

Balochistan Liberation Front

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1964

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: 1968: From 1968-1973, the BLF took part in the Iranian Balochi Revolt fighting against the Iranian government. (unknown killed, unknown wounded)¹

Last Attack: October 26, 2018: The BLF conducted a coordinated attack with the BLA on a Pakistani Security convoy in the Washk District. (2 killed, unknown wounded)²

OVERVIEW

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), also known as the Baloch Liberation Front, is an ethno-nationalist separatist organization currently fighting against the Pakistani government for an independent Baloch state.³ The group was founded in 1964 by Juma Khan Marri in Damascus, Syria. In 1968, the BLF joined the Iranian Balochi Revolt, an insurgency of Baloch groups fighting the Iranian government for greater political autonomy.⁴ During the revolt, the Iraqi government publicly supplied the BLF with weapons and operational support in an effort to destabilize and undermine Iran.⁵ Decimated from five years of fighting, the BLF and other Baloch insurgent groups negotiated an end to the fighting with the Shah of Iran in 1973. In response to the agreement, Iraq decided to stop openly sending arms to the BLF but maintained its relationships with the organization's leadership.

Following the end of the conflict in Iran, the BLF and other Baloch groups turned their attention to Pakistan. The groups demanded independence for the Pakistani province of Balochistan and incited a new insurgency, which became known as the Independent Movement of Balochistan (1973-1977). At the start of the insurgency, Iraq covertly supplied weapons to the BLF and other Baloch militant groups. In February 1973, the Pakistani government raided the Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan and uncovered crates of small arms and explosives that were allegedly en route to the BLF and several other Baloch groups.⁶ In response to the insurgency, the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the Baloch provincial government. This prompted the BLF and other Baloch insurgent groups to attack several Pakistani security forces convoys.⁷ As the conflict escalated, the Pakistani government deployed 80,000 troops to Balochistan to fight an estimated 50,000 insurgents.⁸ By 1974, government operations had pushed the BLF out of Balochistan and into Afghanistan. While the BLF was in exile in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union allegedly helped it regroup, allowing it to rejoin the Independent Balochistan Movement.⁹ The insurgency came to an end in November 1977, after Pakistani security forces implemented martial law and the military established general amnesty for militants in the region.¹⁰

Little is known about the BLF's activities between 1977 and 2004. However, reports seem to suggest that the group did not disband. In 2004, the group reemerged in the public eye when gunmen claiming to be BLF militants killed three Chinese foreign workers that were working on a Pakistani mega-development project in Balochistan. Shortly after, a public statement identified the gunmen as members of the BLF. The statement, issued by Dr. Allah Nazar, also announced that Nazar had taken command of the BLF in 2003. Prior to this statement, Nazar was known for his position as the head of the Balochistan Student Organization – Azad (BSO-Azad), which sought to educate youth on political matters.¹¹

In 2005, the BLF carried out multiple attacks, targeting Pakistani security forces, pipelines, and foreign workers.¹² On March 25, 2005, the Pakistani government captured Nazar, which temporarily halted BLF activities. Nazar was released a year later on June 20, 2006 after members of his BSO-Azad group went on a hunger strike to demand his freedom.¹³

After Nazar's release in 2006, little was reported on the BLF until it restarted attacks in 2011. In October 2011, the BLF attacked the Balochistan provincial minister Sardar Sanaulah Zehri.¹⁴ In 2012, the BLF killed a journalist, accusing him of not reporting on the BLF objectively.¹⁵ Since 2012, the BLF has continued its attacks on foreign workers, journalists, and Pakistani government affiliates, including a recent attack against 20 foreign workers on April 11, 2015.¹⁶ Following this attack, Nazar publicly claimed that the killed workers were members of the Frontier Works Organization, which is affiliated with the Pakistani military.¹⁷

In September 2015, a Pakistani military operation reportedly killed Nazar in the Awaran district of Balochistan.¹⁸ Two months later, however, Nazar gave his first interview in

five years, documenting how he had survived the encounter. The leader pledged further attacks on a planned Chinese economic corridor, parts of which ran through the resource-rich province of Balochistan. Nazar also called on India to lend diplomatic and financial support to the Baloch movement.¹⁹ When asked if he would support negotiations with the Pakistani government, Nazar reiterated that there would be no negotiations without the independence of Balochistan and without the presence of the UN.²⁰ In 2017, the Balochistan government detained several of Allah Nazar's family members, marking another point of tension between the Pakistani government and the BLF.²¹

The BLF has continued to carry out attacks with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), conducting frequent attacks against Pakistani forces as well as on projects being completed under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$56 billion venture that links southwestern China to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan.²² In 2018, the group carried out several attacks against Pakistani Security Forces in collaboration with other militant groups.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Jumma Khan Marri (1964-unknown): Marri is the founder of the Balochistan Liberation Front. Marri controlled the BLF from its creation through the Independent Balochistan Movement (1973-1977). It is unknown when he stepped down as the leader of the group.²³

Brahamdagh Khan Bugti (unknown- unknown): The Pakistani government has alleged that after leaving the Balochistan Liberation Front, Bugti helped bring back and lead the BLF in 2005.²⁴

Dr. Allah Nazar (2003-present): Nazar is responsible for the resurgence of the BLF in 2004. He also founded the Baloch Student Organization – Azad (BSO – Azad) in 2002. Nazar was captured on March 25, 2005 by the Pakistani government and was interrogated and tortured until his release on June 20, 2015. Nazar frequently utilizes press statements and interviews with the media to advertise the BLF agenda.²⁵ He was again targeted by the Pakistani government in 2015 but survived and remains as leader of the BLF.²⁶

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no reported name changes for the BLF.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

There are no publicly available size estimates of the Balochistan Liberation Front.

D. RESOURCES

The Balochistan Liberation Front received support and arms from Iraq between 1964 and 1977.²⁷ The Pakistani government has alleged that the Soviet Union supported the BLF in 1974 when the BLF was based in Afghanistan.²⁸

Since the group's reemergence in 2003, the sources of the BLF's funding and weapons are unknown. Analysts hypothesize that the BLF has benefited from leftover weapons from prior conflicts in the region, including conflicts in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.²⁹ Balochistan is a key smuggling route for many products (e.g., opium), and experts speculate that smuggling could be a large source of income for the BLF.³⁰

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

The Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) was founded in Damascus, Syria.³¹ The organization expanded to Iran during the Balochi Revolt (1968-1973).³² In 1973, the BLF moved to the Pakistani Province of Balochistan to take part in another insurgency known as the Independent Balochistan Movement (1973-1977).³³

As of April 2019, the BLF is based in Makran, Balochistan and operates throughout the province of Balochistan.³⁴

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

The BLF is an ethno-nationalist separatist organization with the goal of creating an independent Baloch state.³⁵ The current leader, Dr. Allah Nazar, has stated that he would like to see the BLF become influential enough to push Pakistan to recognize Balochistan as an independent state.

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Nazar, the current leader of the BLF, regularly cooperates with Baloch nationalist parties to influence political negotiations with the Pakistani government over resources.³⁶ In 2011, the BLF attacked Balochistan provincial minister Sardar Sanauallah Zehri in an attempt to force the Pakistani government to negotiate.³⁷

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

The BLF uses rocket strikes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small-arms attacks to put pressure on the Pakistani government for an independent Baloch state. The group also relies on social media and press statements to spread its goals and word of its

attacks. Since the group's resurgence in 2003, the BLF has targeted foreign laborers, aid workers, Pakistani security forces, Pakistani political figures, and journalists.³⁸

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

1968-1973: From 1968 to 1973, the BLF participated in the Iranian Balochi Revolt. The revolt ended when the participating Baloch militant groups entered into a negotiated settlement with the Shah. (unknown casualties)³⁹

1973-1977: From 1973-1977, the BLF fought in the Independent Balochistan Movement that took place in Balochistan, Pakistan. (unknown casualties)⁴⁰

May 2, 2004: The BLF attacked Chinese foreign workers working on the Gwadar port in Balochistan. The BLF considered this construction project to be an attempt by the Pakistani government to colonize Balochistan. (3 killed, 0 wounded)⁴¹

January 11, 2005: The BLF attacked a Pakistani government-controlled pipeline located in Balochistan. (6 killed, unknown wounded)⁴²

October 11, 2011: The BLF unsuccessfully attempted to kill Balochistan provincial minister Sardar Sanaullah Zehri with a bomb. (0 killed, 0 wounded)⁴³

May 28, 2012: The BLF killed WASH TV journalist Qadir Hajizai in Quetta for allegedly being an "informer." (1 killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁴

July 27, 2013: The BLF attacked a Pakistani Coast Guard post near Gwadar. (7 killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁵

April 11, 2015: The BLF attacked 20 laborers working on Pakistani government sponsored dam construction. Nazar claimed that the workers were members of the Frontier Works Organization, a Pakistani security forces affiliate. (20 killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁶

November 15, 2017: The BLF kidnapped 15 men near the Iranian border and shot them near Goruk. The bodies were later discovered, and the BLF claimed responsibility for the killing. (15 killed, 0 wounded)⁴⁷

October 26, 2018: The BLF conducted a coordinated attack with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) on a Pakistani Security convoy in the Washk District. (2 killed, unknown wounded)⁴⁸

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

The BLF has not been designated as a terrorist organization by any major national government or international body. However, the group has operated in close and constant collaboration with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a designated group.

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

There is no publicly available information regarding the BLF's recruitment practices before 2003. Beginning in 2003, Nazar leveraged his ties to the student community as leader of the Bloch Student Organization – Azad (BSO – Azad) to draw recruits. During this time, the BLF drew many of its members from colleges and universities. The group has published propaganda in press statements and on social media to attract local tribesmen, youth, and students to join the organization.⁴⁹ Nazar has given personal interviews to the Pakistani media in an attempt to prevent the press from portraying the BLF as a radical terrorist organization.⁵⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The BLF is one of multiple insurgent groups fighting for increased sovereignty for the Balochistan province. In addition to the BLF, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), the Balochistan Republican Army (BRA), Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LeB), and the Jhalawan Baloch Tiger are also active in the region. The BLF and BLA are the strongest and most influential militant groups of Balochistan.⁵¹ There has been no confirmed coordination between the BLA and other Baloch and non-Baloch groups. Although some of these different militant organizations have almost identical goals (e.g., the independence of Balochistan), they operate independently of one another.⁵²

The BLF allegedly received support from the Baloch Student Organization during the Independent Balochistan Movement of 1973-1977.⁵³

More recently, since Nazar was the founder of the Baloch Student Organization – Azad (BSO – Azad) prior to the BLF's resurgence in 2004, the BLF has had a strong relationship with the BSO – Azad. When Nazar was captured by the Pakistani government in 2005, BSO-Azad group members went on a hunger strike to pressure the Pakistani government to release him, which resulted in Nazar's release on June 20, 2006.⁵⁴

D. STATE SPONSORS

During the Balochi Revolt in Iran (1968-1973), the BLF received support and arms from the Iraqi government.⁵⁵ On February 10, 1973, the Pakistani government raided the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad and found a crate filled with small arms and explosives that were

allegedly going to the BLF and other insurgent groups in Balochistan.⁵⁶ Iraq continued to support the BLF until the end of the Independent Balochistan Movement in 1977.

The Pakistani government claimed that the Soviet Union helped reorganize the BLF in 1974 after it had been pushed into Afghanistan. The USSR supposedly improved the BLF's operational capacity, which ultimately allowing the group to return to fight in Balochistan.⁵⁷

MAPS

- Pakistan

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¹³ Magsi, Asif. "Exclusive Interview with Commander Dr. Allah Nazar of the Baloch Liberation Front." Naked Punch, January 1, 2015. <http://www.nakedpunch.com/articles/223>

¹⁴ "Balochistan Minister Escapes Bomb Attack." - Pakistan. 14 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 July 2015; "Balochistan Minister Zehri Escapes Attempt on Life - The Express Tribune." The Express Tribune Balochistan Minister Zehri Escapes Attempt on Life Comments. 15 Oct. 2011. Web. 1 Aug. 2015.

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