

Roots of Balochistan conf



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Increasing attacks by the Islamic state in Balochistan are connected to Pakistan's failed strategy of encouraging and using Islamist militants to crush Baloch rebels and separatists

On July 13, several hundred tribesmen and students from religious seminars gathered at a public meeting in Mastung, a town in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, to hear Siraj Raisani, a 55-year-old politician from the Balochistan Awami Party.

As he appeared on stage wearing dark sunglasses, the crowd cheered, whistled and raised their hands, in a gesture affirming their loyalty to him. "O! Brave people of Balochistan!" said Raisani, who was known and feared for his strong ties to the Pakistani military. Before he could utter a second sentence, a suicide bomber blew himself up near the stage. The explosion killed Raisani and 149 of his supporters, and injured 186 others.

Abdul Khaliq, a resident, told the BBC Urdu that three of his sons had gone to the rally. "All three of them were killed," he said. Another person lost 15 relatives. In some homes, there were no men left to lead the funerals.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, citing Raisani's relationship with the military. The group has been terrorizing Pakistan's border regions such as Balochistan by attacking unarmed civilians. The suicide bombing was the first time the group targeted a prominent political asset of the military.

The carnage in Balochistan can be understood by considering the long history of separatism in the province, the resentment against the federal authorities for denying its people their proper share of resources and opportunities, and the failed strategy of the Pakistani military to use repression and to encourage and use Islamist groups and militants to crush Baloch nationalist rebels and politicians.

Balochistan, which is home to about 12 million of Pakistan's 208 million people, is the country's largest province, stretching from the Arabian Sea coast through a vast desert and mountainous landscape to Iran in the west and Afghanistan in the north. The gas, gold and copper reserves of Balochistan are among the largest in Asia and account for half of Pakistan's gas production. The province's resources generate about a billion dollars every



A man mourns the death of a relative who was killed in a suicide blast in Balochistan province.

year for the federal government, but its people barely receive their share of state investment and opportunities.

Raisani, who came from a prominent pro-Pakistan family in a province with a long history of separatism — his father was the governor, his brother was the chief minister, another brother was a senator — was contesting his first election. His party, which was formed in March, is widely believed to be an initia-

tive of the military to unite the pro-Pakistan tribal chiefs to help them defeat Baloch nationalist politicians — who seek an end to the military's control over the state's resources — in the forthcoming elections.

Before he started his election campaign, Raisani was mostly known for working with the military to fight the Baloch separatists. In a video posted on social media, Raisani is administering an oath of loyalty on the Quran

to his band of counterinsurgents. The video was uploaded with the soundtrack of an immensely popular Taliban battle song.

The most recent insurgency in Balochistan against the Pakistani government and the military — dominated by ethnic Punjabi — started in 2004. Five separatist militant groups with about 500 men have been fighting the military.

The Pakistani army has few Baloch soldiers and officers, so

How World Cup guarded against holl Ignorance is bliss, but untenable. Temporary distraction, i



TOM PHILIP

When history looks back and remembers the stunning 2018 World Cup, what will be the lasting images: Neymar attempting, game after game, to break the land speed record for rolling while clutching your ankle? The referees experimenting with VAR? The replays of celebrating players and fans in rapture, tossing their drinks in the air, after yet another last-minute game-winning goal? (This tournament's 23 stoppage time goals shattered the previous record.)

Or maybe it will be a singular moment, like Kylian Mbappé's strike to make it 4-1 and become the first teenager to score in a World Cup final since a man named Pelé. Regardless, this has been hands-down the most entertaining World Cup in recent memory, and it turns out we needed this more than we could have imagined.

The World Cup, while perennially mired in FIFA corruption and never far away from fraught

politics, is also colorful, joyful, downright good television and, in the grand scheme of things, not all that important.

This is not an insult. It's an ode. At a time when 7 out of 10 Americans admit they are worn out by the high-stakes anxiety of the news, this summer's tournament couldn't have come at a better time.

You may have heard: The world is a dark and unstable place right now. Syria is still burning, and chauvinism is on the rise seemingly everywhere. In the United States, Flint, Michigan, still does not have clean drinking water, and the government appears to be preoccupied with kidnapping and then losing people's children.

Luckily, for every new horror or outrage, there has been the respite of obsessively watching a sport in which 22 men sprint after a ball for an hour and a half — the game that can end with a score of 0-0, yet somehow consistently produce moments of ecstasy and tension.

"Egypt are in trouble here," a Fox commentator said gravely on the second day of the tournament, referring to nothing more than their inability to press Uruguay higher up the field. Egypt's political landscape

remains volatile. And many images of young Arabs and North Africans in Western media are, to put it kindly, reductive.

But for weeks the nation made headlines around the world simply for the exploits of their forward Mohamed Salah, the 26-year-old winger with a wide smile and quick feet, who scored dozens of goals this past season for his English professional club, Liverpool. When Salah scores, he often celebrates by kneeling in prayer — a public display of faith to which his adoring Liverpool fans dedicated an entire tongue-in-cheek chantey:

"Mo Sa-la-la-lah! If he's good enough for you, he's good enough for me. If he scores another few, then I'll be Muslim too. If he's good enough for you, he's good enough for me. Sitting in the mosque, that's where I wanna be!"

In mid-June, Donald Trump ended an inflammatory anti-immigration speech by hugging the American flag, a truly ridiculous and near-dystopian sight that would have haunted me for days had I not been numbed to the whole thing by Cristiano Ronaldo's sublime hat trick against Spain and the minicontroversy that erupted around his awful goatee.



Many caught in the soccer magic naturally ignored political developments across the world.

On June 27, as the debate raged over whether White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders should have been asked to leave a little restaurant in Virginia, I was preoccupied by Germany's loss to South Korea, which in a wild turn of events simultaneously sent the defending champions home before the knockout round and put Mexico into knockouts despite having been routed by Sweden.

Please, feel free to engage in

the self-important discourse about the proper way to protest being volleyed around by verified Twitter accounts ever since the Sanders incident. I sat it out and instead looked up foreign embassy jobs after seeing a video of Mexican fans holding the Korean consul general to Mexico aloft, celebrating him as if this bespectacled middle-aged gentleman were the hero who had scored the winning goal.

Trump's second Supreme

Court nomination? A watershed moment in American politics but I missed the empty buildup and hours of conjecture (turn: out Kavanaugh was reportedly Kennedy's mandated pick) because I was too busy laughing and texting my friends about all the cheekily maximalist meme: surrounding England's tear and, before that, lying down in a cold dark room to recover from the seven-goal thriller that was France vs. Argentina.