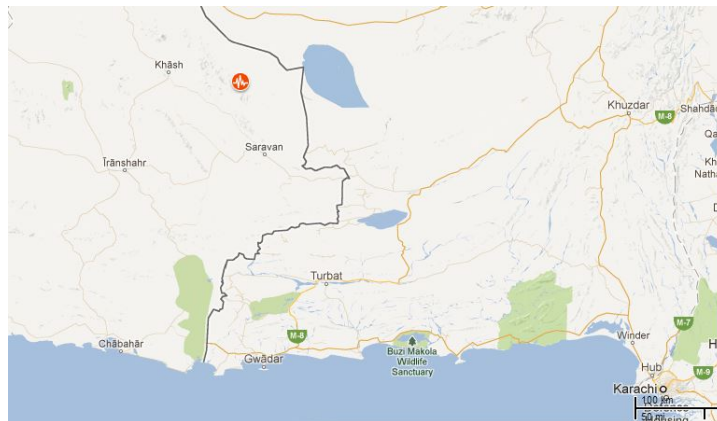


# MASSIVE EARTHQUAKE STRIKES TROUBLED BALOCHISTAN REGION



Google Map screen grab of USGS-reported epicenter of earthquake in Iran.

A massive earthquake has struck near the Iran-Pakistan border in the region known in both countries as Balochistan. With Iran subject to massive US sanctions that are already crippling its economy and affecting health care, responding to this disaster will be a huge challenge. Just over the border in Pakistan, the region has been torn by what some see as government-sanctioned disappearances and killings. The border in the region is quite porous and there have been a number of incidents involving both Iranian and Pakistani border control agents. The best prospects for the economy of the area to improve hinge on the Iran-Pakistan pipeline which crosses the border within about 150 miles of the epicenter and development of the port of Gwadar, which Pakistan recently signed over to China, also just over 150 miles from where the earthquake struck.

PressTV informs us that deaths from the quake have already been reported:

At least 40 people have been killed after a powerful earthquake measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale struck Iran's

southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province, the Iranian Seismological Center (IRSC) says.

The IRSC reported that the epicenter of the quake was situated 81 kilometers north of the city of Saravan.

Dawn reports that Iranian authorities say it is the worst earthquake to hit Iran in 40 years:

An Iranian government official said he expected hundreds of deaths from the massive 7.8 magnitude earth quake, felt as far away as New Delhi and Gulf cities of Dubai and Bahrain.

"It was the biggest earthquake in Iran in 40 years and we are expecting hundreds of dead," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

(While this post was being written, Dawn updated the article to note that five deaths have already been reported on the Pakistan side of the border.)

The shaking was felt across large distances:

Tremors from the earthquake were felt as far away as New Delhi and the Gulf cities of Dubai and Bahrain.

Note that last year, two earthquakes in northwest Iran killed over 300 people. Those quakes had magnitudes of 6.4 and 6.2 on the Richter scale. The scale is logarithmic, so even the lower 7.5 estimate from Iran (compared to the initial 7.8 from USGS) makes this earthquake at least ten times more powerful than the quakes last summer. The region where today's quake struck is much less populated, but with a quake of this magnitude, expect the devastation to cut a very wide swath.