

# **Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations**

## **Baluch in Afghanistan**

### **Summary of Key Issues**

- There were roughly 100,000 Baluch in Afghanistan prior to the outbreak of resistance against the communist government in Kabul, and the subsequent rule of the Taliban.
- They are concentrated in the barren, desert region of southwestern Afghanistan along the border with Iran and Pakistan. However, there are scattered populations throughout the country (especially in the northwest).
- There are approximately 5-6 million Baluch living in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.
- In all three states, the Baluch are politically and economically marginal. However, the ethnic group has some violent nationalist organizations which clash with authorities in all three states.
- Baluch are largely tribal nomadic pastoralists.
- The Baluch have absorbed the Brahui tribes, which reside in the same areas as the Baluch, but which speak a Dravidian language. The Brahui either migrated from southern India or were a vestige of the ancient Indus valley civilization. While they maintain their own language, they have been culturally assimilated by the Baluch.

## Baluch Ethnic Group

The Afghan Baluch live on the periphery of Afghan life. There were roughly 100,000 Baluch in Afghanistan prior to the outbreak of resistance against the communist government in Kabul, and the subsequent rule of the Taliban. They are concentrated in the barren, desert region of southwestern Afghanistan along the border with Iran and Pakistan. However, there are scattered populations throughout the country (especially in the northwest).



**Baluch Nomads migrating to better pastureland**

It is difficult to estimate the Baluch population in Afghanistan because during the Soviet-Afghan war and Taliban rule, many of the Baluch fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. The refugee crisis has been compounded by a five-year drought (1997-2002) which devastated the agricultural production and herding on which most Baluch rely. These additions to the population in the barren area of Pakistani and Iranian Baluchistan have caused tensions because they put a strain on the scarce resources of the area. Some of these individuals have returned to Afghanistan, but it is too soon to tell how many will eventually reside in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Baluch also reside on the periphery of the Baluch ethnic group. They form the northern border of Baluch inhabited lands and have been separated from the much larger populations of Baluch in Pakistan and Iran for the past century. Although it is very difficult to estimate the Afghan Baluch population, there may be up to 5-6 million in total. The area inhabited by the Baluch encompasses 207,000 square miles stretching from Afghanistan to a 900 mile Arabian Sea coastline. This area is a barren and hostile environment composed of rocky brown scrub country punctuated by mountains and deserts. In all three states, the Baluch are politically and economically marginal. However, the ethnic group has some violent nationalist organizations which clash with authorities in all three states.

Although there are some urban Baluch in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, the Baluch are largely tribal nomadic pastoralists. They rely upon tending sheep and goats as their main form of production, and migrate within their tribal lands in search of fresh grazing land throughout the year. Baluch residing in areas where there is some agricultural land will travel to that area during parts of the year to tend to crops (wheat or rice), or harvest dates to augment their production. Historically, this income was supplemented through raiding the Punjab and Persian populations. However, since the 1930's, opportunities for raiding have been greatly diminished by the increased power of the governments of Pakistan and Iran. Many Baluch have taken advantage of the lawlessness engendered by the twenty-year conflict in Afghanistan to supplement their income through smuggling operations.

Baluch tribes can vary in size from several hundred to 15,000. The largest Baluch tribe is the Marri of Pakistani Baluchistan. The Afghan Baluch reside in three distinct communities.

*Nimruz:* There are roughly 60,000 Baluch residing in Nimruz. This southwestern group is the largest of the Baluch settlements in Afghanistan. The Baluch in this area are largely settled farmers. This occupation is unusual among the Baluch in general, but common for Baluch in Afghanistan. The settled agricultural lifestyle of these Baluch results from the availability of fertile land in the vicinity of Lake Helmand and the Helmand River. The agricultural lifestyle has resulted in a very different political organization among these tribes. The organization of these tribes is much more authoritarian than other Baluch and resembles feudalism more than the lineage-based tribal systems in Pakistan and Iran.

The largest population of Baluch in Nimruz resides along the southern shore of the Helmand River between Rudbar and Chachar Burjak. The area consists of large agricultural landholdings, and is inhabited by a very small number of landlords and many poor tenant farmers whose position in life resembles that of serfs. Nearly all of these individuals are from the Sanjarani tribe.

The northern portion of Nimruz is populated largely by Pashtuns and contains the provincial capital, Zaranj. Pashtuns only arrived in Nimruz beginning in the 1960s because of the presence of a successful Baluch bazaar in Zaranj. The Baluch residing in northern Nimruz are mostly from the Nahrui, Rakhshani, Saruni, Shahreki and Mamasani tribes.

The western section of Nimruz contains Baluch settlements on the eastern banks of the Helmand River in proximity to the Iranian border. This area is characterized by settled agricultural systems and is predominantly inhabited by members of the Gurgech, Rakhshani and Nahrui tribes.

*Herat and Badguiz:* 30,000-40,000 Baluch reside in the western Afghani provinces of Herat and Badguiz.

*Northwest Afghanistan:* Scattered groups of pastoral nomadic Baluch are found throughout northwestern Afghanistan. The provinces where they can be found include Farah, Faryab, Samangan, Takhar, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Jauzjan and Quandahar.

The Baluch are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. However, the abject poverty of most Baluch means they are not particularly involved with religious leaders. The Baluch do tend to be very committed to a kind of folk Islam. Baluch in Iran are slightly more committed to Islam than their northern cousins.

## Ethnic Description

### *Physical Description*

The Baluch are similar in appearance to other Afghan ethnic groups, with tan complexions and dark hair.

### *Cultural History*

Baluch legend has it that the Baluch migrated from the Aleppo region of Syria. Other legends hold that the Baluch are one of the 10 lost tribes of Israel (and therefore God's chosen people). Still other accounts claim that the Baluch are descendants of the Babylonians.

However, the Baluch language offers evidence that the Baluch originated from the Caspian region, and made their way gradually across Iran to reach Baluchistan in 1000 AD.

Once they had arrived in the vast and unforgiving area they now inhabit, the Baluch assimilated the Med of Makran (the Baluch fishing tribe on the Arabian Sea), and entered into a conflict with the Brahui. The Brahui speak a Dravidian language and either migrated from southern India or were a vestige of the ancient Indus valley civilization. The Brahui still reside in Baluch areas. While they maintain their own language, they have been culturally assimilated by the Baluch.

Baluch seeking to justify the creation of a Greater Baluchistan point to two periods in Baluch history when an all-Baluch government reigned in Baluch areas.

- In 1487, Mir Chakar was able to unite the Baluch tribes into a loose confederacy. The seat of power was at Sibi. However, the kingdom collapsed into a civil war between Mir Chakar's Rind tribe and the rival Lashari tribe.
- The next organized government of the Baluch was called the Khanate of Kalat. This period still holds resonance for many Baluch. The Khanate functioned independently between 1749 and 1819, and governed present-day Pakistani Baluchistan.

The expansion of British India in 1839 resulted in British annexation of Sind in 1843. Sind is now a province of Pakistan which has a mixed Baluch and Pashtun population. The Khanate of Kalat and other regions of Baluchistan formed the sensitive Western borderlands of British India.

The British did not annex these lands and the Baluch remained independent of Persian/Iranian control until the 1930's, and of Pakistani control until Pakistan annexed the Khanate of Kalat over the objections of the Khan in 1955.

The Pakistanis renamed the Khanate “Baluchistan.” The province makes up 42% of Pakistan’s territory, but contains only 4% of its population as a result of the hostile environment and lack of a modern economy.

The Baluch resisted the post-World War II annexations. Pakistani and Iranian government efforts to tame their borderlands have resulted in an ongoing low level of insurgency with occasional violent flare ups. Resistance is particularly strong in Pakistan where the 1973-1977 war between Baluch rebels and the Pakistani Army touched the life of every Baluch tribesman. This war also spilled over into Afghanistan where Baluch nationalists set up base camps in their fight against the Pakistani government. The base camps were condoned and supported by the communist government of Afghanistan. The Baluch paramilitary camps were situated in an area dominated by Islamic fundamentalist groups (*mujahideen*) who were attempting to overthrow the Soviet-supported government in Kabul. The Baluch operated completely independent of the *mujahideen* and often ran into problems with them.

### *Cultural History of the Afghan Baluch*

The oral histories of the Afghan Baluch indicate that they arrived in southwestern Afghanistan in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It appears from these same sources that Ghengis Khan and his Turkish-Mongolian troops drove the Baluch population back into Baluch lands in present-day Iran and Pakistan during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Baluch tribes returned to southern Afghanistan in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when they were pushed out of present-day Pakistan by the westward expansion of the Marri, Bugti and Boledi tribes.

On their arrival in southwestern Afghanistan, largely along the banks of the Helmand River and Lake, the Baluch underwent an economic transformation which ended in political and cultural reorganization. These nomadic herders became settled agriculturalists. The climate of the area was unable to support nomadic herding. However, the river banks offered the ability to practice limited settled agriculture. The Baluch intermarried with the Persian (Iranian) upper class which owned the agricultural land, and possessed an extensive irrigation system of canals and dams which was central to successful cultivation in arid, unforgiving climate of southern Afghanistan. The political system maintained within Baluch nomadic herding communities is fairly egalitarian in that every household has the ability to choose a camping group, and has multiple family and lineage ties which allow these households to resist any authoritarian tendencies in lineage or tribal leaders. This situation changed greatly when the Baluch took up settled agriculture. The *sardars* or tribal chiefs became landowners and the other Baluch became the workers on the land. This arrangement has resulted in a political system which resembles European feudalism. The land owning Baluch tribes also made extensive use of slave labor well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Kandahar was a major slave trading town.

As settled agriculturalists, the Baluch ruled from fortified citadels. They began a political expansion in 1830 and enveloped the region of southern Afghanistan. After this expansion, the Sanjarani tribe established itself as the dominant tribe. Other tribes competed with them for control, but the Sanjarani *sardars* established relationships, through marriage and tribute payments, with neighboring Persian and Pashtun leaders. These alliances assured security for the rule of the Sanjarani *sardars*.

Unlike the settled, southern Afghani Baluch, the nomadic Baluch scattered throughout northwestern Afghanistan appear to have resided in that area for the last six or seven centuries. Their nomadic, tribal political and economic organization remains largely intact to this day.

## Centers of Authority

### *Description*

**Settled Agriculturalists:** The authority among settled Baluch agriculturalists in Afghanistan rests with the tribal chief or *sardar*. This individual owns the land on which all tribal members work. The members of the tribe fall into three categories: members of the *sardar's* lineage, supervisors of agricultural production, and landless peasant tenants.

The members of the *sardar's* lineage are the landowners of the tribe and form a kind of small nobility. The *sardar's* lineage has many more rights than the other lineages in the tribe. Because power rests with one lineage, it is impossible to join the aristocracy of the tribe. The *sardar's* lineage is closest genealogically to the tribal founder. The power of the *sardar's* lineage results not only from its land ownership, but also from its ability to select the next *sardar*. For this reason, the *sardar's* lineage is called the *sardarkhel*.

**The degree to which the ownership of land is concentrated in the hands of the *sardar* and his family is illustrated by the following example:**

**Five landholders in the Chahar Burjak district own 100% of the land. Three-quarters of this land is owned by members of the *sardarkhel* (lineage of the tribal chief) of the Sanjarani tribe. The largest landholding in the area (4,400 hectares) belongs to Sardar Destegir Kahn. The second largest holding (3,200 hectares) belongs to his uncle.**

The social, political and economic power of the *sardars* has allowed them to assume political offices within the state systems which exist in Afghanistan. For instance, the *sardar* of the Sanjarani is also the mayor (*malik*) of Chahar Burjak. No administrative process can occur in the district without his approval. Due to his patronage of the local police, the *sardar* is also immune from prosecution. This has allowed him to take advantage of the significant smuggling opportunities in the region. Even the religious leader, or *mulla*, of Chahar Burjak is beholden to the *sardar* for his income, and therefore has no ability to provide a second center of power in the community. It is said that Sardar Destegir Kahn and his *sardarkhel* enjoy drinking alcohol in front of the *mulla*. Drinking alcohol is expressly forbidden in Islam, but the *mulla's* dependence on the aid and goodwill of Sardar Destegir Kahn make any opposition to the activity impossible.

The lineages which are closest genealogically to the *sardarkhel* are usually the source of the middle class of Baluch tribesmen. This class is composed of a small number of families whose male members supervise agricultural production for the landowners. The *nazir* is responsible for the organization of the estate. The *mirza* is responsible for bookkeeping, marketing, remunerating tenants and paying taxes. These two individuals must be able to read and write, and are often members of the *sardarkhel*. Subordinate officials oversee the irrigation system, assist in distributing wages, monitor threshing and ensure collection of the *sardar's* portion of the harvest.

The lowest group in the social organization of the settled agricultural Baluch are the tenant farmers. These individuals make up the vast majority of the people living on the land. They

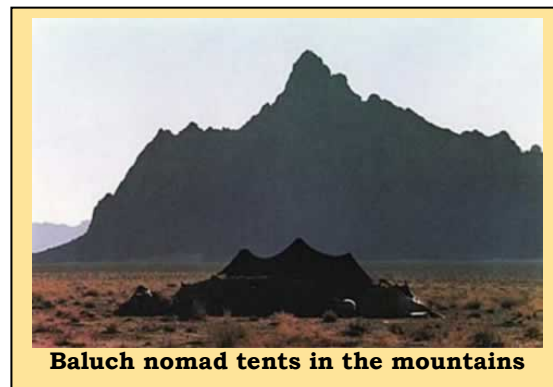
lease small amounts of land, usually twelve hectares, from the *sardar*. Rent is paid in kind and usually consists of a share of the harvest. The size of the share is determined by who contributed each of the five factors of production: land, labor, seed, work animals and water. The contribution of each of the factors entitles the landlord or the tenant to one-fifth of the output. Because the landowner controls the irrigation system and owns the land, it is likely that the tenant will only be able to take one-fifth of the product. This results in an average yearly income of roughly US\$50. The tenants' minimal income means that they often have to borrow from the landlord in order to meet expenses. A tenant can only leave a landlord's holdings once he is debt-free, so tenants become so indebted to the landlords that they become attached to the land they live on, like serfs or indentured servants.

The sole source of authority in these agricultural tribes is the *sardar*. He controls political, economic and military power.

The largest tribes who follow this pattern of economic and political organization are:

- Gurgech: This is the largest Afghan Baluch tribe. It has 6,000 members who reside on the banks of the Helmand River in central Nimruz. The tribal leader and main landowner is Sardar Mirza Dost Muhammad Khan. He is very committed to the welfare of the members of his tribe.
- Sarnjarani: The members of this tribe reside along the Helmand River in the vicinity of Chahar Burjak. The tribal chief and main landholder is Sardar Destegir Khan.
- Nahru.
- Shahreki.
- Sarbandi.
- Rakhshani.

**Nomadic Herders:** Political and military power among the nomadic Baluch is not concentrated at the ethnic group level. It is concentrated within the extended family and within the tribe. It is the responsibility of each member of a lineage to protect and assist other members of that lineage. A lineage is composed of individuals with the same great-grandfather or, in some cases, great-great-grandfather.



By showing that an attack on one is an attack on all, a lineage demonstrates to others the foolishness of threatening any member of the group. In combination with other lineages, this arrangement develops into a balance of power which holds behavior (such as thievery or violence) in check. The dominant lineage tie is through the father. A tribe is composed of a set of these lineage groups and is headed by a *sardar* or tribal chief. Fighting between lineages in the same tribe is common, although *sardars* do their best to prevent in-fighting by acting as a neutral arbiter of disputes.



The concept of authority in Baluch life is complex. While there is a system of fairly democratic decision-making, which relies on household heads and equal lineages, there is also a tribal chief. These two authorities exist in competition with one another.

Both the tribal chiefs and the *masters* of the lineages are generally fairly weak. The chief's main role is to act as a mediator between rival lineages. Because he has no authority to coerce tribe members into following his decisions, he leads best when he rules based on public opinion. Similarly, the *master* of a lineage must heed the opinions of the members of the lineage.

A Baluch tribe is made up of a set of equal lineages, *brasrend*, which organize through assemblies and councils to form a tribe. Lineages consist of individuals who have the same paternal great-grandfather or, sometimes, great-great grandfather. Each member of the lineage must defend other members of the lineage and the honor of the lineage. Each member of the lineage is also duty-bound to assist other members of the lineage who are in material need.

**Master** is the concept of political seniority. It is very important at all levels of Baluch political organization. It is a combination of age seniority, personal authority, leadership status, and social stature. This concept is the determinant of who is in charge of lineages and tribes. Political power is based on who else is in the room and a judgment of who is *master*.

The tribe provides the lineages with internal order, protection from external threat, and access to tribal lands and their natural resources (upon which all rural Baluch depend).

Each household within the tribe joins a *halk* or camping group. These *halks* are dominated by one lineage, but usually contain households which are members of two or three other lineages. The *master* or leader of the *halk* is determined by membership in the dominant lineage, economic success, seniority, ability to deal with others, number of offspring and other similar factors. The *master* of the *halk* makes decisions which are generally binding on the operation of the *halk*. However, these decisions are always made after extensive consultation with the other heads of household. The *halki master* has little way of applying sanctions to members for not obeying his authority. In addition, each household is able to pack up and leave for another *halk* where kin reside within a couple of hours. Therefore, the *halki master* must rule by consensus or the *halk* will fail.

Further, each *brasrend* has a *master*. Above the *brasrend*, up to the tribal level, there are no specified leadership roles, and authority is somewhat vague and situational. *Brasrends* often come together (based on common lineage) to form into tribal sections. Prominent members of the tribal section form an informal council. This *ad hoc* arrangement based on *master* does not extend to the office of *sardar* or tribal chief. *Sardar* is a permanent office.

### History

Historically, Baluch have found it difficult to cooperate above the tribal level and sometimes within tribes. Competition between lineages and tribes over grazing land and other natural

resources has led to conflicts within and between tribes. Conflicts which result from offenses, or perceived offenses to the honor of a member of a lineage, can sometimes spiral out of control into violent conflict between lineages. The most common reasons for conflict are theft and injury to the honor of another person.

**An example of the conflicts between tribes is offered by the account of an anthropologist who lived with the Baluch in Iran during the 1970s:**

A fight broke out between two shepherds over a pasture in Garonchin. One shepherd was from the Gamshadzai tribe and the other was from the Yarhamadzai tribe. The Yarhamadzai shepherd was pretty badly beaten. The members of his *halk* (or camping group) went to the Gamshadzai *halk*'s camp and beat up two other individuals. While migrating, the Yarhamadzai involved in the conflict were fired upon and one died from a gunshot wound to the head.

The Yarhamadzai *sardar* cautioned restraint and said not to inform the Iranian gendarmerie. He suggested the tribe take no further action, but remain calm and await developments toward settlement of the dispute. Over the next month, there were no further developments. Five Yarhamadzai tribesmen came across a lone Gamshadzai in the mountains. They stripped him naked, beat him and then slit his throat and dumped his body in the mountains. The two *sardars* met and agreed that since one man from each tribe had been killed, they were even and should consider the issue settled. The members of each tribe obeyed the agreement.

As a result of this inability for tribes to cooperate with one another, there has never been a long period of ethnic group unity which might allow the formation of Baluch state and homeland.

*Rule of Law*

The Baluch lands are seldom subject to the criminal justice systems of the states in which they reside. There is no written rule of law. There are no judges or courts or prisons. The Baluch maintain law and order through a system of lineage, tribal honor and shame. The system is enforced largely through revenge killings and the ability to expel individuals from lineages or tribes.

The system revolves around a set of norms. Basically, the norms consist of respecting the property of others; not speaking of others in disparaging or dishonoring ways; not committing adultery; and not killing.

If someone were to steal something from another Baluch, a group of male members of his lineage would gather and find the perpetrator, attempt to retrieve the belongings, and punish the individual in question. If they felt he had dishonored them by committing the crime, then the lineage might expel the offender. Expulsion from a lineage is a horrible fate for a Baluch because it means that he will no longer have the ability to be part of a camping group, to find a wife, to be part of Baluch society. If the lineage of the thief felt that he had not committed the crime or that the punishment was too harsh, the male members of the second lineage would seek a reprisal. This second reprisal is normally followed by a period of negotiation moderated by the *sardar*.

In cases of murder, the lineage mates of the deceased have the inalienable right to extract blood for blood. This claim is recognized by the tribe and lineages as legitimate. In many of the states in which the Baluch have resided, the government allows them to maintain order through this revenge system without any interference. Only the closest male family member of the deceased can forgive murder. Once a blood debt has been extracted, the family of the murderer has a right to a blood debt. The *sardar* holds negotiations between the lineages. Once two people have died, the *sardar* normally judges the conflict to be over and the lineages normally accept his judgment.



**Baluch nomad elder**

The only other crimes which warrant death in the Baluch cultural code are adultery and treason. In both cases, the wronged party inflicts the sentence on the perpetrator. However, in the case of adultery, it is customary in many tribes for an adulterous woman who has dishonored her family to hang herself.

In this system, group revenge functions as a check against destabilizing behavior such as theft, murder and adultery. The threat of punishment, dishonor and possible expulsion from the lineage or tribe coerces individuals to act in the interests of the group.

In the case of the settled, agricultural Baluch of southern Afghanistan, the system is based more on the authority of the *sardar* and the local Afghan police than is the nomadic system of internalized justice. Because the *sardar* controls all political and economic power, he is able to enforce order. These *sardars*, however, are often involved in smuggling activities which are against the rule of law of the Afghani government, but are consistent with Baluch history of raiding and trading. The convenient location of the Nimruz Baluch settlements in an area between Pakistan and Iran makes smuggling goods very lucrative for the Baluch *sardars*. The transportation of drugs (largely opium and heroin), gasoline, and all sorts of consumer goods across the harsh deserts is a very dangerous and lucrative undertaking.

### *Role of the State vs. Role of Ethnic Group*

Neither the ethnic group, nor the state are very strong entities among the Baluch generally. The lineage and tribal systems and the code of conduct act in place of government. Government interference in the activities of the nomadic Baluch are viewed negatively by the group as a whole. In addition, interactions with nation states historically have not had positive effects on the Baluch.

Baluch books, magazines and oral folk tales are filled with stories of heroic resistance against would-be conquerors. The stories tell of ancient battles with the Persians, Turks, Arabs, Tartars, Hindus and others. The point of the stories is to glorify the heroes who struggled to throw off the yoke of oppressors.

These tales of ancient battles mesh well with the recent coercive attempts by Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to pacify the tribes. These attempts have resulted in insurgencies and sometimes open warfare. In Afghanistan, the communist government encountered resistance among many Baluch when it attempted to impose policies regarding gender, property ownership and religion. These attempts resulted in the development of some Baluch resistance organizations in southern Afghanistan. It also resulted in the flight of many Baluch agriculturalists to Pakistan. After the communist government's collapse, the Baluch also encountered problems with the Taliban.

The 1973-1977 war against the Pakistani army resulted in a number of tribe-based Baluch guerilla organizations. After the war, continuing through the 1980s and into the 1990s, insurgents based in southern Afghanistan continued to attack Pakistani forces operating in Pakistani Baluchistan. The most powerful tribe in this effort is the largest Baluch tribe, the Marri. One of the three or four bases on the Pakistani border is called Kalat-i-Glizai. It is uncertain whether the camps are still in operation.

Most Baluch do not even think of themselves as members of an ethnic group. They view themselves as members of a household, a lineage and a tribe. The ethnic group itself is made up of tribes which compete for territory on which to graze. The tribes therefore find it difficult to cooperate. For instance, during the war against the Pakistani army, the Baluch did not unite into one fighting force in opposition to the threat. Instead, guerrilla groups formed around lineages and tribes. These guerilla organizations sometimes cooperated with one another, and at other times worked at cross purposes.

The word *baluch* in Baluchi does not connote an ethnic group. It is an indication that the individual is not a tribal chief, or *sardar*, and that he is not a slave or a slave's descendent, or *golam*. *Baluch* signifies a nomadic herding lifestyle. Settled agriculturalists, such as those found in southern Afghanistan, are called *shabri*.

The Baluch have a certain pan-ethnic pride in their language, genealogical histories, culture, ability to survive in one of the harshest environments in the world, and ability to militarily resist much more powerful conquerors. However, far above that, Baluchs identify with the tribal or lineage links of each household.

The de-tribalized, urban Baluch of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran often have a strong ethnic-group affiliation. Education and urban living have politicized these Baluch. Their interaction with other ethnic groups has led them to believe that the only way to better the lives of the Baluch is to form a nation state. The founder of the Baluch People's Liberation Front, Sher Mohamed, is a good example of this phenomenon. Sher Mohamed was a Marri closely related to the *sardar* who was educated in British schools. He became a political activist at the grassroots level, and spent 14 years in jail for trying to start a labor party in pre-independence Pakistan. After serving his sentence, he emerged in time for the Pakistani attempts to pacify and assimilate the Baluch tribal lands. He began a guerrilla resistance organization called the Pararis, which became the lead organization in the struggle against the Pakistani government.

## Cultural Attitudes

### *Self*

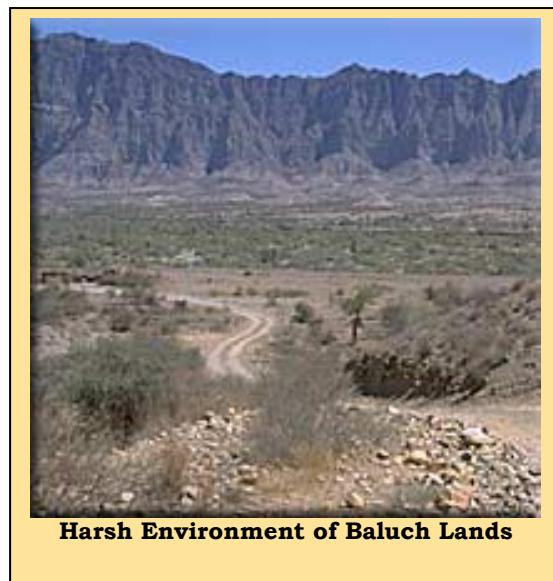
The Baluch identify themselves as members of a lineage, and a tribe. This is the central focus of their identity. Within that identity, the Baluch individual is secondary. All individuals are bound to assist the other members of their lineage at whatever cost necessary. It is not the maintenance of personal honor which drives Baluch behavior, it is the honor of the lineage.

The detribalization of Baluch living in large cities has weakened some of this adherence to lineage honor or tribal honor. Urban Baluch often think of themselves as individuals, in much the way as other residents of cities in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

### *Group/Tribe/Clan*

The main determinant of Baluch identity is membership of a lineage. If the lineage is honorable and associated with honorable lineages, the individual can be proud. Particularly, if the members of the lineage behave righteously according to the norms of Baluch life, the lineage is deemed honorable. This honor reflects well on all members of the lineage. The honor of a lineage is also based on its proximity to the present *sardar* or to the founder of the tribe.

As an ethnic group, the Baluch have certain points of pride. The Baluch view themselves as hardy survivors able to inhabit some of the world's most difficult environments. The Baluch pride themselves in being great warriors who are able to fend off technologically and numerically superior forces through their rugged survival skills. The Baluch view the deserts and rocky, high mountain passes which characterize the area in which they live as a blessing which allows them to defend against better armed and more numerous forces. The Baluch are proud of their nomadic, tent dwelling lifestyle for similar reasons. The Baluch consider themselves to be fierce warriors and pride themselves on combativeness. The Baluch also take great pride in being astute entrepreneurs who are able to take advantage of smuggling and trading to augment their meager existence.



**Harsh Environment of Baluch Lands**

### *Modern Nation State*

The Baluch attitude toward the modern nation state is generally negative. Although some urban Baluch aspire to a Baluchistan independent of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, most are suspicious of any government.

The nomadic Baluch tribes have resisted with great determination the efforts of various empires to absorb them. The Baluch political, economic and social structure is totally incongruous with the modern nation state. Property rights; written laws; governments with a monopoly on coercion; and identifying oneself with millions of people as part of a nation are all totally alien to the Baluch. In the modern period, there have been several violent Baluch uprisings against the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

In addition, Baluch reliance on raiding and smuggling as a source of income has made them a target of the governments of Iran and Pakistan.

The settled agricultural Baluch tribes in southern Afghanistan have also resisted integration into the Afghan state. During the rule of the Soviet government, the southern Afghan Baluch tribes resisted integration into the state. The attempts by the communist government to manipulate the educational system, make changes in the landlord tenant relationships, and to alter gender relations angered the Baluch. These tribes formed into their own, independent *mujahideen* and fought against the Soviet government. However, they were not aligned with the Pashtun *mujahideen*. These groups operated out of refugee camps in Iran, and it is believed that they were funded by the same US or Saudi money.

### *Conflict Resolution*

Conflict resolution among the Baluch relies on a pattern of revenge for harm to the honor of a lineage or an individual in a lineage. After each act of revenge, there is normally a negotiation. The negotiation is sometimes chaired by the *sardar* of the tribe. If a lineage or a tribe wishes to show that they are sorry and give in to the dishonor of having committed a crime against another group, they may send their women to the negotiation in their stead. The women will plead for peace.

### *Neighboring States*

The Baluch tribes fiercely guard their way of life from the domination of others. As a result, they have poor relationships with the governments of the countries in which they form a minority. They are often willing to form alliances with outside powers in order to increase Baluch ability to resist the attempts of governments to integrate them into a modern nation state. However, the Baluch adherence to alliances with outsiders ends when these outsiders begin to attempt to influence Baluch culture, politics and customs.

### *Pakistan*

The Baluch have strongly resisted integration into Pakistan. The British never formally annexed most of the Baluch lands. They remained an independent entity, the Khanate of Kalat. The government of the Khanate was only nominally independent, but was so weak

that most Baluch tribesmen were unaffected by its existence. The Khan refused to allow the Baluch to be integrated into the Pakistani state when it won independence in 1947. The Khanate was forcibly annexed by Pakistan in 1955.

The Pakistani government has from that point forward attempted to integrate the Baluch into the Pakistani nation. In order to have a unified nation, the people of the nation must have similar culture; must abide by a written code of law; must obey modern cultural norms. As a result of the disparity between the dominant ethnic group's (the Punjab) way of life and that of the Baluch, and also the Pashtun living in Pakistan, there have been many clashes between the government and the non-Punjab populations.

There has been an ongoing low level insurgency resisting integration into Pakistan since 1955. In 1973, this insurgency flared up into an all-out war.

Between 1970 and 1973, a conflict raged between the provincial government of Baluchistan and the central government of Pakistan. The Pakistani government was then headed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The conflict centered on the amount of autonomy which should be granted to the local authorities. Bhutto eventually grew frustrated with the resistance of Baluch leaders to his centralizing policies, and dissolved the provincial government in 1973. Six weeks after the ouster of the government, Baluch guerrillas began to attack Pakistani army convoys. By 1974, the Baluch had managed to cut off most of the main roads linking Baluchistan and the surrounding provinces, and had brought a halt to the Sibi-Harnai railroad link. The increasingly frequent and effective ambushes of army units and raids on army encampments were taking their toll on the Pakistani military. The guerillas were able to attack and then disperse into the harsh environment of Baluchistan without the need for roads or towns.

The turning point in the war occurred as a result of the Pakistani purchase from Iran of 30 US-made Huey Cobra helicopters. These helicopters gave the Pakistani army devastating firepower and the ability to follow the tribesmen across the desert and mountain terrain, cutting off their escape routes.

The central battle in the conflict occurred when the Marri tribe (the largest Baluch tribe with 15,000 members, and the most committed to resistance to the Pakistani government) held its annual summer gathering at Chamalang. As a result of the fighting, most of the military aged men remained in the mountains and allowed their wives, sons and fathers to arrange the camping group associations and discuss politics for them. The Pakistani army attacked the tents gathered at Chamalang with combined air and ground forces, and effectively lured the guerillas out of the hills to defend their families. The Baluch took heavy losses in three days and three nights of fighting, and then did what they could to regroup and escape.

After this defeat, the insurgency was increasingly unable to mount coordinated attacks. The Pararis (the central Marri guerilla force) and other guerilla groups began to operate out of southern Afghanistan in 1975. In February 1977, a weak truce with the Baluch was signed by the new government of Pakistan. However, some insurgent groups still operate out of Afghanistan, resisting the Pakistani government.

## *Iran*

The Baluch are concentrated in large areas of eastern Iran which stretch the entire length of the Iranian border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, all the way down to the shores of the Arabian Sea.

Iranians have always had a fairly poor relationship with the Baluch. The Baluch are Sunni Muslims, while the Iranians are Shia. This has been a constant tension in the relationship. In addition, Baluch nomads have been a source of lawlessness within the Iranian state from time immemorial. The tribes were involved in raiding of Iranian villages until the 1930s when the Iranian government began a campaign to halt these activities. The present-day incarnation of this lawless behavior is smuggling. One of the major components of the smuggling trade is opium and heroin. The heroin is generally exported, but there is a large community of opium addicts in Iran. Much of the smuggling starts or ends in Iran, and crosses through the far southwestern Afghan province of Nimruz into Pakistan. This is a source of constant irritation for the government of Iran since it erodes law and order throughout Iran.

The Iranian government has historically regarded instability in the Baluch areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan as a threat to the rule of law in Iran. In 1928, the Pahlvi monarchy in Iran completed a military campaign against the Baluch tribes which led to direct rule by Tehran over the tribes. From that point forward, the Iranian monarchy attempted to bring the Baluch into their movement to unite and modernize Iran. They considered the lifestyle of the tribes inappropriate for a modern country and therefore undertook hard measures to settle the nomads. Local dress was officially forbidden in public places (although the unveiling of women was never really enforced). The language of education and administration was to be solely Persian. Schools were established in Baluch areas and male and female children were required to attend.

These measures caused resentment and rebellion in Iranian Baluchistan. In 1964, the Baluchistan Liberation Front was founded in Iran with the aim of establishing an independent Baluchistan. This Baluch movement went on throughout the Islamic revolution, and contained Marxists, nationalists and Islamic religious leaders. When the Islamic revolution succeeded in 1980, these parties were abolished and all hopes of an independent Baluchistan were lost.

Since 1980, Iran has been ruled by a conservative religious government which adheres strictly to Shia Islam. The unwillingness of the Baluch tribes to conform to the precepts of Shia Islam has been a constant source of tension between Iran and its Sunni Muslim Baluch citizenry.

Tensions between Iran and Iraq have at times led the Iraqi government to aid the Baluch in their fight against the Iranian state. This collaboration has led the Iranian government to view the Baluch as a direct threat to the national security of Iran.



### *Afghan Interim Government*

Traditionally, Pashtun-dominated Afghan governments have supported Baluch aims for independence from Islamabad and Tehran, but not from Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan.

Like many of the groups in southern Afghanistan, the Baluch are not particularly excited by the prospect of a northern-dominated government. The Baluch are likely to press for as much autonomy as possible from the central and even the regional governments.

However, most Baluch will see this government as the lesser of evils. It is better than war. It is better than the Taliban. And it is better than the communists. This belief will persist until the Afghan government attempts to infringe on Baluch independence. Any such attempt will likely be met with armed resistance.

### *Russia*

The Russian and Soviet imperial quests for a warm water port led them to conceive of Baluchistan as one possible source of that port. As a result, the Soviets courted certain Pakistani and Iranian Baluch resistance organizations. As long as the Soviets remained at a distance, the Baluch were content with their assistance. However, once the Soviets installed a communist regime in Afghanistan and began a long military battle for control over Afghanistan, the Baluch became disenchanted. The Soviet proximity to the Baluch, particularly in Afghanistan, led the tribesmen to fear domination by this great power. The communist government of Afghanistan's efforts to change behavior toward women; to decrease the importance of religion; and to change landlord-tenant relationships angered the Baluch. The Baluch tribes living on the Helmand River formed an independent resistance group which fought against the Soviets. However, Pakistani Baluch based out of southern Afghanistan in their struggle against the Pakistani government, were receiving aid simultaneously from the Afghan government.

In their relations with the Russians, the Baluch once again showed that they are perfectly willing to accept assistance from the outside, as long as it does not interfere with Baluch autonomy.

## Language

### *History*

Baluchi is an Indo-European language which belongs to the western group of the Iranian branch of languages. It is closely related to Kurdish, Persian and Pashtu.

It was not until the British arrived in Baluch lands in Pakistan (1840s) that Baluchi began to be used as a written language in Pakistan. However, most Baluch remain illiterate.

Those who are literate are often literate in another language because there are few, if any, Baluchi language schools.

There are southern, eastern and western Baluch dialects. These are influenced by the languages which surround them. The Baluchi-speaking population is surrounded by languages belonging to five language families: Persian (Farsi and Dari); Pashtu; and Indian (Punjabi, Lahnda, Sindhi). Each of the dialects contains influences from one of these.

The eastern Baluchi dialects are spoken in areas which border on Indian language areas. It is spoken in Punjab, Sind and eastern Pakistani Baluchistan.

Southern Baluchi is spoken in southern Pakistan, and the southern portion of Iranian Baluchistan. Western Baluchi is spoken in northwestern Pakistani Baluchistan, in northern Iranian Baluchistan, and in Afghanistan.

### *Influence on Culture*

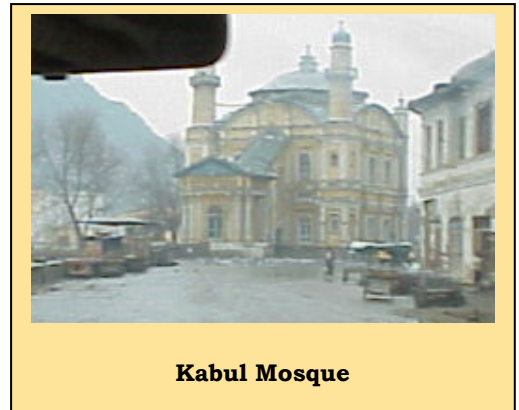
The Baluchi language has always been a uniting factor for the Baluch. Despite the division of the Baluch into many tribes and subtribes, all Baluch speak the same language. Baluchi is the primary language of the home for most Baluch. However, Dari, Pashtu, Farsi and Punjabi are second languages which the Baluch use in dealing with members of other ethnic groups, and sometimes the government.

Particularly in Iran, the use of Farsi and Dari is prevalent because of the educational system. When Baluch speak at home about science, math or politics, they often speak in Farsi or Dari because these are topics relating to the education they received in these second languages. However, in everyday discourse in the home, they still use Baluchi.

## Religion

The Baluch are Hanafi Sunni Muslims. The religion causes problems for the large Iranian Baluch population because the Iranian government is a conservative Shia regime.

The Baluch consider themselves to be devout Muslims. Discourse concerning God is often present in their daily speech. However, they do not adhere to most of the organizational principles of Islamic ritual. They often do not have access to *mullas* or *imams* because of their poverty. Many Baluch do not pray five times a day. This does not decrease the pride they take in being Muslims.



### *Sunni and Shia*

The split between Sunni and Shia Islam began to occur immediately after Prophet Mohammad's death, with the followers of Abu Bakr, one of Mohammad's early disciples, forming the Sunni branch, and the followers of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, forming the Shia branch.

The historical divide of Islam into Sunni and Shia branches was originally caused more by political disputes over successors, than by doctrinal differences. Over time, the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam have gradually assumed theological and metaphysical overtones. Shia have a clerical hierarchy of divinely-inspired religious leaders, attach great value to the intercession of saints, and embrace different forms of mysticism. Sunnis do not have a clerical hierarchy.

Today, 85% of the Muslim world is Sunni, while only 15% is Shia. The invasion of Afghanistan by Sunni Arab invaders and the establishment of the Sunni-based Ghaznavid Empire in Afghanistan around 1000 A.D. checked the spread of the Shia Islam of the Iranian Empire into Central and South Asia.

Both Sunni and Shia Islam have four major *Shariah* or schools of theological law. In Afghanistan, the dominant school of the Sunni Muslims is the Hanafi. The Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence was founded by Abu Hanifa, one of the earliest Muslim scholar-interpreters to seek new ways of applying Islamic tenets to everyday life. He died in Iraq in AD 767. Abu Hanifa's interpretation of Muslim law was tolerant of differences within Muslim communities. He also separated belief from practice, elevating belief over practice.

The Hanafi Sunni *Shariah* school of Islamic law requires prayer five times a day (*munz*), fasting during Ramadan (*rojaj*), a pilgrimage to Mecca if economic circumstances allow (*haj*), a donation of 2.5% of income to the poor (*zakat*), and the duty to uphold and defend Islam through struggle (*jihad*). Religious leaders (the *Ulema*) issue formal legal opinions (*fatwas*) based on *Shariah* law concerning major contemporary social, political, and ethical issues.

After conducting the *haj*, the pilgrim gains a new, enhanced social and religious status.

## Customs

### *Greeting*

When two Baluch meet, they often tell each other the information they have regarding lineages, tribes, and environmental conditions in the area. Because of the nomadic lifestyle of the Baluch and the lack of modern communication, this is often the only way they can get information with which they can plan migrations and ensure safety from economic and physical harm.

These conversations often go on for quite a long time.

### *Cultural Dos and Don'ts*

It is important never to address women and not to attempt to look at them. It is even taboo to ask after the health or well-being of the women or girls to whom a man is related. It is clearly not culturally acceptable for a man to become involved in a “dating” or sexual relationship, or even a friendship with a Baluch woman.

The Baluch culture is organized around honor and shame. Anyway you can increase the honor of a man or his lineage/tribe is welcome. Any shame you bring upon him will make your relationship very difficult.

The Baluch have very little food. Food would be a good gift to bring to the Baluch. If you bring other gifts to the Baluch, ensure that they are useful and portable.

## Lifestyle

### *Role of Family*

The family is the central organizing unit in Baluch life. Once a couple is married, they and their offspring become a unit within the lineage of the husband. As a unit, they own livestock, a tent, and all other household items.

### *Role of Women*



Baluch women have an important role in the economy in Baluch areas. The roughness of the land and the low technology approach to extracting its resources requires hard work from all individuals. The women collect vegetables, carry water, cook, and care for the children and the tent area. In addition, Baluch women produce rugs and embroidery for sale and use by the family.

However, Baluch women have little to no political or economic power independent of their husbands. They are kept veiled from head to toe.

### *Role of Men*

Baluch men are charged with tending to the livestock, protecting the group physically and economically, and interacting with the rest of the tribe.

A man provides his family with the protection of his lineage. He must maintain his honor and his image as a fearless warrior, as well as those of his lineage mates, in order to discourage any attacks on the families in the lineage.

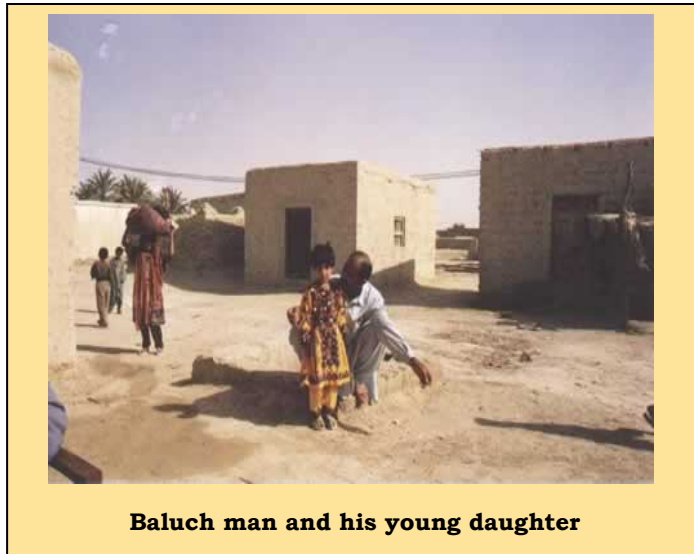
### *Dating and Marriage*

Although most Baluch tales and ballads are love stories addressed to women, there is no dating among the Baluch. Women wear Burkas after puberty and are only seen unveiled by their closest relatives. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex is punishable by death and marriages are arranged. In addition, Baluch women are often as young as twelve when they are married to someone twice their age. Young men have to prove they are honorable and establish sufficient wealth to support a family before they are married. These girls often remain with their parents for several years after the marriage. Once they have become more mature, they begin to live with their husbands.

Marriage is the central event in the life of a Baluch. It is the passage from adolescence to adulthood and is accompanied by a fantastic celebration.

The men and women are separated into camps a short distance apart and, as the day dawns, the men come to the women's camp. The women remain in a large tent while the *mulla* performs the ceremony, or *nika*. At the end, he asks the man if he will take the woman to be his wife. If he says yes, a messenger is sent to ask the bride if she will consent. It is customary for the bride to refuse several times out of modesty, but finally agree. Once the two are married, they can see one another for the first time.

A married couple forms its own household which must provide for itself and its offspring. A couple is tied together in this endeavor. Men do the herding and other animal-related tasks, defend the household, and interact socially and politically with the lineage and tribe. The women maintain the household's tents, bear and raise the children, collect water, fruits and vegetables where they are available, cook and weave rugs, and embroider clothes for family use or for sale. A couple must have many sons in order to provide labor and to protect the family from threats.



A man became suspicious of his wife when he noticed her glancing out of the hut door just in time to see the white garments of a passing Bugti [male member of a large Baluch tribe]. The husband feigned sleep for the next twenty-eight nights but his wife never stirred from bed; however, on the twenty-ninth night, his wife jabbed him in the side to make sure he was sleeping. The husband grunted convincingly, turning over on his side as his wife got up and walked out of the hut. She walked for two miles to her rendezvous under a large tamarisk tree where her lover had waited hopefully every night, in case she should come. He was there this night too, but just in time he spotted the wife's husband following her and he ran off into the desert.

'Why do you run away and leave me alone to face punishment? Oh, you coward!' she cried out when she saw what had happened. But, while her husband stood by, she dutifully hung herself from the tamarisk tree, while on this occasion, the lover escaped unscathed.

Had the lover been caught, the husband would have had the right to kill him.

Adultery is the worst of all of the offenses in tribal life. Because the entire system of tribal economic, political and social life revolves around lineages of male ancestors, any doubt that a woman's child is her husband's would cause the system to cease to function. As a result, even a hint of suspicion; even a glance by a wife at a man walking by is

grounds for a husband to accuse her of adultery. If it is found that two people are engaged in adultery, the man is killed by the woman's husband, and the woman is duty-bound to hang herself for having brought dishonor onto herself, her family and her tribe.



## Clothing

### *Headwear*

Baluch men can be identified by the large white turbans they wear. Baluch women wear *chadur* which cover them from head to toe whenever any man who is not closely related to her is present.

### *Clothing*

**Men:** Baluch men generally wear very loose trousers called *shalwar* in white or other natural colors. The trousers are worn with a long, loose top called a *jamag*. The men's *jamag* hangs down to mid thigh and sometimes to knee length.

Usually, men wear turbans. They consist of long white pieces of material wrapped many times around a skull cap. The Baluch turbans are often large relative to those of other Afghan ethnic groups.

Baluch men grow a moustache when they are single, and a beard when they are married. The length of the beard often indicates the seniority of the individual.

Some Baluch tribes have variations on dress which indicate what tribe they belong to. For instance, one of the largest tribes in Pakistan, the Bugti, wear only white, and have very long hair which hangs down to their waists.

**Women:** Women wear long, black *chadur* which act as a veil and cover them from head to foot. When the women are in their camping group, they often do not cover their faces because they are among family and there is no threat of sexual misconduct.

Underneath their *chadur*, the women wear full, loose trousers called *shalwar* which hang to the tops of their feet. Over the *shalwar*, Baluch women wear full, loose dresses which cover them from the base of their necks to their wrists and ankles. These dresses are called *jamag*, and have very wide sleeves.

These clothes provide women with protection from the elements, ability to move around to perform the work they need to do, and privacy. The nomadic Baluch have no toilets and the loose clothes they wear provide them with a "personal tent" of sorts so that they can urinate and defecate.

### *Footwear*

The Baluch wear leather sandals with small toe openings. Many Baluch, particularly children, often have no shoes.



## Diet

### *Type*

The Baluch in general have a very sparse diet. They occupy some of the least productive land in the world and practice herding and agriculture without modern methods or machinery. As a result, they do not have very much food to consume. Since Baluch lands are mostly in desert areas, water is also in short supply. (This is not true for the Baluch residing in southern Afghanistan on the banks of the Helmand River.)

The Baluch usually consume a soup or stew like dish called *batuk* at midday and evening meals. Bread is dipped into a large, communal bowl of *batuk*. *Hatuk* is made out of whatever is available. It is sometimes made of spiced milk, often with lentils or other vegetables collected from the area. During feasts, the *batuk* is made from meat gravy and served with meat. During times of great scarcity, the *batuk* consists of only water with hot peppers in it.

The bread used by the Baluch is called *nan* and is common to most of the subcontinent. It is baked in large, thin circles. It is flat and smooth on the bottom, with some bubbles on top.

The Baluch drink milk from their animals and also make yogurt, which they combine with bread for a quick meal. The Baluch sometimes drink milk fresh and sometimes soured. When they drink it soured, they add the root of a *sadanton* plant.

The Baluch very rarely eat meat because their animals are producers and are scarce resources. They produce milk, hair and other products which are essential to the Baluch. Killing an animal is like killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

It is likely that the diet of the settled Baluch farmers in Afghanistan have a slightly different diet which is richer in vegetables and perhaps meat.

### *Alcohol/Drugs*

Despite the teachings of Islam, some Baluch consume a beverage called *bang*. *Bang* is made from hemp leaves and is an intoxicant.

More commonly, the Baluch use a snuff laced with opium.

### *Eating Style*

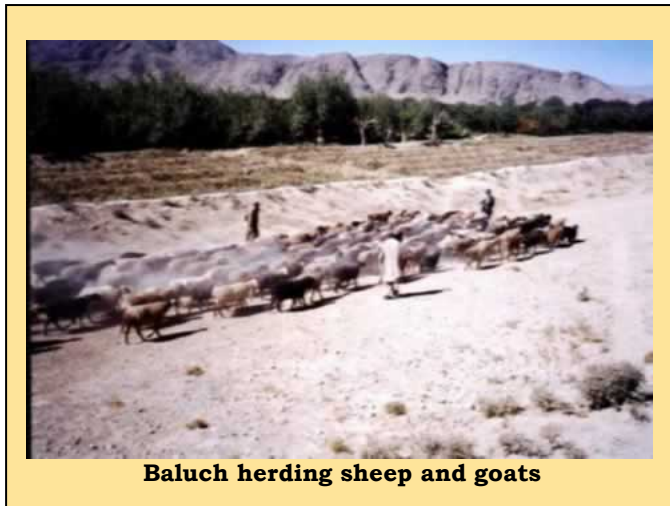
A Baluch family commonly eats together from the same bowl within their tent. However, Baluch sometimes eat alone out of smaller bowls. At feasts, six to eight people will eat out of a common bowl.

### *Role of Food*

Food is a central issue for the Baluch because of its scarcity. The Baluch inhabit a barren landscape and live solely off its meager resources. The acquisition and maintenance of sources of food is the central quest of their existence.

## Cultural Economy

The main determinant of Baluch economic activity is the area in which they live. If they live in an area with fertile agricultural land suitable for cultivation, they will become settled agriculturalists. If they reside in an area with relatively poor grazing land, they will migrate and tend animals. If the migration takes them to date palm groves where they can harvest dates and date palm materials, they will spend time doing that and then migrate again.



Each Baluch tribe has traditional territory. These territories can change through conflict with other tribes. The nomadic tribes gather once a year in the summer to reorganize into camping groups. Each camping group is made up of one to twenty tents. Each tent represents a household—two parents and their offspring. Each household owns a certain number of sheep and goats. Each head of household agrees to a *karar* or annual herding contract. This agreement forms the basis of the

camping group. The camping groups, or *halk*, are based on the number of animals and the fertility of the grazing land where they will migrate. There cannot be so many animals that the land cannot sustain them. There also have to be enough households and animals to sustain a *shwaneg*, or shepherd. The shepherd is paid a percentage of the income from the animals. The animals provided their owners with milk, wool, goat hair and occasionally meat. They are also sold at the markets.

In addition to tending livestock, the Baluch nomads harvest dates. Date palm groves belong to tribes or tribal subsections and can be used by *halk* from these organizations. They are harvested in high summer.

The nomads also practice runoff gardening of grains and vegetables.

When a Baluch tribe resides on land which can be cultivated year round through the use of irrigation canals, the tribe settles there. The *sardar* or tribal chief rents small amounts of land, usually twelve hectares, to a household. Rent is paid in kind and usually consists of a share of the harvest. The size of the share is determined by who contributed each of the five factors of production: land, labor, seed, work animals and water. The contribution of each of the factors entitles the landlord or the tenant to one-fifth of the output. Because the landowner controls the irrigation system and owns the land, it is likely that the tenant will only be able to take one-fifth of the product. This results in an average yearly income of roughly US\$50. The tenants' minimal income means that they often have to borrow from the landlord in order to meet expenses. A tenant can only leave a landlord's holdings once

he is debt-free, so tenants become so indebted to the landlords that they become attached to the land they live on, like serfs or indentured servants.

## Cultural Geography

The Baluch reside in the most inhospitable areas of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The preservation of the Baluch lifestyle, language and autonomy has been made possible by the harsh environment in which they live. The Baluch are very proud of their ability to survive in a hostile environment. They are also aware of the benefits this difficult area affords them in terms of defense. One 16<sup>th</sup> century Baluch war ballad proclaims, "The lofty heights are our comrades. The pathless gorges our friends."



**Severe drought struck the Baluch lands between 1997 and 2002, making the already barren landscape even less fertile.**



**Baluch settlement near the Bolan Pass**

This environment is also a direct determinant of nomadic versus sedentary agricultural lifestyle. The area where the Baluch reside along the Helmand River in Afghanistan lends itself to settled agriculture, while the northwestern Afghan deserts and mountains lend themselves to herding. However, the scarce brush in these areas cannot support even the small herds belonging to the Baluch over long periods of time. As a result, Baluch herders are nomadic.

The area inhabited by the Baluch consists of rocky brown scrub which stretches for hundreds of miles punctuated only by mountains. These precipitous peaks are punctuated by narrow valleys with scrubs and date palms. There are plains which are suitable for agriculture in some areas. However, these plains are prone to flooding and are therefore difficult to cultivate.

Temperatures in the Baluch lands are unbearable. In the winter temperatures on the plains can be as low as 40 degrees below zero, while in the summer they can climb to 130 degrees. Rainfall is unpredictable, and August and September are often characterized by sandstorms

and thunderstorms, as well as flash floods. The US Geological Survey suggests that Iranian Baluchistan is the closest thing on Earth to Mars.



**The plain of Las Bela contains some of the most fertile agricultural land in Baluchistan. However, it often experiences seasonal flooding, like many of the plains in this area. This seasonal flooding makes the land untenable as a permanent residence.**

There are several bright spots in the Baluchi environment. One of them is the agricultural land on the Helmand. While it is not particularly rich, it is at least stable. Forests of juniper also exist in the mountains of northeastern Baluch territory in Afghanistan. Rich agricultural land exists in Las Bela and Kacchi.

## **Culture's Effect on Warfare**

### *Conventional*

There is no conventional warfare among the Baluch. They do not have access to modern weapons and their decentralized, lineage structure would make this coordinated activity nearly impossible.

### *Unconventional/Tribal*

The Baluch are skilled guerilla fighters. Baluch weaponry consists of rifles and machine guns. They have the great advantage of being hardy and able to survive in the bleak area in which they live.

When faced with an enemy with greater technology and manpower, the Baluch engage in ambushes, raids on camps and destruction of lines of communication and transportation. The Baluch mass to attack units, camps or infrastructure, and then disperse and escape through the impassable terrain. Since they do not use roads, do not travel in large groups and do not have many fixed base camps, the Baluch are very difficult to engage. This gives them the upper hand in choosing when and where to fight.

The Pakistani Army countered Baluch operations by using highly maneuverable helicopters to track and strafe the Baluch with automatic gunfire after an encounter. This proved an effective, if not optimal, counter to Baluch operations and tactics.

## **Urban vs. Rural Culture**

Urban Baluch are largely detribalized. They have the cultural characteristics of the dominant city-dwelling population where they live. In many cases, they no longer speak Baluchi. All that remains for them is the proud membership in this hardy ethnic group.



## **Influence of Diaspora**

A small population of Baluch reside in East Africa. They are the only significant population living outside of the Baluch homeland. They have no significant influence on the political, economic or social situation inside Baluchistan.

## **Holidays**

It is uncertain how much the Baluch adhere to the Islamic holidays celebrated by the rest of Afghans.