarding India’s defence set a precedent: the high ranks of the British army were aware that independent India would never accept to be militarily controlled or conditioned by the UK. The Viceroy and the British high officials until the last moment were uncertain if independent India would be divided or united and endorsed the partition when, at a meeting with Lord Mountbatten in early May 1947, Jinnah undertook that Pakistan would opt for the Dominion Status, and therefore remain within the British Commonwealth¹⁵. If British interests could not be ensured by a united India, they should be by Pakistan. When it became clear that Pakistan could better secure Britain’s interests, the Viceroy and his staff suddenly decided to divide India. This was in spring 1947.

3. *The aftermath of India’s partition and a forgotten conflict in South Asia: insurgency in Balochistan*

India’s partition left behind a heavy legacy of territorial conflicts. a permanent war in Kashmir, four Indo-Pakistani wars, the 1971 civil war that gave birth to Bangladesh. In addition, at the peripheries of South Asia no lesser tensions are taking place, almost neglected by international experts and media. Balochistan is among them.

“Balochistan” defines an ethno-linguistic area spreading between present Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, predominantly inhabited by tribal groups. In the pre-colonial period, Balochistan’s social system was shaped by weak tribal alliances, that were partially altered by the British colonial administration, when the Marri-Bugti tribal areas were

¹⁴ IOR L/WS/1/1045, Notes for Sir David Monteath at Chiefs of Staff meeting, unsigned, undated but presumably from September 1946.

¹⁵ IOR L/WS/1/1030, Copy of a minute from dominion secretary to the prime minister dated 9 May 1947.

merged with Pashstun areas, ceded by Afghanistan to the British with the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879, to constitute British Balochistan. It was annexed to British India in 1884. Together with the territories obtained from the Kalat State under a contract of perpetual leasing, this region was administered directly, while the Kalat State, under the authority of the Khan of Kalat, was nominally independent, although constrained to a large degree by British political influence and pressure¹⁶.

Towards the end of the British rule Pashtun and Balochi pro-independence movements arose in this area, although in June 1947, when the creation of Pakistan was imminent, the tribal leaders and municipal authorities who had the capacity to decide the future of the region opted to join Pakistan, while the Kalat State declared independence, just to resist nine months, before succumbing to Pakistan's pressure and acceded to the nascent state. In spite of the government's efforts to suppress Pashtun and Balochi separatist movements, they survived and played a crucial role in local balances of power¹⁷. Soon after 1947 the Baloch nationalist organisations required autonomy, rather than full independence, more political and civil liberties and a more equitable distribution of revenues. The insurgency transformed into an ongoing conflict since 1948, when the province was forcibly annexed to new-born Pakistan.

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province (with the smallest population), stretching over approximately one third of the country's territory, but has been politically marginalised and oppressed by the hegemonic, Punjabi dominated political class. This vast and barren land, besides huge reserves of copper, gold and other raw materials, homes Pakistan's largest gas fields, that supply approximately 40 per cent of the national production. Balochistan's economy contributes to 4 per cent of Pakistan's GDP, but receives only a minimum share of the wealth it produces¹⁸.

¹⁶ R. REDAELLI, *The father's bow: The Khanate of Kalat and British India (19th-20th century)*, Firenze. Manent, 1997; P. TITUS, N. SWIDLER, *Knights not Pawns: Ethno-Nationalism and Regional Dynamics in Post-Colonial Balochistan*, in "International Journal of Middle East Studies", 32, 1, 2000, p. 48.

¹⁷ P. TITUS, N. SWIDLER, *Knights not Pawns*, cit. p.47.

¹⁸ Y. SAMAD, *Understanding the Insurgency in Balochistan*, in "Commonwealth and Comparative Politics", 52, 2, 2014, p. 15.

In the confrontation between the Balochi insurgency and the government, calm periods alternated with frequent uprisings, in 1958-59, from 1963 to 1969, from 1973 to 1977 and in 2005-2006, after the prominent leader Akbar Bukti was killed¹⁹. The insurgents claim a range of self-determination and a just redistribution of the revenues from the raw materials exploitation.

4. *Balochistan's strategic and economic importance and the US-China new great game*

In Balochistan were located most British military bases, that after partition remained in Pakistan. This detail is totally neglected by the scholars, who otherwise acknowledge Balochistan's highly strategic importance in general terms. Britain handed over Balochistan to nascent Pakistan and entitled the new state to dispose of Balochi territory for future common strategic objectives. This is not to say that an external power is responsible for post-independence conflicts in Balochistan, but rather that Pakistan's ostensible lack of willingness or incapacity to find a political solution to these conflicts should be explained in the light of UK-US Cold War alliances in Asia, that largely hinged on Pakistan and made this country the breeding ground for ruthless Anglo-American strategic and military experiments. In the 1950s Pakistan was tied-up to the UK and US by the double system of treaties represented by SEATO, the South East Asian Treaty Organisation, signed in Manila in 1954, that included US, UK, France, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand, and CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation). The latter was the fulfilment of two previous unaccomplished projects conceived by Great Britain across the World War II: the Middle East Command (MECO), then later on became the Middle East Defence

¹⁹ Educated at Oxford, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was the head of the Bugti tribe. He was Interior Minister in Feroz Khan Noon's government in 1958 and Governor of Balochistan for a short period in 1974. He won the election in 1988 as leader of the Baloch National Alliance and became Chief Minister of the province from 1988 to 1990. In 1990 Bukti founded the Jamhoori Watan Party in 1990 which became the largest Baloch party. Akbar Bugti was a member of the National Assembly in 1993 and 1997: Y. SAMAD, *Understanding the Insurgency in Balochistan*, cit., pp. 35-36.

Organisation (MEDO). CENTO was the evolution of the Baghdad Pact, signed in February 1955 between the UK, Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Pakistan was the keystone of Anglo-American strategic interests in South Asia, the bulwark against a presumed Soviet extension towards the Gulf and the Middle East, in an endless version of the Great Game, so much that Gen. Ayyub Khan, the first of a series of Pakistani military dictators, defined his country as “America’s most allied ally in Asia”.

Out of 10 former British airbases in Pakistan’s territory, 5 are located in Balochistan (Dalbandin, Pasni, Quetta, Shamsi airfield in Washuk and Jiwani), 3 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former North West Frontier Province), 1 in Punjab (Nur Khan base in Rawalpindi) and 1 in Sindh, Karachi, the largest airbase in Asia. The US army had, or has, free access to all of them.

After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and, subsequently, since 2001 US Enduring Freedom Operation in Afghanistan, Balochistan and the former North West Frontier Province earlier became the sanctuaries of Afghan *mujāhidīn* and, later on, of al-Qaeda militants and the Taliban movement, financed by American and Saudi Arabian funds, initially to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. After the end of the Soviet occupation, it was Pakistan to finance the Pashtun militancy in Afghanistan, in order to curb Iran’s influence in the region. Due to the Taliban and al-Qaeda presence across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the activities of the two movements intersected with the Balochi militant groups. Since then, violence escalated in the province, especially against the Punjabi settlers and moderate Balochi political leaders²⁰. The number of arms dramatically increased and the Balochi militants, both within and outside Pakistan, started to use the same financial channels used by the Taliban and al-Qaeda: drugs and arms trafficking for self-financing and informal *hawala* system for international money transfers²¹. The influx and the presence of Taliban and al-Qaeda elements determined also a radicalisation of the Balochi organisations in terms of political Islam.

Since the Enduring Freedom Operation, the US air force carried out a number of air strikes on Afghanistan and occasionally on Pakistan,

²⁰ M. KUPEKZ, *Pakistan’s Baloch Insurgency: History, Conflicts Drivers and Regional Implications*, in “International Affairs Review”, xx, 3, 2012, p. 104.

²¹ Y. SAMAD, *Understanding the Insurgency in Balochistan*, cit., pp. 21-22.

operating from Western Pakistan air fields. Since 2004 the US started a secret drone program, apparently agreed with the Pakistani governments, aiming to suppress Afghan and Pakistani *jihād* across the border. They targeted also the Balochi insurgents. According to different sources, most victims were unarmed civilians. Between 3.363 and 4.467 militants, both Afghan and Pakistani were killed. Several air strikes originated from air bases in Balochistan. The total number of Balochi deaths since 1947 is not known. Between 1999 and 2015 about 20000 people disappeared in Balochistan, however precise figures are not known.

Today the Pakistani government and army exploit, dispossess and oppress this land and its people: until recently the Pakistani government used the iron fist, with human rights abuses, abductions and militants' disappearances. The perpetrators of such abuses, Pakistani politicians and army officers, belong mainly to the Punjabi ruling elite, they are the descendants of the postcolonial rulers chosen by the British establishment to lead independent Pakistan and by the Anglo-American politicians to build up strong alliances in this crucial part of Asia. As they ancestors, today's politicians and military have to secure at any cost the control of the highly strategically important Balochistan, rich in raw materials as well. At least in its initial stages, the Balochi nationalists were predominantly secular and politically moderate and asked for autonomy and democratisation, but the climate of violence created by the Pakistani rulers exacerbated radical resistance and armed insurgency.

Since 2002 grievances have been continuously made against the ambitious Chinese-funded project for the enlargement of the Gwadar port, which is still in progress. Chinese interests in Balochistan began in 1990, when the state owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MGC) signed a contract to extract gold and copper from Saindak mine²² (Amir 2019). Balochis complain for being excluded from this and other infrastructural projects, managed exclusively by the government, with the employment of a few Balochis (in Gwadar are em-

²² A. AMIR, *The Balochistan Insurgency and the Threat of Chinese Interests in Pakistan*, in "China Brief", vol. 19, 4, 15 February 2019, The Jamestown Foundation of Research and Analysis, pp. 15-17, ; M. KUPEKZ, *Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency*, cit., pp. 103-104.

ployed Chinese engineers and labourers), with no advantages for the province. Since the inauguration of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Pakistan²³, the insurgents' attacks on Chinese workers multiplied, to intensify in 2018, when the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) organised a sensational attack on the Consulate in Karachi of the People's Republic, on 23 November. A previous suicide attack on a bus carrying Chinese engineers in August 2018 failed²⁴. After an interlude between 2019 and 2021, most probably due mainly to the COVID 19 pandemic, attacks resumed in 2022, involving now also female bombers, and continued with a failed plot in 2023²⁵. The BLA's decision to divert from the struggle against the government and target Chinese interests in the country is explained by the perception of China as an accomplice of the Pakistani government. According to the insurgents, not only China is "partner in crime" with the government in exploiting Balochistan's natural resources, but it supports the Pakistani government in trampling the Balochis' rights²⁶. The alleged scope of the CPEC is to uplift Pakistan's economy, but it is a matter of fact that China is more in the hunt of access to the strategically attractive Gulf and to Arab oil. However, lately the Pakistan-China relations have been under a strain, due to Pakistan's debt pressure and difficulty in paying back Chinese infrastructural investments, and to security reasons as well²⁷.

²³ Under CPEC agreement China is expected to provide a 62 billion US\$ loan to Pakistan to build the Gwadar Port, energy generation plants, transportation infrastructures and industrial zones: A. AMIR, *The Balochistan Insurgency*, cit.

²⁴ A. AMIR, *The Balochistan Insurgency*, cit.

²⁵ M. A. NOTEZA, *Will Balochistan Blow Up China's Belt and Road?*, in "Foreign Policy", 30 May 2019. M. ABRAR, 2021, *Two children killed, Chinese injured in Gwadar suicide attack*, in "Pakistan Today", 20 August 2021; K. BALOCH, 2022, *China is Unnerved by Increasing Attacks on Chinese in Pakistan*, in "The Diplomat", 1 October 2022; *Protests, suicide attacks: Backlash grows against China's Belt & Road projects in Pakistan*, in "The Times of India", 21 August 2021; *Four killed by female suicide bomber near China Institute in Pakistan*, in "The Guardian", 26 April 2022 (apart from being the first attack to be carried out by a female militant, it was also the first one against Chinese academics); *Police foil attempted suicide attack on Chinese company in Karachi, kill militant*, in "Arab News", 10 May 2023.

²⁶ A. AMIR, *The Balochistan Insurgency*, cit.

²⁷ V. FABBRI, *The China Pakistan economic corridor facing serious difficulties*, in "Geopolitica.info", 15 March 2023.

In more recent times, a new threat for Chinese interests in Balochistan seems to be a renewed American involvement in the province. Washington's concern about growing Chinese economic, possible military influence in the province and expansion to the Persian Gulf may lead the United States to support the Balochi insurgency and endorse Balochistan's claims for self-determination or even independence. Certainly the United States does not have the intention to sit idle and undergo China's increasing hegemony in the region. While in 2012 the intention of a group of American congressmen to support Balochi separatism seemed unfeasible²⁸, now the idea of severing Balochistan from Pakistan seems to make its way among American geopolitical experts, following the example of Great Britain when, in 1899, supported separatism in Kuwait and created a British protectorate, subordinated to Britain's foreign policy. As Pakistan not only turns away from the United States but, through its Taliban proxies and China, tries to humiliate Washington, a new generation of American strategists, policymakers, and intelligence professionals may reconsider the redlines that have governed bilateral ties since the Truman administration. Bangladesh, after all, split away from Pakistan and is now a stable and moderate country. It is increasingly conceivable that a new generation of US policymakers less trustful of Islamabad and less concerned with Pakistani sensibilities may question whether it would be a US interest for Balochistan to follow suit²⁹.

²⁸ A. Z. SHAH, *Geopolitical Significance of Balochistan. Interplay of Foreign Actors*, in "Strategic Studies", Vol. 37, No. 3, 2017.

²⁹ M. RUBIN, *Could Washington Support Balochistan Independence?* in "The National Interest", 12 September 2021.

Riassunto - Il Balochistan, la più grande provincia del Pakistan, dove si concentra un'enorme quantità di risorse naturali di ogni tipo, dal gas naturale all'oro, collocato in un'area di importanza geopolitica di grande rilievo, all'ingresso del Golfo Persico, è anche uno dei luoghi più instabili al mondo. Il Balochistan è la regione in cui, negli anni dell'occupazione sovietica dell'Afghanistan e, successivamente, dell'operazione Enduring Freedom e oltre, fino ad oggi, sono stati addestrati e armati gruppi combattenti che agivano sia oltre confine, in Afghanistan, sia sul territorio pakistano. Da sempre terra di frontiera, il Balochistan è stato oggetto dei progetti britannici di divisione del subcontinente indiano: qui si concentravano le basi militari e aeree inglesi. Con l'indipendenza di India e Pakistan, era di vitale importanza per Gran Bretagna e Stati

Uniti mantenere il controllo militare del Balochistan e lo fecero accorpando la regione a uno stato debole e facilmente manipolabile come il Pakistan. L'articolo ricostruisce i fatti che hanno portato alla *partition* dell'India, descrivendo nel dettaglio la visione che gli ambienti militari inglesi avevano del Balochistan, offrendo una prospettiva totalmente inedita, visto che, quando si parla della spartizione dell'Asia meridionale, ci si focalizza per lo più su altre zone, come il Kashmir, trascurando aree che hanno avuto altrettanta rilevanza ma che finora sono sfuggite all'attenzione degli studiosi.

L'attuale instabilità del Balochistan, dove oggi si incrociano gli interessi di diversi attori, USA, Pakistan, Cina, India, è una conseguenza degli assetti geopolitici incoraggiati nel 1947 dalla Gran Bretagna.