

Book review: Tilak Devasher: Pakistan - The Balochistan Conundrum. Noida: Harper Collins 2019. ISBN 978-93-5357-070-5

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despite being legally a federal republic. After the violent secession of the eastern “wing”, now Bangladesh, there was no place for location and space theory and regional development economics: “On the Pakistan side, state authorities are emphasising that the CPEC is a national endeavour which includes all provinces and areas under Pakistan administration. But due to the asymmetry in the allocation of [...] projects and uncertainties regarding [...] funds, severe doubts regarding the concrete geographical framework persist” (p. 126).

Readers will benefit from some prior knowledge of geography and history. It all goes back to the painful birth of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of (undivided) India and the still unresolved status of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. (For the Pakistan government, at least, the status remains unresolved; according to the Indian constitution, all of Jammu and Kashmir is part of India.) Since the Karakoram Highway, the northernmost section of the CPEC, runs over parts of Kashmir that India claims as her own territory, it always will be a stumbling block in China-Indian relations. Immediately after achieving independence in 1947 the new countries of India and Pakistan began the first Kashmir war and “the military came to control national defence and military policy” (p. 302), developing into the mighty military-industrial complex that controls the country’s CPEC interests (pp. 281–306 and *passim*).

The book covers developments until 2018. It is richly annotated, has a list of abbreviations, a long bibliography and an index. The author concentrates on the socio-political, international and security aspects and provides ample good advice for decision makers in Pakistan. There is little on western China other than the Uyghur problem and hardly any comparison to other Chinese economic corridors. Attempts at determining winners and losers show often contradictory objectives. Still, to the reviewer’s knowledge it is the most encompassing study on the subject available and, thus, required reading for all interested in the political economy of economic corridors and Pakistan-China relations.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

TILAK DEVASHER, *Pakistan. The Balochistan Conundrum*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019. Xxxi, 359 pages, INR 899.00. ISBN 978-93-5357-070-5

Balochistan is the largest but least populated province of Pakistan. Historically, it extended into Iran and Afghanistan. Balochi tribes also live in other provinces of Pakistan, such as Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province). The northern part of the Province of Balochistan is mainly inhabited by Pakhtuns; Quetta – the capital and largest city – also

houses Punjabi and refugees from Afghanistan. Among them lives a large contingent of Hazara, members of the Shia community, whereas most others are Sunni. A coastal strip around the small fishing harbour of Gwadar was under the Sultanate of Oman for 174 years before Pakistan bought it in 1958 (p. 158). That Oman is still an important destination for migrant workers (including military personnel) from Balochistan, however, is not mentioned in this book.

In 1838, the East India Company sent its army down the Indus and up the Bolan pass and “signed a safe passage agreement with Mehrab Khan, the Khan of Kalat, who guaranteed the safety of the British army” (p. 65). However, the famous lease contract that gave the colonial power control of the corridor from the Indus to the Afghan border was only signed in March 1839 (Mir Ahmad Yar Khan Baluch: *Inside Baluchistan*. Karachi: Royal Book, 1995, pp. 219–221). The western and southern parts of (present) Balochistan were under the Khan of Kalat and became a British protectorate, but never, as Baloch nationalists proudly note, an Indian princely state. When the colonial power left, the Khan claimed independence. In 1946, Jinnah, the Qaid-i-Azam (“Great Leader”) and at that time the legal adviser to the Khan, stated “it is my personal belief if any State wants to remain aloof, it may do so without any pressure from any quarter, whether it be the British Parliament or any political organization in the country” (p. 76). After the British had left, however, Kalat was forced to accede to Pakistan by Jinnah himself, now the first Governor-General of Pakistan.

Today we are witnessing the fifth “insurgency” in Balochistan, after 1948, 1958, 1962 and 1973–77 (p. xxvii). It is marked by unprecedented violence, sectarian terrorism, “enforced disappearances” and “missing” persons (p. xviii). The region has gained economic and strategic importance, especially since the governments of Pakistan and China agreed on a Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) linking Western China with Gwadar (see also the book review in this IQAS issue on Siegfried O. Wolf, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Cham: Springer, 2020). For good reason the Balochi fear to suffer rather than to benefit from the project, which might bring investment, but most likely little employment, unwelcome immigration and a heavy drain on its natural resources. Obviously there are several “foreign hands” involved in the game: not only Pakistan, China, Iran and Afghanistan, but also India, Arab states and out-of-region stakeholders.

The author of the book under review, a retired Indian bureaucrat, has already presented two books on Pakistan in the previous years (*Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, Noida: Harper Collins, 2016, and *Pakistan: At the Helm*, Noida: Harper Collins, 2018). Currently, Tilak Devasher is a member of the Indian National Security Advisory Board and a consultant with the Vivekananda International Foundation, an Indian public policy think tank, considered to be closely aligned with the Government of India and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Given the sorry state of relations between India and Pakistan, India’s

interest in the area should be no surprise, even more so because India feels threatened by a corridor that gives its rival to the north a direct link to the Arabian Sea, severing all possible land links between India and western Asia and beyond.

The book is well researched and documented and more or less in line with other works on the area. It moves from geography (“An ancient civilization”) and history (“Times gone by”) to “The roots of alienation”, the “Chinese gambit”, “Relentless persecution” and finally “Enduring insurrection”. The author plays down any role India might play in the present upsurge of violence – India is even not listed in the index. It may want a weak neighbour, but certainly not chaos beyond the border. The author thus wishes and warns: “For the long term, the Pakistani state will have to compromise with the Baloch. Continuing to seek a military solution to a political problem may make sense tactically in softening the opposition. But it can never be the long term solution. One of the key factors for the future development of Pakistan would be [...] a solution that puts the Baloch in the centre rather than the resources of the province. Failure to do so will slowly but inexorably exacerbate the crisis in Balochistan till it explodes with dire consequences for Pakistan” (pp. 291–292).

While politics and history are well covered, there is much less on economy and ecology, and the sections dealing with these issues somehow sound quite bookish, giving the impression that the author never had the opportunity to visit the area himself. In the chapter on Gwadar, the harbour on the Gulf of Oman near the Iranian border and the terminus of the Economic Corridor, he mentions the extreme scarcity of water and writes on the prospects of this fundamental cornerstone of the CPEC: “Failure to supply water may expose Gwadar to the same fate as Fatehpur Sikri or Myanmar’s famed capital Bagan” (p. 168). However, while Fatehpur Sikri, founded by Emperor Akbar as the capital of his Mughal Empire in 1571, famously had to be abandoned because of the scarcity of drinkable water, Bagan, situated on the banks of the mighty Irrawaddy, lost its importance due to the onslaught of the Mongols, not because of a lack of water. Unfortunately, despite his well-argued reservations about the future of Gwadar, the author shuns any judgement on the prospects of the Iranian port of Chabahar across the border, built with Indian assistance as a gateway to Afghanistan and beyond (pp. 172–174).

To the reviewer’s knowledge this book is the most up-to-date and comprehensive work on Balochistan. It explains the many contradictions of the centrally ruled federal republic. It also reveals why and how the much-touted Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor may not only disappoint Pakistan, but also China. The book is highly recommended to all who want to know more about the conundrum not just of Balochistan but the region as a whole.