INTRODUCTION

Iran, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a country in southwestern Asia. It is bordered on the north by Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, and Turkmenistan; on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; on the south by the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Persian Gulf; and on the west by Iraq and Turkey. In 2004, the population of Iran was estimated to be 69,018,924. Iran’s population is made up of numerous groups comprised of communities of Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Georgians, Baloch, and others. The Persian people comprise about 45 percent of Iran's population. Turks population estimated to be around 12 to 16 million, Kurds 6-8 million, Arabs 2-3 million, and Turkmens 1-2 million, etc.

Balochistan, officially known as the 'Province of Sistan & Balochistan' is one of the thirty provinces of Iran. It is in the southeast of the country, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan and its capital is Zahedan. The province is the largest in Iran, with an area of 181,785 km² and a population of 4.1 million.

The province is comprised of two sections, Sistan in the north and Balochistan in the south. The combined Sistan & Balochistan Province today accounts for one of the driest regions of Iran with a slight increase in rainfall from east to west, and an obvious rise in humidity in the coastal regions. In the south, east and west of Sistan & Balochistan, the people are mostly Baloch and speak Balochi language. The name Balochistan in Persian language means 'Land of the Baloch.' Similarly, the Persian language name for Sistan comes from the old Persian Sakastāna, meaning 'Land of the Sakas.' The Sakas were a population of Central Asian nomadic tribes speaking an eastern Iranian language.
The inhabitants of the province of Sistan & Balochistan continue to embrace their own norms and traditions, and the region has the potential to become one of the sight-seeing areas of Iran. The province today is the most underdeveloped, desolate, and poorest of Iran's provinces. The government of the Islamic Republic has been trying to reverse this situation by implementing new plans such as the creation of Chabahar Free Trade Zone. The major cities of Balochistan are Zahedan, Iranshahr, Chabahar, Saravan, Nik Shahr, and Khash, and the region is mainly home to Iran's Baloch Sunni.

The Baloch in Iran make up about 3 to 4 million of the population, who are mostly spread within Sistan & Balochistan province which is the largest province of Iran consists of over 11% of the total area of the country. Politics, society, and culture of Baloch in Iran have its peculiar characteristics and unique features. Modern politics, in fact, in this part of Iran is a recent phenomenon. It is barely half a century old.

**Chapter one** of this study contextualizes the Baloch question in Iran. In order to contextualize the Baloch question in Iran, their culture towards politics is analyzed. The chapter deals with the Balochi system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. It also discusses about Reza Shah’s British-supported military coup which established him as the Shah of Iran in 1925 and his military encounter in 1928 with Doust Mohammad Khan Baranzai, the ruler of the western (Iranian) Balochistan, which this military expedition of 1928 by Shah’s regime finally brought about a strong presence of central government in Balochistan of Iran. The chapter goes on to analyze how both different central governments of Iran such as the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic tried to integrate the Baloch within their political systems.
It describes and compares the socio-cultural structures of the Baloch before 1979 Revolution and after the Revolution, which remained to be as authoritarian. It discusses the reasons of why majority of Baloch lacked comprehension of the actual state of political life and values in politics, and why Baloch for years remained in a passive state of affairs. It also explains the establishment of modern government in Balochistan of Iran and the gradual development of Baloch towards a subject form of politics.

Chapter two includes the demographic profile of the Baloch in Iran, their educational and occupational status, as well as, a description of their social institutions including language, marriage, polygamy, poetry, societal norms, and their religious faith. As far as the educational and occupational status of the Iranian Baloch is concerned, the chapter compares the developmental policies of the Pahlavi regime with that of the Islamic Republic. It explains and reasons on Balochistan's highest rate of illiteracy in Iran, and focuses on the educational status of Baloch in Iran, which improved relatively in post-Islamic Revolution. It also discusses the Balochi religiosity (Sunni Islam) as the most striking cultural feature, pervading all aspects of their life.

Chapter three describes the political status of Baloch after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Therefore, focus is on a brief analytical study of the constitutional structure, the constitutional status of the Iranian Baloch, and their socio-political status in Iran. The chapter focuses on the centralization of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran which is concentrated in the hands of Leadership. The other major institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran such as the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Guardian Council, Judiciary, Expert Assembly, Presidency, Council of Expediency, Revolutionary Guards, Army, and Intelligence, are also taken into consideration.
It goes on to assess the activities of Baloch in Iran such as political and nonpolitical associations; the situation of the Baloch under the Islamic Republic, as well as, the structure of the elite class within the Balochi society of Iran --- the tribal masters and chiefs who constitute the chieftaincy group, the Mullahs and religious instructors who constitute the clergy group, and the politicians, state employees, managers, doctors and intelligentsia, who constitute the educated group. How Baloch tribal chiefs have been emasculated and their new generations are transforming into the educated group? Why the educated Baloch are disorganized and are under the influence of Baloch clergy? And, finally how Baloch clergy dominated the entire Balochi society of Iran despite their religious differences with the ruling Shia clergy? These questions are among the major issues discussed in this chapter.

The thrust of Chapter four is to investigate those developments undertaken by the Islamic Republic towards the Baloch in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. The chapter compares Balochistan of pre-1979 Revolution with the Balochistan of post-1979 Revolution and explains how the entire composition of Balochi cities comparatively changed for good in post-Islamic Revolution Iran. It compares Balochistan within Iran itself, which has failed to keep up with the rest of the country in agricultural, industrial, and commercial developments. The chapter refers to the various public and private projects and reports, undertaken by different organizations such as Administration & Planning Organization of Sistan & Balochistan.

Chapter five studies the nature of Baloch politics in Iran which has been discussed decade-wise into four phases. It deals with the main political issues, structures, strategies, and culture of politics between Baloch and the Islamic Republic of Iran.
The first phase deals with the Baloch politics before the Islamic Revolution. The second section focuses on major political developments occurred within the first decade of the Islamic Republic. The third part of this chapter is concerned with politics in the second decade. And, the final part discusses major recent political developments undertaken in the third decade of the Islamic Republic of Iran such as the Baloch insurgency.

It explores the developments under Pahlavi monarchy --- Baloch began to develop some primary awareness of the system yet essentially remained passive and inactive towards government’s decision-making process, and how such orientation towards political participation more or less remained the same till the victory of the Islamic Republic. The chapter also deals with the issue of why majority of Baloch live under the supremacy of their religious elders. It also discusses the 'form of political participation' of Baloch in Iran.

**Chapter six** or the final chapter of the study has been organized into the following parts. The first focuses on the outcome of religious political developments in Balochistan, how religion has been politicized. The second examines the major socio-political demands of the Baloch, to what extent their demands have been fulfilled by central government. The third deals with the concept of national unity and Islamic integrity; to what extent this policy has been successful. The fourth looks at Iran's monoethnic approach towards the Baloch. The fifth refers to the emergence of recent Baloch insurgency, what lies behind the politics of insurgency. The sixth explores Balochi political inclination; do they prefer autonomy or looking for independence. The seventh concentrates on the effects of global communication over political developments in Balochistan. The section eight presents a hypothesis on the
future of Baloch politics under the Islamic Republic of Iran. And, the final section deals with a proposal to the problem.

In short, this chapter discusses that the future of Baloch politics in Iran mainly depends on two major factors. 1. How the Islamic Republic has approached and dealt with the Baloch, and what have been the consequences of actions and reactions between the Baloch and the central government during these twenty-nine years (1979 – 2008) of rule by the Islamic Republic of Iran. 2. The future of Baloch politics in Iran depends on the fate of the Islamic Republic itself.

It analyzes how unsuitable policies can produce bad outcomes, leading foreign powers to interfere in the internal political affairs of the country, and what the Islamic Republic of Iran should do to cut the foreign intervention or how to restore stability especially in Balochistan. A number of suggestions have been presented at the end of the chapter. Finally, the study ends with the conclusion.