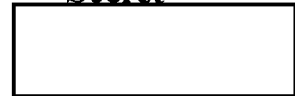




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# **Baluchistan: Iran's Weakest Link?**

**A Research Paper**

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*GC 80-10023  
March 1980*

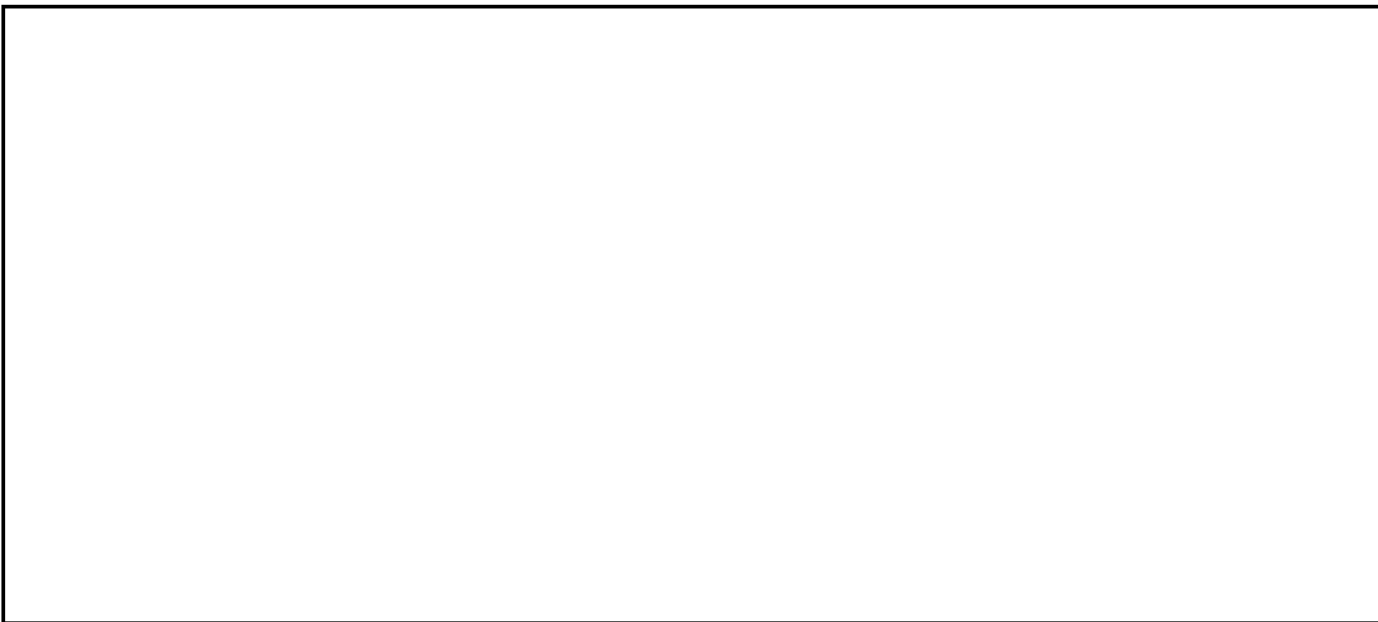
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# **Baluchistan: Iran's Weakest Link? (U)**

**A Research Paper**

*Research for this report was completed  
in March 1980.*

This paper was prepared by the Middle East/  
Africa/Latin America Branch, Geography Division,  
Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research.  
It was coordinated with the Iranian Task Force and  
the National Intelligence Officer for Near East  
and South Asia. Comments and queries are welcome  
and may be addressed to the Branch Chief [Redacted]

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GC 80-10023  
March 1980

**Baluchistan:  
Iran's Weakest Link? (U)****Overview**

Iranian officials have long been aware that Baluchistan's geographic and political vulnerabilities make it highly susceptible to outside meddling. Some officials are concerned that Soviet influence in Afghanistan may spread southward into the region and turn the Baluchi dissidents—now only a small, poorly organized threat—into a serious disruptive force. (C)

The Baluchis, because of their isolation and years of neglect, have been better able to resist government "Persianization" efforts than other Iranian minorities. They have retained their distinctive culture, including the Sunni religion, but they have also remained Iran's poorest and least educated minority. (U)

Iran's 600,000 or so Baluchi tribesmen live in the hot, dry, barren, and remote province of Baluchestan va Sistan, some 1,400 kilometers southeast of the Persian heartland. The Baluchis, who comprise less than 2 percent of Iran's population, are almost exclusively Sunni Muslims. They share the province with a small number of Persian Shiites and Afghan border peoples. (U)

The region is part of Greater Baluchistan—an ill-defined Baluchi traditional homeland that includes western Pakistan, with 2 million Baluchis, and southern Afghanistan, with about 25,000 Baluchis. Cross-border political and economic links between these groups have been strengthened since the Iranian revolution began. (U)

The Iranian Baluchis have long desired greater autonomy but, unlike the more restive Pakistani Baluchis, are fairly passive. The spurt of economic development during the last few years under the Shah placated most Baluchi critics of the government. Current depressed economic conditions in the province and Tehran's unwillingness to redress basic Baluchi grievances, however, have increased local resistance to continued government presence in the province. (C)

Iranian officials have also feared that the Soviets, by undermining Tehran's control in the province, might encourage the development of an autonomous Baluchi state. Through it they could seek to gain access to Chah Bahar—a small fishing port on the Arabian Sea that could be converted into a naval facility. In such an attempt the Soviets would face serious problems: the

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1,000-kilometer distance between Afghanistan and Chah Bahar, the poor condition of some of the roads, and the strong summer swells and shallow depths in the harbor. (C)

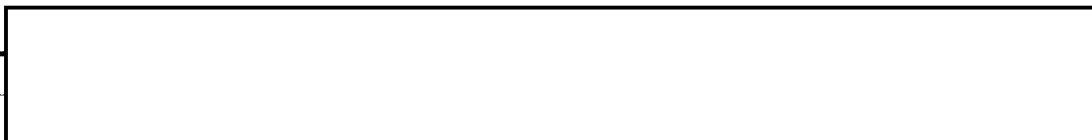
Clashes between Revolutionary Guards and Baluchi dissidents have occurred on several occasions and will probably continue. Provision of arms, equipment, and training—either from Baluchis in neighboring Pakistan or from a Soviet surrogate in Afghanistan—could greatly increase the Baluchi threat to Tehran's control of the province. (C)

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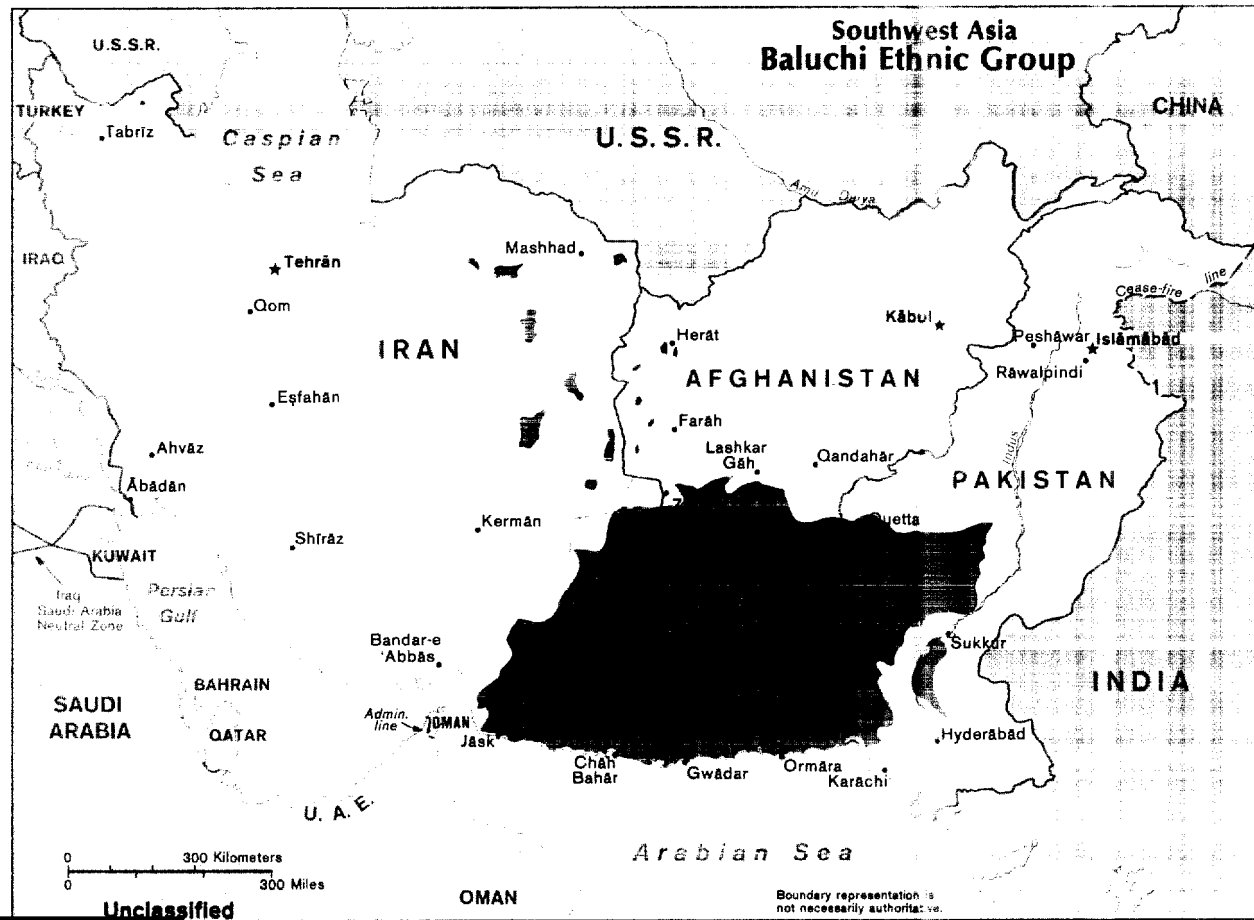
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## Baluchistan: Iran's Weakest Link? (U)

### The Geopolitical Setting

Iranian officials have long been aware of the geographic as well as political vulnerabilities of Baluchestan va Sistan Province. Located some 1,400 kilometers southeast of the Persian heartland, the province occupies one of the most remote and desolate regions of Iran. Its heavily Sunni Muslim population, with strong cultural links with Baluchi tribesmen in western Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, makes the province highly susceptible to outside meddling. Political and economic conditions have worsened since the ouster of the Shah and are ripening for serious unrest. Tehran fears that, if externally exploited, the situation could lead to a serious secessionist movement. (c)

The tri-nation region that makes up Greater Baluchistan has traditionally formed a land bridge between the Middle East and South Asia. Cultural ties among the approximately 600,000 Baluchis in Iran, the 2 million Baluchis in Pakistan, and the 25,000 in Afghanistan are far stronger than those between the Iranian Baluchis and the country's Persian majority. Cross-border political and economic links with fellow Baluchis have been strengthened since the Iranian revolution. (c)

Baluchestan va Sistan has little intrinsic economic value and, from an economic standpoint, is hardly worth fighting for. Belated economic development of the province under the Shah was geared more to Tehran's strategic concerns than to the province's internal needs. (c)

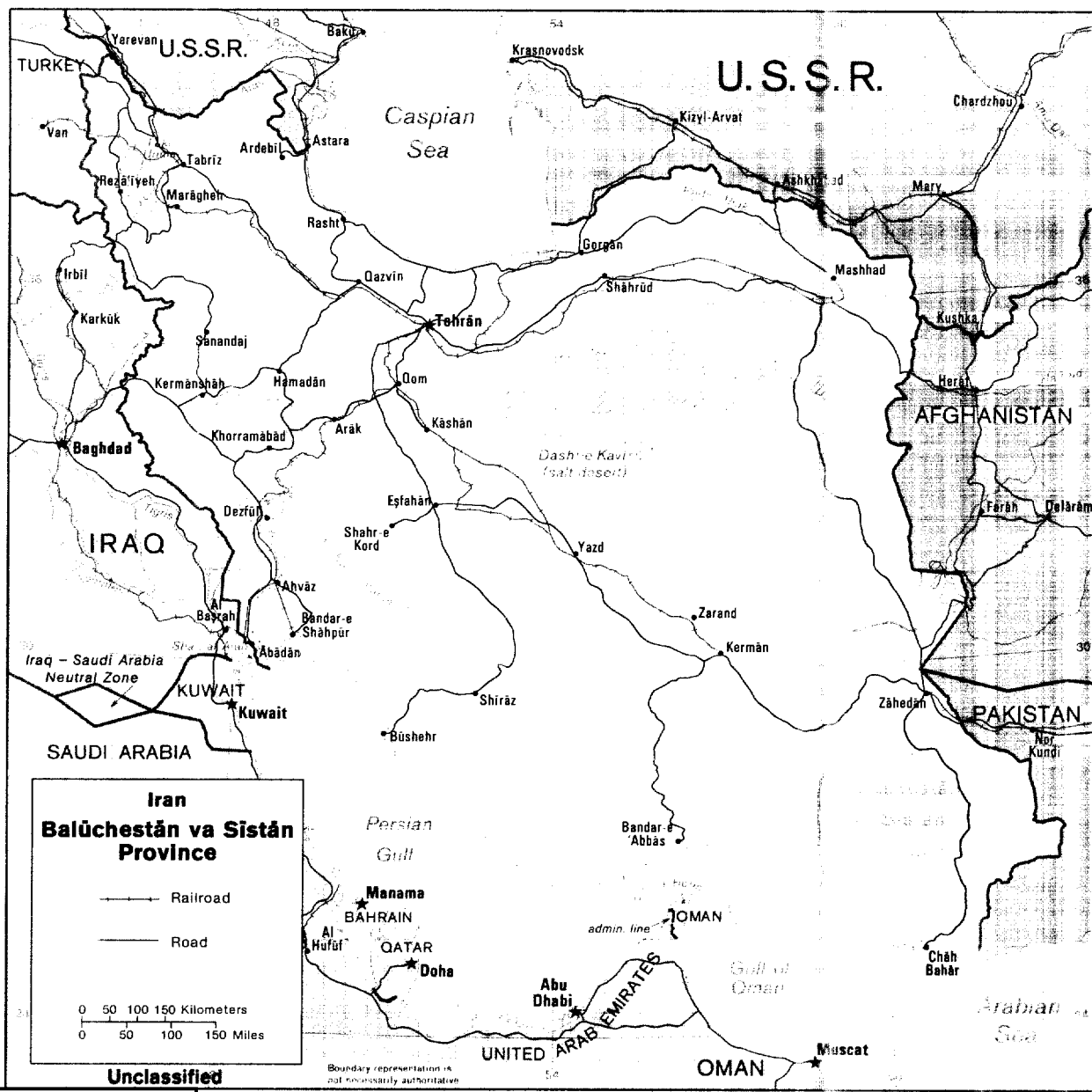
Tehran's fears that dissident activity could evolve into a widely based secessionist movement are based largely on a concern that Soviet influence will extend southward from Afghanistan into the province. Government authorities have long feared that the Soviet Union would seek influence in Baluchistan as part of its grand design to gain access to a warm water port. The Soviet invasion fortifies those fears and places the Soviets more than 600 kilometers closer to a warm water port as well as to the West's strategic Persian Gulf oil

tanker routes and to the Middle East oil. Officials fear that the unsettled political situation in Tehran and the isolation and cultural separation of Baluchestan va Sistan make the province vulnerable to Soviet intervention. The officials theorize that the Soviets would work through the 25,000 Baluchis in Afghanistan to support Iranian Baluchi efforts to establish an autonomous state. The Soviets would, in exchange for that support, be granted access to Chah Bahar, a small fishing port on the Baluchistan coast [redacted] (c)

With such a plan the Soviets would encounter problems, though not insurmountable ones, both in reaching Chah Bahar from Afghanistan and in constructing a relatively large port there:

- Chah Bahar lies more than 1,000 kilometers by road from the nearest border-crossing point between Afghanistan and Iran (through the Sistan Basin). Major improvements to some of the existing roads in both Afghanistan and Iran as well as construction of a bridge over the Helmand River (which forms the Afghanistan-Iran border in the Sistan region) would be necessary to permit heavy traffic through Afghanistan to Chah Bahar.
- Use of the better route from the Soviet rail line at Kushka south to Herat, then northwest to Mashhad and south through Zahedan to Chah Bahar, would require Soviet annexation of much of eastern Iran—a far more ominous development than a takeover of Baluchistan alone. (The most direct route from the Soviet Union to Chah Bahar is from the rail line at Ashkhabad through Mashhad. But the 110-kilometer road that crosses the border has a daily [redacted] the Soviets may have designs on Pakistani Baluchistan and on Gwadar, a small fishing port 175 kilometers east of Chah Bahar. But its harbor is smaller and less well protected and the route between Afghanistan and Gwadar is longer and more tortuous than between Afghanistan and Chah Bahar. Western Pakistan, moreover, is presently not as vulnerable a political target as is southeastern Iran. (c)





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capacity of only 1,500 tons. There is no other road route from Afghanistan to Chah Bahar through Pakistan.)

- Construction of a relatively large port facility at Chah Bahar would be difficult and expensive—particularly a long breakwater to block the strong summer swells and nearshore dredging to permit docking of large naval vessels. The Shah's plan to build a small naval facility there was canceled when the port expansion was found to be much more expensive than expected. (C)

### The Geographic Base

#### Land

Baluchestan va Sistan is a rugged and dry province, about the size of Missouri or Oklahoma. It covers about 180,000 square kilometers, or 11 percent of Iran's land area.<sup>2</sup> It is barren of resources and among the least habitable regions of the country. Its moonscape appearance is reinforced by a dearth of vegetation, broken only by scattered oases of sparse grasses, shrubs, and cultivated crops in the better watered areas and by a few sparse stands of broadleaf deciduous forest in the mountains. At least one volcano also contributes to the forbidding appearance of the landscape. Occasional devastating earthquakes rock the eastern part of the province. (U)

Most crests of the ranges in the eastern mountains exceed 2,500 meters. Transportation lines between Iran and Pakistan are channeled through intermontane valleys. Kuh-e Taftan, a volcanic peak with a height of 4,042 meters, is the highest mountain in eastern Iran. Although it is now fairly quiescent, it occasionally emits a plume of smoke and bubbles of mud and gas. (U)

The mountain range in the south is a little lower—with elevations of most crests between 1,500 and 2,000 meters—but is more rugged and an even greater

<sup>2</sup> Greater Baluchistan includes 625,000 square kilometers, of which more than half lies in Pakistan. Some Baluchi liberationists have claimed that the area of Baluchi influence in Iran extends well beyond the province boundaries—west as far as Bandar-e Abbas and north to the Soviet border near Mashhad. This additional area, however, includes only small Baluchi enclaves amidst a hodgepodge of other minorities. (U)

barrier to transportation. Only two roads, both of which link Chah Bahar with Iranshahr, penetrate this southern massif. The isolated coastal plain, nowhere more than 80 kilometers wide, has a regular coastline with few indentions (the Chah Bahar harbor is the major exception) and clear and deep approaches. (U)

Terrain in the rest of the province is a checkerboard of mountain ranges and flat basins with salt flats and sand dunes, much of which is an extension of Iran's Great Central Plateau. (U)

Most of Baluchistan's water courses are dry for the better part of the year and have meager flows even during relatively wet weather. Soils are thin to nonexistent in most places and the scant precipitation runs off the land rapidly. The lack of water has been the most critical inhibiting factor to the development of the province and has confined the settled population to the better watered basins—such as around Iranshahr and Zabol [redacted] and intermontane plateaus, such as around Zahedan and Khash. (U)

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The best watered area—and the most densely settled and agriculturally developed—is the Sistan Basin, nestled along both sides of the Iranian-Afghan border. The Helmand, the major river of southern Afghanistan, flows into the basin. The basin is comprised of scattered marshes, threaded with winding distributaries of the Helmand and with irrigation canals. It includes three lakes that normally coalesce to form one large (1,100 square kilometers) water body during the period of maximum river flow (May and June). The basin, however, may be completely dry during drought years. Hundreds of irrigation canals once crisscrossed the basin, but many were destroyed during the Mongol invasion in the 16th century. Despite some improvement and expansion under the Shah, the irrigation system is still only a fraction of its former expanse, and the basin's population is probably less than it was 500 years ago. (U)

Should the Baluchi dissident movement expand, the geography of the province would probably confine the insurgents to the eastern and southern mountains. The especially rugged terrain would limit access to them by government forces, but the sparse vegetation, as in all



parts of the province, would make them vulnerable to government air operations. (c)

**Climate**

Baluchistan is one of the hottest and driest regions in Iran. Mean daily maximum temperatures are highest in the interior basins where they soar to more than 40 degrees Celsius on most summer days (May through September). Iranshahr, for example, registers a mean daily high of 44°C in July and August. Coastal temperatures, moderated by proximity to the sea, usually peak in the mid-30s but are still uncomfortable because of the higher relative humidity. The major temperature aberrations occur in the eastern mountains and in the Sistan Basin where winter temperatures are cold, normally dipping below freezing on many days in December and January. Light snowfalls in the eastern mountains are not unusual. (U)

The province normally gets no more than six inches of precipitation annually. The highest amounts fall on the upper mountain slopes, the lowest in the lowlands. Most rain falls as torrential downpours on only a few days in winter from November through April. (U)

The most prominent climatic feature of the province is its strong summer winds, called the "Wind of 120 Days," which blow steadily and strongly (and sometimes violently) from north to south along the Iranian-Afghan border through the Sistan Basin and, with slightly lesser intensity, into the southern part of the province. It is hot and desiccating and is saturated with particles of dust, sand, and salt. It strips off top soil and destroys vegetation, precluding summer crop cultivation in the Sistan Basin. An equally strong but less persistent wind blows icy air into the northern part of the province in the winter. (U)

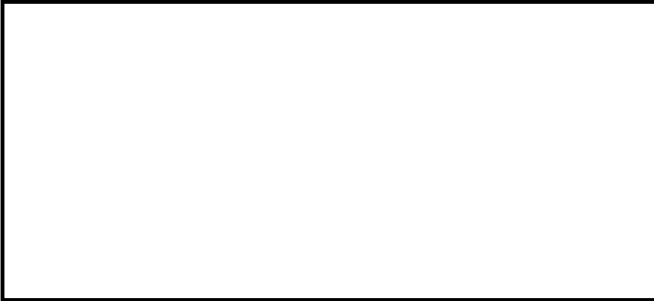
**Transportation**

**Roads.** The road network in Baluchistan va Sistan is sparse but adequate for this lightly peopled area. The main trunk road that links the port of Chah Bahar via Iranshahr to Kerman and Tehran and the fork that extends north from Iranshahr to Zahedan are paved, have two lanes, and were completed in recent years as part of the Shah's program to better connect the province with the rest of the country [redacted] These roads have daily carrying capacities of more than 20,000 tons. The road that links Zahedan directly

with Tehran via Bam and the two roads that lead north—one from Zahedan to Afghanistan via the Sistan Basin and the other to the Soviet border via Mashhad—have also been recently upgraded. Some sections, however, are still unpaved and have daily capacities of only about 7,000 tons. All other roads, including the three that cross into Pakistan, are bituminous treated, gravel, or natural earth and have daily capacities between 2,500 and 10,850 tons. (c)

The sparse road network, coupled with the rugged terrain, would favor insurgent operations over conventional military operations. Although all major populated areas of the province can be reached from Tehran, Kerman, and Mashhad by road in all seasons with no difficulty, military traffic within the province would be slowed by the tortuous road alignments through the mountains as well as by landslides in the mountains during the occasional heavy rains (November-April). Military traffic would be particularly vulnerable to interdiction by guerrilla forces in the mountains; Baluchi dissidents reportedly have already harassed military vehicles near Zahedan. (c)

If Iranian fears are realized and the Soviets move into the province to reach Chah Bahar, some road sections in both Afghanistan and Iran would have to be significantly upgraded to handle sustained Soviet military traffic. The vehicle ferry across the Helmand River, now the major choke point on the route between Herat and Chah Bahar, could readily be replaced by a pontoon bridge, but the roads could not be so easily improved. In Afghanistan, the southern part of the gravel road between Herat and the border, via Delaram, has a daily capacity of only 5,000 tons.



**Railroads.** The only rail line in the province is a broad-gage (5-foot, 6-inch) extension of the Pakistani rail system that crosses the border southeast of Mirjaveh and extends the 85 kilometers to Zahedan [redacted]

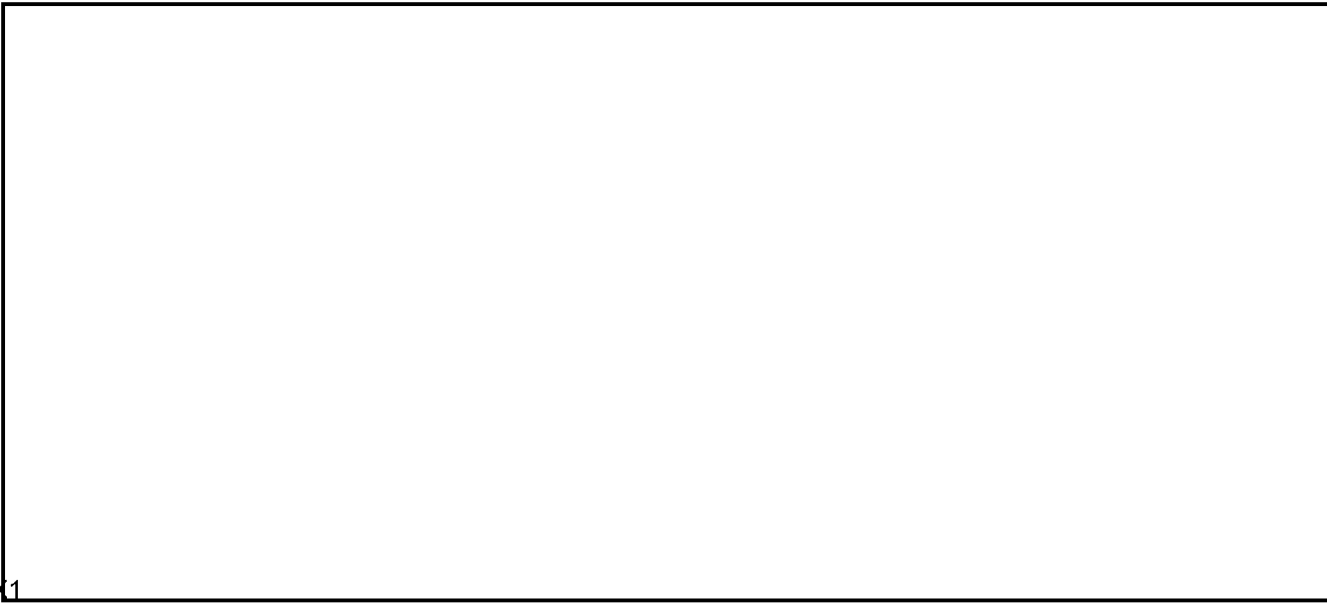
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[ ] The line, which extends through northern Baluchistan Province in Pakistan to Spezand (near Quetta) where it connects with the line to Karachi, was built by the British in World War I for military purposes. Traffic on the line, which serves a sparsely populated and little developed region, is light and irregular. The line handles both passengers and freight, including coal and other goods for Zahedan. The Shah had planned to extend the standard-gage (4-foot, 8-inch) Iranian rail line to tie the province directly to the rest of Iran as well as to provide a connection to the Pakistani system. Construction, which has proceeded east only as far as the Kerman area, has been halted. (U)

**Ports.** Chah Bahar, which handles some small general cargo craft in addition to small fishing vessels, is the only port in the province. It is located on the eastern side of a large and well-protected embayment, at the terminus of the paved road that links it with the interior of the province as well as with the rest of Iran. Konarak, across the embayment from Chah Bahar, does not presently function as a port. A pier, still in existence there, was used in the construction of the Chah Bahar military complex. The nearly completed \$1 billion military complex might have invigorated the local economy, but the facility is now little used and cannot be counted on to provide additional revenue for the future. The Revolutionary Council has considered turning Chah Bahar into a free port, a plan that has equally dim prospects for upgrading local economic conditions. (C)

**Airfields.** The Chah Bahar airbase, built in the mid-1970s as part of the naval port development plan, can handle C-141 aircraft [ ] (It is actually located nearer to the village of Konarak than to Chah Bahar.) [ ] Zahedan, which normally serves as the province's only international airport with roundtrip service from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, now handles only domestic traffic. It can accommodate craft of Boeing 747 size. The few other airfields in the province are considerably smaller but most can handle C-130 aircraft. (C)

Chah Bahar has no harbor facilities other than a short pier that is rarely used. The Shah's expansion plan was canceled when surveyors determined that local rock was too soft for the construction of a substantial breakwater, necessary to block strong summer swells. The nearest usable rock is in the mountains, about 100 kilometers away by road. While the 11- to 13-meter depths in the center of the harbor could accommodate large naval vessels, nearshore bottoms would need to

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be dredged for them to dock at the berths that were planned. Chah Bahar otherwise has the potential to become a good port: the approaches are deep and clear and the bottoms are suitable for anchorage. (U)

## The Population

### People and Places

The Baluchis are believed to have originated in Iran, around the southwestern shores of the Caspian Sea. Medieval invasions by Turks and Mongols most likely pushed them southeastward through the Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut deserts to the area around Kerman. Their nomadic wandering led them eastward, eventually into Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many of the Baluchis now living in Iranian Baluchistan are believed to be descendants of Baluchi tribesmen who returned to Iran from Pakistan as recently as 300 years ago. (U)

The population of Baluchestan va Sistan Province is only about 700,000, about 2 percent of the Iranian population. Overall population density is a little more than three persons per square kilometer. The province has never attracted significant Persian settlement and today probably no more than one-tenth of the population is Persian, nearly all of whom are confined to the few urban centers; most of the remainder is Baluchi.<sup>3</sup> (U)

To Baluchi tribesmen, Iranian Baluchistan begins south of the provincial capital of Zahedan. Between this theoretical line of Baluchi demarcation and the province's coast, at least 80 percent of the people live as pastoral nomads or peasant farmers in small, isolated, mud-hut villages or semipermanent tent camps. (U)

To the north of Zahedan, only about 20 percent of the 100,000 or so inhabitants of Sistan are Baluchi. The remainder are a mixture of various Persian Shiite tribal groups, collectively known as *Zabulis*, and Afghanis called *Marzneshin*, (those who live on the

<sup>3</sup> Some Baluchi "opportunists" have left their traditional homeland for Iranian cities such as Kerman or Bandar Abbas. Others have sought employment outside Iran in Persian Gulf countries such as Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, where most work as unskilled laborers, fishermen, or merchants. Of the 25,000 Baluchis in Oman (most of whom are from Pakistan), many are in the armed forces; Qatar also uses Baluchis in its security forces. (C)

border). All of these non-Baluchi peoples, regardless of ethnic origin, are known locally as *Sistanis*. This has a perjorative connotation that for the Baluchis infers an "us against them" significance. Most Sistanis are peasant farmers or livestock owners who live a more settled existence than the Baluchis to the south. (U)

Although the population of the province is predominantly rural, a few larger towns did develop under the Pahlavi regimes. Zahedan is the largest with a population of 93,000 [redacted]. Non-Baluchis (Persians, Indians, and Pakistanis), make up one-half of the residents, providing a cosmopolitan atmosphere more akin culturally to the Sistan portion of the province than to Baluchistan proper. A thriving smuggling business keeps the bazaars of this marketing center well stocked with merchandise. The other five major towns—Zabol (about 30,000; [redacted]), Iranshahr (14,000), Chah Bahar (6,000), and Khash [redacted] and Saravan (both around 5,000)—serve as trade, agricultural, and administrative centers. Their populations have been inflated by the presence of administrative, law-enforcement, and military staffs from Tehran. Baluchis rarely fill these government positions. Had the Shah stayed in power, these urban areas might have grown even more. He had planned to build eight self-contained *shahraks* (government villages) nearby as part of a program to permanently settle some of the nomadic population. The *shahraks* were to have contained houses, hospitals, and schools. None was built. (U)

### Baluchi Culture

The Baluchis have been the most successful of Iran's minorities in their attempts to resist "Persianization." They take pride in their cultural distinctiveness and regard their Persian countrymen as outsiders, whom they call "Qajars," an uncomplimentary reference to the harsh rule of the dynasty prior to the Pahlavis. Baluchi success in preserving their culture is due largely to their physical isolation from Tehran as well as to the relatively belated efforts by the Shah to bring the Baluchis into the Persian political fold. Consequently, they have retained their Sunni religion, their distinctive attire (baggy trousers and tunics for the men), architecture, and food preferences. The Baluchis even appear physically different from the Persians. They tend to be somewhat darker, particularly those

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along the southern coast where the infusion of African stock—apparently from Oman where many Omanis were slave traders—is more pronounced. While the Baluchis may have managed to retain their cultural heritage, they have remained the poorest and least advanced of all of Iran's minorities. (U)

**Tribal Structure.** The several hundred tribes that comprise Baluchi society are little more than extended families. Each tribe is led by a *sardar*, or supreme chief, and often takes its name from the founding sardar. The selection of tribal leaders is theoretically democratic; sons do not necessarily succeed their fathers. New sardars are selected from an elite coterie of eligibles within each tribe. Rank and status within the tribe are normally based on age and the services rendered to the tribe. (U)

Under the Shah, some of the traditional power of the sardars was reduced. Their role as representatives and war leaders for the tribe was changed to that of intermediaries for administrative and economic matters between the government and the tribe. But the distance between Tehran and Baluchistan is immense, both in kilometers and in centuries, and the feudal power of the sardars still remains a wieldy force over their tribesmen. Since the revolution, their power has increased. (U)

Available information on the role and significance of individual Baluchi tribes is limited and dated. The Rigi tribe, concentrated around Khash, is one of the largest and most progressive. In 1970 the Rigi claimed the honor of having Iranian Baluchistan's only Baluchi university graduate as well as most of its meager complement of gendarmerie officers, merchants, and civil servants. (U)

The Yar-Mohammad Zehi tribe, concentrated along the Iran-Pakistan border east of Zahedan and Khash, is best known for its lengthy wars with the British during the British colonial reign in Pakistan (then part of India). The tribe's most famous chief, Jaynad Khan, led a guerrilla war against the British for 20 years. His son, Bajjar Khan, fought the forces of Reza Shah. When he was captured and eventually pardoned, he changed the tribe's name to Shahnavazi, which means "caressed by the Shah." The Shahnavazi have been

traditional enemies of the Rigi. Tribal quarrels between them as well as between other Baluchi tribes still arise but are mild in comparison to the blood feuds that occurred before Reza Shah, the father of the current deposed Shah, enforced his policy of tribal reconciliation. (U)

**Language.** The Baluchi language is related to Farsi, although few Baluchis know Farsi. Around Zahedan, where Baluchi-Persian contact has been most pronounced, Farsi-speaking Iranians are usually able to communicate with the Baluchis after a short exposure to their language. Farther south, however, the Baluchi language is heavily influenced by nearby South Asian dialects and even contains some words of African origin, and Persians are more apt to need interpreters. (U)

**Customs.** Folk customs and rituals are important to the Baluchis. Births and weddings are lively occasions and always include music played on the *qeychak*, a string instrument. When a child is born, friends and family celebrate for six consecutive nights; on the last night, they collectively select a name for the infant. Weddings are a three-day celebration. The bride is dyed with henna, and on the third night guests bring gifts and join in to celebrate. (U)

**Religion.** Religion has perhaps been the most binding cultural tie for the Baluchis. When the Shia Persian government of Reza Shah asserted its control over the predominantly Sunni Baluchis in the 1930s, the tribes—perhaps as a means of stressing their cultural identity—intensified their devotion to Sunnism. These efforts were led by religious leaders known as *mowlavis* who are somewhat the Baluchi equivalent of the Shiite ayatollahs. (U)

In Sistan and around Zahedan, many of the Muslims—including some Baluchis—are Shiites. Religious friction between the two sects, common in the past, has heated up even more since the revolution began, brought on by Baluchi resentment of the government's Shiite favoritism. This favoritism, although partly dispelled by Tehran's recent agreement to allow Sunni courts in Sunni-dominated areas, will continue to impair Baluchi relations with Tehran. (U)

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### Education

Educational facilities in the province are sorely lacking. Outside of the six major towns, there are no schools above the primary level. Of those few primary schools that do exist in the rural areas, nearly all are located in the larger villages. Because most Baluchis live in scattered, small, hut or nomadic tent settlements in isolated areas, most children never attend school. Even those that do live near a school generally drop out before graduating. (U)

As a consequence of the limited educational opportunities, only about one in four Baluchi males is able to read. The literacy rate for females—who are discouraged from attending school by prevailing religious conservatism and feudal traditions—is even lower; less than one in 30 can read.<sup>4</sup> (U)

Iranian Baluchi college graduates number no more than a few dozen. According to one government official who was assigned to the province during the Shah's regime, the University of Baluchistan in Zahedan had only 10 Baluchi students in 1978. (U)

In the last two years of the Shah's regime, attempts were made to improve education by hiring more teachers, establishing more schools, and upgrading media communications in the area. The program to recruit qualified teachers was not particularly successful; despite substantial salary offers, the province's isolation had little appeal for prospective teachers. In 1978 the government also formulated a plan to set up tent schools for the Baluchis similar to those introduced among seminomads in southwestern Iran, but it was never implemented. (U)

The Shah's government made large investments in media broadcast facilities in an effort to entice Iranian Baluchis away from dependence on news and entertainment from South Asia and across the Persian Gulf. Local programming designed to appeal to Baluchis was promoted by National Radio and Television in Zahedan. A high-powered radio transmitter was to have been installed near Chah Bahar to serve the southern portion of the province. Westinghouse was involved in a project to use a high-altitude balloon to

<sup>4</sup> Reportedly, the only Baluchi grammar book in existence was written by a British traveler in the 19th century; it has been preserved in the British Museum. (U)

beam television to all parts of the province. These media projects, like the plans to increase the number of schools and teachers, were probably halted after the overthrow of the Shah. (C)

### Economy

In the early 1970s, rural income in Baluchestan va Sistan was about one-half that of other provinces. After long years of neglect, a government agency was established in 1972 specifically to develop long-range, socioeconomic programs for the province. This belated development was probably undertaken by the government more to mollify the Baluchis and to secure the eastern border than to upgrade the living standards of the Baluchis per se. (U)

Earning opportunities did increase as a result of this development; many Baluchis took jobs as laborers on road and building construction projects, usually earning no more than \$3 a day. This economic "boom" did not last. Most of the money that was pumped into the province was used for projects that only marginally improved the province's economic potential. Nearly all of the projects have succumbed to the revolutionary upheavals and the Baluchis are now probably worse off economically than they were eight years ago. (U)

### Agriculture

Most Iranian Baluchis live a meager existence as herders of sheep, goats, or camels in a land so barren and devoid of resources that there is no other way to make a living. Names of Baluchi villages—Shuregaz (Growing in Salt Marshes), Tallesiah (Black Heap), and Shah Resukhteh (Burnt Town)—reflect the harshness of the area. Settled farming has been severely limited by the lack of water. Rainfall is infrequent and erratic, most often occurring either as torrential showers or not at all. In the lowland area along the coast, for instance, crop cultivation is particularly risky, subject to either flood or drought; 35 villages near Chah Bahar were flooded by heavy rains in December 1979. Other major agricultural oases exist around Iranshahr, Zahedan, and Khash, but production is inadequate even for the local populations. (U)



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Sistan is the only area in the province that is normally sufficiently watered for extensive crop cultivation, and even it is subject to periodic droughts. The Helmand River that flows into the region from Afghanistan provides a more stable water supply than those in the rest of the province. Irrigation schemes in Afghanistan, however, had threatened to deny adequate water for the Iranian side. A treaty, signed in the mid-1970s, established rules for water usage on both sides of the border. (U)

The relatively abundant water resources in Sistan have enabled the Sistanis to lead a more prosperous existence than the nomadic Baluchi tribesmen in the rest of the province. Cattle farming is widely practiced in the region as animals can be grazed on the relatively well-watered and lush grasslands rather than be moved from one pastoral grazing area to another. Sistan is also blanketed with irrigated fields of winter wheat, barley, beans, and other food crops. Despite an overall improvement in the agricultural base under the Shah, cultivation methods still remain primitive and production limited. (U)

#### Industry

Little industry exists in the province. A subsidized garment manufacturing plant is located in Zahedan. A rug factory, where Baluchi "tribal" carpets are woven, is located in Zabol. Two mechanized bakeries are located in Zahedan and Iranshahr; a third was under construction in Chah Bahar as of 1978. Plans had been made under the Shah to establish a textile mill in Iranshahr to supply the garment factory in Zahedan, but it has not been built. A small fishing industry exists at Chah Bahar, but the expectation of its growth into a major fishing center was somewhat dubious even before the revolution. (U)

#### Smuggling

The only continually profitable business—and the cornerstone of the province's economy—has been smuggling, an enterprise that capitalizes on the porous international borders of the region. Iranian, Pakistani, and Afghan Baluchis regularly cross over into one another's territory. Many carry identification cards for all three countries, just in case they are challenged by local government authorities. Even under the Shah, government officials looked with a tolerant eye upon smuggling as long as the perpetrators

kept to such innocuous items as foodstuffs and other small-scale consumer goods. It was only when the smugglers dabbled in illicit goods such as weapons and narcotics that the government stepped in, using "hired guns"—trusted Baluchis armed by the government—to help the local gendarmerie. Since the revolution and its ensuing economic and security breakdown, smuggling operations have increased; one observer has estimated that as many as 70 percent of the Baluchis are engaged in the activity. (U)

Baluchis also have a long history of brigandry, going back to the days when they raided caravans traveling through the area. Most such activity is now targeted against the few trucks that haul goods from Chah Bahar to the towns of the interior. (U)

#### The Baluchi Quest for Autonomy

For the past 2,500 years, tribes of Greater Baluchistan have been ruled by outside powers—Greek, Indian, Aryan, Mongol, Arab, Iranian, and British. None, however, ever established effective control over them. All present-day boundaries in the region were drawn by the late 19th century and the Baluchis have been reluctant vassals of the three host countries ever since. Although they have not forsaken their aspirations to reunite in an independent Baluchistan, most Baluchi political-military efforts have been aimed at gaining greater autonomy within their respective countries. (U)

The Pakistan Baluchis, who account for more than 75 percent of the entire Baluchi population of more than 2.5 million, have been the most vociferous in their demands for greater autonomy. They have been far more troublesome to Islamabad than the Iranian Baluchis have been to Tehran. Their demands have been in response to a heavyhanded government policy that has given them limited government representation while taking their resources with (according to the Baluchis) little in return. The battle for greater Baluchi autonomy in Pakistan culminated in a bloody, five-year war with the central government. Despite a 1977 truce, signed by General Zia (who ousted Ali Bhutto as Prime Minister in 1977), the Pakistan Baluchis are still not satisfied with their lot and Islamabad still fears a resurgence of Baluchi dissidence. (C)

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Tehran, fearing that the Baluchi fight for greater autonomy in Pakistan would spill over into Iran, worked with Islamabad to quell the dissidence there.

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While there is little doubt that the Iranian Baluchis sympathized with the plight of their ethnic brethren in Pakistan, Tehran's fears were probably greatly exaggerated. (S)

Even if the Pakistan Baluchis had actively supported a movement to gain greater autonomy for fellow Baluchis in Iran, it is doubtful that their efforts would have had much success. The Iranian Baluchis are not as well educated or politically astute as their Pakistani cousins, and Iranian Baluchi resistance movements have been poorly led and poorly organized. Although the Shah systematically weakened the powers of the Baluchi sardars and arrested those sardars who opposed him, his policies were otherwise less dictatorial than those of Islamabad and Iranian Baluchi grievances were correspondingly fewer. The discontent that did exist among the Baluchis, which stemmed from Persian domination and the lack of Baluchi participation in the management of their affairs, was partly compensated for by the relative prosperity under the Shah, particularly during the last few years of his regime. (C)

Baluchi charges of economic and cultural repression have greatly increased since the revolution. Economic conditions have deteriorated. Foreign construction firms have left the province and unemployment has soared; stores have closed and availability of consumer goods has declined. The government presence has taken on a higher profile, particularly through the deployment of the Revolutionary Guards. Shiite Islam has been codified as the state religion (although the Sunni Muslims were granted special considerations in January). (U)

Baluchi dissatisfaction with the present government and their demands for greater autonomy have grown more vocal: Baluchi independence movements have reappeared, ties with Baluchi separatist movements in Pakistan have been strengthened, and the first Baluchi political party has been formed. Clashes between Baluchis and Revolutionary Guards occurred in

Zahedan, Iranshahr, and Chah Bahar during the last half of 1979 and in early 1980. Martial law was imposed in Zahedan in December when more than 100 Revolutionary Guards were reported to have been killed.<sup>5</sup> The disorder has since been controlled, but the truce is a tenuous one so long as the Baluchi grievances remain. Even though Tehran's longstanding fears of Soviet-supported Baluchi separatism are still unsubstantiated, these developments, accompanied by the Soviet advance into Afghanistan, give them added credibility. (S NF)

### Outlook

Although visions of an independent Baluchistan have been resurrected among many Iranian Baluchis since the revolution began and a few now actively support secession, most still see secession as an unrealistic goal (or are ignorant of political events altogether). A redress of their grievances—particularly the removal of the Revolutionary Guards, an increased Baluchi representation in local government, recognition of Sunni Islam as an equal to Shiite Islam, and an improvement in their economic well-being—would satisfy most. (C)

In view of its tenuous control of Baluchestan va Sistan, Tehran might be forced to grant some of these concessions to the Baluchis, such as greater involvement in local administration, to head off a more serious insurrection. But, given the present chaotic political and economic conditions in the country, an improvement in economic conditions in the province is not likely to happen soon. Even if Tehran grants concessions, a continuation of economic lethargy in the province will probably encourage more Baluchis to resist the government's presence. While they do not yet pose a serious threat to government control of the province, provision of arms, equipment, and training either from fellow Baluchis in Pakistan or from a Soviet surrogate in Afghanistan (both of which may already exist to a limited extent) could make the Baluchis a much more serious disruptive force. (C)

<sup>5</sup> The Zahedan disorders were complicated by flareups between Baluchis and their Sistani neighbors. The Baluchis charged that the government showed favoritism to the Shiite Sistanis in the province. (S NF)

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