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Rohrabacher's "Blood Borders" in Balochistan

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On February 9, 2012, the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs convened a hearing on "Baluchistan" [sic], chaired by Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R - CA). I, along with Messrs Ralph Peters, T. Kumar, Ali Dyan Hasan and Dr. M. Hosseinbor, testified as a witness in that hearing.

When I agreed to participate, I was told that the hearing was intended to be a general introduction to the various crises in Balochistan, their causes and the impact of these issues on U.S. interests. However, as the date of the hearing neared, I learned that the event would serve other purposes.

When I sought guidance about the precise issues I should discuss in my testimony, the committee staff member told me, in some exasperation, that "we want to stick it to the Pakistanis." He continued that for a decade the Pakistanis have been killing us in Afghanistan. While I fully agreed with the sentiment behind his remarks, I grew concerned that the hearing was not genuinely motivated by concern over the human rights challenges confronting the residents of Balochistan. Instead, this was an opportunity to interfere in the administration's ongoing efforts to develop a policy towards Pakistan, as well as Afghanistan.

Barely a week later, Congressman Rohrabacher introduced a Resolution "Expressing the sense of Congress that the people of Baluchistan, currently divided between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, have the right to self-determination and to their own sovereign country." Needless to say, this non-binding resolution does not reflect the sense of Congress and no Congressmen have embraced the measure. However, this resolution and the preceding hearing did much to

rankle Pakistan and render any rapprochement between Washington and Islamabad (not to mention Rawalpindi) even more difficult.

Many members of the Baloch diaspora who support an independent Balochistan have been extremely excited by these developments. Unfortunately, there are reasons to suspect that Congressman Rohrabacher's actions are not inspired by any genuine concern over ongoing human rights violations perpetrated against, as well as by, the Baloch inhabitants of the province.

There are multiple reasons for my skepticism. First, prior to the hearing, Congressmen Rohrabacher--with Congressman Louie Gohmert (R-TX)--had already penned an opinion piece in which he suggested that the United States should lend its "....support for a Balochistan carved out of Pakistan to diminish [Pakistan's] radical power". Second, the integrity of the hearing was immediately undermined by the inclusion of Mr. Ralph Peters, who in 2006 argued for the dissolution of Pakistan in a buffoonish essay, "Blood Borders," in the *Armed Forces Journal*. Specifically, he called in that piece for a "Free Baluchistan." How could an independent observer conclude that the hearing was anything but an attempt to promote the belief in Pakistan that the world's most powerful parliament was seeking to undermine its territorial integrity?

Unfortunately, this is not the first geopolitical exploit Mr. Rohrabacher has orchestrated. In January of 2012, he and Mr. Gohmert, among other Congresspersons, held a controversial meeting in Berlin with several representatives of the now defunct Northern Alliance. The goal of the meeting was to undermine the administration's current, if difficult and tentative, negotiations with the Taliban. In the Op-Ed already mentioned, Rohrabacher and Gohmert called for a new "Constitutional Loya Jirga, or convention, that will draft a new constitution enshrining federalism as the new form of government. This would break the Taliban's ability to dominate Afghanistan by strengthening those communities opposed to the return of the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies."

This author agrees that the current Afghan constitution, which reflects the interests of the United States and was written as the U.S. was hastily forging its shambolic policies towards Afghanistan, is inappropriate for Afghanistan today and even agrees that the suggestion makes much sense. However, this initiative by a select number of Congressmen, who do not represent the American Congress, harmed the administration's policy towards Afghanistan and its efforts to extract the U.S. from a deadly and flawed counterinsurgency policy that has borne few fruits. Worse, it inflamed the Afghan government, which saw this move as a deliberate effort to usurp its own primary place in negotiating Afghanistan's future. Needless to say, the fixation with the warlords of the Northern Alliance belies an astonishing ignorance about these men's involvement in war crimes and appalling human rights violations (such as the shocking practices of child rape and child concubinage (*bacchebazi*)). While the Taliban are widely seen as violent and illegitimate actors who have killed tens of thousands, for some reason the militias of the former Northern Alliance have managed to distance themselves in the American mind from their own violent and repugnant pasts.

The Obama administration has been busy trying to limit the repercussions of Rohrabacher and Gohmert's machinations. The State Department has had to bear the brunt of Pakistan's considerable and justified anger over Congressional meddling in what is clearly an internal

affair-even if that internal affair is appalling. (Can anyone imagine a comparable hearing on the Indian counterinsurgency campaigns in Kashmir? In each case the actions of the state involved raise uncomfortable questions for the United States.) Given that the duo has limited support in Congress for their efforts to change policy towards Afghanistan or Pakistan, and given also that such efforts have been repudiated by the administration, it remains to ask why they continue to pursue this folly.

The most facile reading is that Rohrabacher and Gohmert are genuinely frustrated, both with failed U.S. policy in Afghanistan and with the fact that Pakistan, while continuing to benefit from a variety of U.S. assistance programs, provides support for a wide array of terrorist groups opposed to U.S. interests. (Both Pakistan and the United States disagree on what the amounts transferred are, where they go and how they are used.) If this is indeed their motivation, I share their vexation. But seeking to force U.S.-Pakistan relations to a breaking point does not serve U.S. interests, or Pakistan's for that matter. After all, no matter how much Pakistanis resent the United States, U.S. support at the IMF is critical to keeping Pakistan afloat despite its severe fiscal problems.

A more cynical interpretation of Rohrabacher and Gohmert's actions might involve the desire for access to natural resources in both Afghanistan and Balochistan. In light of this suspicion, one must ask who paid for the Berlin conference? What private sector entities may have a vested interest in pushing this strange, orphaned agenda?

There are no ready answers to these questions. However, I can say with some certainty that the hearing and the Resolution that followed it have much more to do with partisan politics, and possibly resource-grabbing, than with any interest in the ongoing human rights crises in Balochistan.

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