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Afghanistan's Geopolitical and Geostrategic Importance for International Security: A Great Game Theory Analysis of Its Role Across Three Centuries

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In Prague, 22 April 2024   Edries Barna

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Abstract

The geostrategic and geopolitical location of Afghanistan in the Eurasian Region has seen the country playing a critical role in international security ever since its formation in the 19th century. Being at the epicenter of stiff competition among the Great Powers, the country has influenced many aspects of international security. In this qualitative study which was influenced by the Great Game Theory, the researcher purposively sampled individuals with lived experiences in Afghanistan and then interviewed them. In addition through participant observation and documentary analysis/historical analysis, the main findings of the study were that Afghanistan is of geostrategic importance in international security is significant due to its location at the crossroads of South Asia and Central Asia. Also, the presence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda networks has a profound impact on the peace situation not only in Afghanistan but also in its neighboring regions, and foreign interventions in Afghanistan, both regional and global, have shaped the cultural, political, and economic life of the local population with regional and trans-regional powers, exploiting abnormal political and economic conditions and the weakness of non-popular governments to their advantage. In addition, current political leaders face tremendous challenges in ensuring peace and stability in the country, struggling with internal conflicts and a lack of contemporary diplomatic knowledge. Consequently, collaboration with the global community and international organizations in pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan is met with considerable complexity.

Abstraktní

Geostrategická a geopolitická poloha Afghánistánu v euroasijském regionu vedla k tomu, že země hraje klíčovou roli v mezinárodní bezpečnosti již od svého vzniku v 19. století. Vzhledem k tomu, že se země nachází v epicentru tvrdé konkurence mezi velmocemi, ovlivnila mnoho aspektů mezinárodní bezpečnosti. V této kvalitativní studii, která byla ovlivněna teorií velkých her, výzkumník záměrně vybral jednotlivce s prožitými zkušenostmi v Afghánistánu a poté s nimi provedl rozhovor. Kromě pozorování účastníků a dokumentární analýzy/historické analýzy byly hlavními zjištěními studie, že Afghánistán má geostrategický význam v mezinárodní bezpečnosti a je významný díky své poloze na křižovatce jižní Asie a Střední Asie. Také přítomnost sítí Talibanu a Al-Káidy má hluboký dopad na mírovou situaci nejen v Afghánistánu, ale také v jeho sousedních

regionech, a zahraniční intervence v Afghánistánu, regionální i globální, formovaly kulturní, politické a ekonomické život místního obyvatelstva s regionálními a nadregionálními pravomocemi, využívání abnormálních politických a ekonomických podmínek a slabosti nelidových vlád ve svůj prospěch. Současní političtí vůdci navíc čelí obrovským výzvám při zajišťování míru a stability v zemi, potýkají se s vnitřními konflikty a nedostatkem současných diplomatických znalostí. V důsledku toho se spolupráce s globálním společenstvím a mezinárodními organizacemi ve snaze o mír a stabilitu v Afghánistánu potýká se značnou složitostí.

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Introduction

The existing state of affairs in Afghanistan has its historical roots in power struggles between Britain and Russia, and later between the Soviet Union and the United States. At the turn from the 19th to the 20th century the British Viceroy in India, Lord Curzon, identified the Central Asian countries and territories in his famous statement as "pawns on a chessboard". (Kreutzmann, 2005: 04). These rivalries, termed the Great Game, have been referred to the "alleged activities of secret British and Russian agents in Central Asia, agents sent to collect information of political and perhaps lay the foundations of political influence over the peoples of the region" (Yapp, 2001: 180). Afghanistan has been at the epicenter of this geopolitical conflict between these super powers as both countries had colonial interests in governing the country. According to Mojtahed-Zadeh (2017: 66), Afghanistan's existence never emerged in a natural process of a nation-building exercise, it was created by Britain when its geopolitical interests of mid-nineteenth century was in full swing. Another rival with similar interests was Russia, whose hostilities with Britain scaled up due to its associations with Afghanistan (Yapp, 2001). Bhat (2020) posits that "all international contenders from Alexander the Great who struggled there and attempts by British, Russia and Soviet Union failed miserably" (p. 181). With the United Stated joining the "Great Game" due to its geo-economic interests in the region, it has gone as far as "considering the incredible idea of power sharing with the Taliban in Afghanistan which represents nothing but the scale of US desperation" and this presents "another dreadful recipe for future disasters of perhaps greater consequence for South and Central Asia and the World at large" (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2017: 65). Using the Great Game Theory, this study seeks to establish Afghanistan's geopolitical significance in international security which is faced by unending conflicts in the region.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

➢ To understand the contribution of Afghanistan's geopolitical and geo-strategic position to international security

➢ To understand how forces within and outside Afghanistan shape its role in international security

➢ To understand the problems that Afghanistan face as a geopolitical and geo-strategic positioned state in international security

Research questions

➢ What is the contribution of Afghanistan's geopolitical and geo-strategic position to international security?

➢ How are the forces within and outside Afghanistan shaping its role in international security?

➢ What are the problems that Afghanistan face as a geopolitical and geo-strategic positioned state in international security?

Background of the Study

The first phase of old great game ended in 1907 with the signing of Anglo-Russian Convention which ended (Fatima and Zafar, 2014: 627). With the second phase of lasting until 1917, Russia did not abandon its foreign policy of trying to revolutionize the its neighboring countries through communism. Russia believed that it had to take initiatives to "liberate by means of armed revolt, the whole of Asia from imperialist domination" (Hopkirk, 2012). From this time, Afghanistan became a centre stage in world politics within and beyond Asia. Currently surrounded by Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikstan and China, the country was originally created by the British Empire as a buffer zone between the British and Russian Empires (Singh, 2020). Thereafter, since for many it seemed vacant, it attracted a number of invasions from the Great Powers (the British in 19th century, Soviet Union in the 20th century and the United States of America in the 21st) all who subsequently experienced defeat and ended up withdrawing with heavy hearts. With the rise of the Cold War and the Soviet attempt to revive its Empire from 1979, Afghanistan became a practical play ground between many ideologies like communism, capitalism, Islamism, anti-communism and anti-sovietism. With the defeat of the Soviet Union in 1988 and subsequent rise of Taliban thereafter, the path became open for a new contender, the United States of America (USA) but would not fully materialize until 2001 with the attack on several key structures in the USA like the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon which attacks were said to be masterminded by the late Osama Bin Laden. Whether it is the current government or its original self of the 1990s, Taliban Rule has always been a force that ruffles the furthers of especially the Western powers, a reality which points to the fact that Afghanistan has indeed a role to play in international security (Maizland, 2022). Another interesting point to note is that the word "terrorism" has become so much associated with Afghanistan since 2001 and is worth looking into.

It is true that quite a number of studies which includes that of Singh (2020) focusing on the Geo-strategic significance of the country throughout its history, that of Taucher et al. (2014) which is an overall report of the country touching on economy, society and security and that by Threlkeld and Easterly (2021) which touches on the Afghan-Pakistan ties, among other studies have been done. However, of much importance is that most of these studies have either focused on Geo-political importance of Afghanistan for Central Asia alone, especially Pakistan ignoring other players (Khan and Shirazi, 2021; National Intelligence Council, 2002), or have focused on a general overview (Taucher et al., 2014) without a clear theoretical grounding like the current study. It is worth noting that the Great Game theory, first promulgated in the 19th century may be said to be old, is still a very relevant theory in political analysis and may be the appropriate theory from which issues to do with Afghanistan in the Geo-political and Geo-strategic arena may be well understood. Jawad (2002) observes that due to this great game primarily people of Afghanistan, suffered a lot whose lives were affected and their prospects for the future destroyed. Jawad (2002) adds that "as long as foreign intervention continues both inside and outside Afghanistan, there is little chance for national reconciliation and resolution of the crisis within the country (Ibid, 38).

The Problem

Once a war cycle takes off in Afghanistan and its surrounding regions, intervening to stop it has always been a very difficult attempt, difficult either with financial support and large-scale military intervention (Giustozzi, 2009). USA, Russia, and Britain have tried to implement various policies in order to have hold on the Afghan soil so as to achieve economic control of the area (Bhat, 2020). For this purpose, US used its air force, earlier spying by British and military offence and communist card by USSR to dominate on the region but all their efforts failed and the situation forced them to withdraw from the region without achieving anything except loss of life from both sides (Bhat, 2020). All these attempts have yielded nothing but instability in global peace. These has led to aggressive foreign policies from both parties, culminating to events such as the 9/11 attacks on World Trade Centre and the US finally taking military action in Afghanistan which it coined "war on terrorism". Large scale external intervention often invites counter-interventions, thereby strengthening conflict and prolonging the cycle of war rather than pacifying the country (Guistozzi, 2010). Looking at Afghanistan, its domestic policy has always been informed with political upheavals due to lack political transitions which never had a solid basis unsuccessful tribal

reconciliation. With external forces such as the big powers which are interested to control the region to attain balance of power, it means Afghanistan is likely to face a series of both internal and external conflicts. Within the premises of this study, it is therefore imperative to understand what has led to failure of previous efforts at peacemaking and peacebuilding in Afghanistan and how this can affect global peace at large.

Significance of the Study

Through research, conflict sensitive strategies can be formulated and be implemented at every stage to ensure global peace. Atmar and Goodhand (2002) argue that conflict reduction and peacebuilding are the 'missing ingredients' that need to be mainstreamed into humanitarian policy and practice. Despite efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, peace has never been achieved in the Afghanistan due to a series of conflicts. Research will therefore help in "developing a common analysis, leading to a comprehensive and coherent peacebuilding framework" (Atmar and Goodhand, 2002: 08). This will enhance previous strategies that have failed before. International organisations such as the European Union have shown the interest in Afghanistan as they are committed to a peaceful and prosperous country that would be free of terrorism, which is a cornerstone for the country's security and development through bringing peace and stability (Bharti, 2023). With a current situation of a never-ending conflict, the country's international relations remain unfavorable for economic investments and for the betterment of the livelihoods for its citizens. It is therefore mandatory for research-based peacebuilding strategies to be designed to ensure sustainable socio-economic reforms for local people, policies that can be used to ensure better international relations between Europe, Asia, and the United States without compromising international security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview of the Great Game

The Great Game has spanned over three centuries, modeling international relations in the battle for supremacy over the Eurasian region for political and economic control. A British surveyor who toured the region in 1904 commented that "who rules east Europe commands the heartland; who rules the heartland commands the world-island; who rules the world-island commands the world"

(MacKinder, 1962 p. 162). With the region being of interest to global powers, Afghanistan has posed "the most important geo-strategic and geo-economic challenge of our time" (Friedman, 2006 p. 07). According to Dorran (2006), "Central Asia today represents one of the world's last great frontiers for geological survey and analysis, offering opportunities for the discovery, production, transportation, and refining of enormous quantities of oil and gas and other energy resources" (p. 544). Motivated by economic interests, "the major international actors are positioning themselves in the heart of the Eurasian landmass, leading several scholars to believe that once again Central Asia has become the theatre of a "New Great Game". (Kleveman, 2004). According to Council of the European Union (2015), "Central Asia represents a significant potential in many crucial areas such as security, economic and trade development of the region, good governance and democracy, protection of human rights and the rule of law". The presence of big powers, Western and non-Western has affected the socio-political environment of Afghanistan with individual citizens getting affected in the course of the geo-political conflict. Despite all these consequences on the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the major international players have not renounced their activities in the Eurasian region but continue their economic rivalries which have levels of uncertainty on world security.

The theory of the great game has led to numerous evaluations which involved five republics of Central Asia as chessboards where international players are trying to win according to their interests (Bhat, 2020 p. 170). Looking at the First World War, an inconsistent belief in warfare was created with nations believing it to be the methodology of resolving political and ideological differences. Fearon (1995) argues that such pre-emptive wars were driven by an expectation that whoever attacks first would gain a decisive advantage in war. Different beliefs about the start of the war could also cause significant changes in people's effective preferences (Meyerson, 2021 p. 23). Looking at the relations between Germany, Russia, and France in the pre-World War I era, Germany saw the other countries as upcoming military threats, and taking any particular action to maintain the balance of power would have been seen as a justifiable act. Meyerson (2021) asserts that "national leaders' justifications for the war could effectively persuade their populations to demand more ambitious war aims, and so the onset of war could itself create new national preference types, about which others might be uncertain" (p. 23). Looking at the current Great Game theory, it can be argued that the same perspective is still a major driver into Asian geo-

politics, with involved players justifying their military presence in Afghanistan as means to bring about international justice. An example will be America's military engagements after the September 11 attacks, which it termed the 'War on Terrorism'. Schelling (1960) notes that games with multiple equilibria are a pervasive fact of life in human society, and we can find many games where coordination can help to avoid inefficient equilibria that would be very costly for everyone. However, Meyerson (2021) argues that for this coordination to happen it "ultimately depends on everyone's willingness to accept authoritative judgments from the highest leaders of their society" (p.24). Looking at World War I from a Great Game Theory perspective, "The war was a contest to define a new focal equilibrium for Europe, and peace would require a new international consensus to be forged either by negotiation or by conquest" (Meyerson, 2021 p. 25). In this study, the actions or risk-seeking behaviors of engaging in war are cross-examined if they are a viable option to resolve the situation in Afghanistan. The study will also question the validity of using authoritative judgments (Meyerson, 2021) and the significance of engaging in warfare as a decisive move (Fearon, 1995). In this study, it is therefore imperative to understand the contribution of Afghanistan in international security, and factors within and outside the country that are behind its socio-political instability.

International Security: The role of European Union (EU) & Non-Western Powers in Afghanistan

According to Korski (2008), "the political and military dynamics in Afghanistan and the erosion of support for the international coalition in Europe have pushed the situation close to a tipping point where a radical overhaul of the existing strategy and its implementation is essential if a disaster is to be averted" (p. 32). After the September 11 attacks, surrounding countries seemed determined to improve their traditional rivalries toward greater cooperation (Weinbaum, 2006, p. 17). A rising tide of regional economic cooperation, it was hoped, would complement international assistance programs in carrying Afghanistan through the post-conflict years (Weinbaum, 2006). In Afghanistan, EU commitment to protecting human rights and gender was mirrored in extensive training of the Afghan police to respect human rights as part of their engagement efforts of creating internal stability (Peters, et. al., 2018, p. 180). This, however, did not turn out well as "the national police has been responsible for incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, mass arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings during counter-insurgency operations" (UN, 2017, p. 4). This

indicated that the "impact effectiveness of EU efforts on the level of strategic and intermediate objectives across cases are overshadowed by poor results when looking at general governance indices and pertinent human rights reports" (Peters et. al. 2018, p. 182). The EU approach to rolling out a civilian police training program and its subsequent failure to gain the support of the local stakeholders fighting the insurgency thus served to symbolize its ineffectiveness (House of Lords, 2011, p. 3). All this shows that external forces outside Afghanistan have not transformed the conflict towards a peaceful resolution, but they have destabilized the domestic affairs of the country.

According to Hawkins et al., (2006) EU policy is mostly turning a blind eye towards the politics of crisis response policy and instead focuses on coordination problems and institutional challenges of policy-making. According to Peters (2016), these activities are more of "hoisting the EU colors and gaining in profile as an international actor … often more important than immediate problem-solving" (p. 265). From the start, the position of EU had In Afghanistan focused on giving the EU a voice in a political field that was dominated by the United States to an effort focused on coordinating the contributions of the EU and other member states (Gross, 2009, p. 22). According to Klaiber (2002, p. 1), the US-led removal of the Taliban regime in response to the 9/11 attacks made clear to the EU that, "if it wants to play a role politically, it cannot shy from issues of major international contention". Whilst the EU showed interest in solving the problems of Afghanistan it could not strike a balance between its objectives and its foreign policy interests, which were somewhat compromised by the involvement of the US. Vendrell (2009) concurs that the EU has not met the expectations of the Afghan people. He states that: Frankly, Afghans cannot really understand how with all the assistance that Europe gives, we cannot ensure that there is far less corruption, that warlords are prevented from playing a significant role and that we begin to establish the kind of rule-of-law that the Afghans want (in Mock 2009).

Vendrell (2009) goes on to add that, "the most crucial mistake was to continue to consort with the warlords and commanders who had brought ruin to Afghanistan in the 1990s and to continue to favor them". Peters et. al. (2018) analysed that "EU priorities are often diverging or difficult-to-align with local understandings and practices, hence laying bare once more the mismatch between conflict-transformation action and critical conflict-transformation rhetoric" (p.

184). This is an indicator that forces within and outside Afghanistan are interlinked with international peace and global powers are the key actors who engage in risky behaviors without clear-cut objectives of conflict resolution. This study will identify the conflict dynamics of the current situation in Afghanistan, current conflict resolution strategies, and possible humanitarian interventions that can be employed in the Heartland.

Afghan relations with other neighboring countries and its Impact on regional security

The wars in Afghanistan have affected trans-border relations with its neighboring countries leaving the region in a state of uncertainty for a peaceful co-existence. According to Riecke (2013, p. 01) "each of these neighbors tries to exert influence in Afghanistan, through ethnic networks, economic investment, and development aid, but also with financial and material assistance for political and militant groups". According to the Global Peace Index 2021, Afghanistan is the world's least peaceful country, with the scope and intensity of the internal conflict in Afghanistan steadily increasing since at least 2014 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021, p. 01). The internal political upheavals in Afghanistan have also hooked up countries like Iran and Turkey into the geopolitics of the region because "cultural and ethnic ties have connected people on both sides of the respective borders, often with a binding power greater than the loyalty to the state itself. The neighbors are, thus, intrinsically linked with the Afghan political system and society" (Riecke,2013: 10). Bhat (2020) asserts that:

> In Central Asian region, new players of the region are trying to be part of the great game in the region. Among those Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan are very crucial because of their affinity to the region through religious cards and closeness or border sharing with these states. The role in the region involves military, economic and political alliances that are likely to determine future of Muslim Central Asia (p.130).

With Western and non-Western countries being involved in the affairs of the Eurasian countries, the notion of creating a peaceful environment is dissuaded by inevitable conflicts due to international interference. The US policy towards Afghanistan and its neighboring countries is not driven by the motive of creating global peace, it "is to create a novel range of impact to dominate on the politico-economic sphere of the region and to develop a strong security network in order to eradicate the powers which act as a threat to its interests" (Fouskas and Gokay, 2005).

Rickie (2013) states that for stability to be achieved in Afghanistan, it needs the cooperation of other regional members but their diverging and bilateral conflicts make this a difficult task. It is clear that each member sate involved in the Afghan conflict, there are always in pursuit of a personal agenda in the region. According to Fouskas and Gokay (2005), The War Against Terror launched against the country was a false notion propagated by US but its main objective is to tighten the nook on the region to achieve national interests. Fouskas and Gokay (2005) add that the US is observing a change of Eurasia as per its national interests and devise its policies accordingly. Whilst neighboring Iran has supported Shiite groups in Afghanistan and opposed the fundamentalist Sunnite rule of the Taliban (Milani, 2006), it has sponsored the country's reconstruction, creating regional trade networks "that builds up an Iran-dominated economic space." (Rickie, 201, p.:10). Another neighbor, Pakistan sees all its foreign policies in Afghanistan in the light of its rivalries with India. It aims to keep India outside Afghanistan whilst maintaining a strategic relationship with the West (Rickie, 2013). Uzbekistan ties with Afghanistan are mainly fostered by the presence of Afghan people in the country. This has naturally inclined Uzbekstan to Afghnistan's domestic and foreign policies. Uzbekistan's alliance with Russia has brought Moscow's influence in the region. It can therefore be argued that Afghanistan's geo-political position if interest to both regional member states and international players who want to benefit from Heartland, hence this study seeks to understand if these players will adopt a more constructive approach in the 'New Great Game' that will cater for the Afghans without compromising world security.

The US -Taliban Agreements, peacemaking in Afghanistan: opportunities and challenges
According Ghani (2010) leadership from international players and from within Afghanistan should collaborate in order to establish a peaceful environment in the country. With the US making a deal with the Taliban in early 2021 known as the Doha Agreement to bring an end to the war was driven by the motive to create positive relations and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. This move seems to come after the realization that "framing the conflict in terms of counterterrorism did not win the Afghan public because it was manifested on the ground as support for strongmen and tolerance of increasingly bad governance" (Ghani 2010, p. 22). According to Hussain (2008) the war on terrorism was of critical importance to the United States and to global security; failure was not an option and this war had to be fought a different way, simply because the present approach

was not working (Hussain, 2008: 02). This approach adopted by the US seemed to be a realization that the Heartland is "undoubtedly a difficult territory over which to establish control, and its reputation induces pessimism in observers at the merest sign of trouble" (Hughes and Fergusson, 2019, p. 01). Afghanistan's reputation as a 'Grave Yard of Empires' cannot be overlooked and military expeditions and interventions have proved to be futile, which calls for an alternative approach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

This study is premised within the interpretive paradigm, a branch of philosophy concerned with understanding the world of human experience (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 36). Interpretivists seek methods that enable them to understand in depth the relationship of human beings to their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part (McQueen, 2002, p. 17). The researcher views the social world through a "series of individual eyes" and chooses participants who "have their own interpretations of reality" to "encompass the worldview (McQueen, 2002, p. 16). The study took this approach in ascertaining the role played by Eurasian countries in the Great Game and how they have shaped the socio-political environment of the Afghans.

The interpretivist paradigm is under the constructivist ontology. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991, p. 14) explain that "ontologically, interpretive information systems research assumes that the social world (that is, social relationships, organisations, division of labours) are not 'given'. Rather the world is produced and reinforced by humans through action and interaction". Interpretivism denies universality of truth but propounds that "knowledge or reality are products of a particular group or culture" (Smith, 1993, p. 05). In this case, interpretivism accepts and seeks multiple perspectives, is open to change, practices iterative and emergent data collection techniques, promotes participatory and holistic research, and goes beyond the inductive and deductive approach (Willis, 2007). This approach is synonymous with qualitative research which is a "means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 4). Willis (2007, p. 90) asserts that interpretivists tend to

favor qualitative methods such as case studies and ethnography. Thomas (2003, p. 6) concurs that interpretivism is closely linked with qualitative epistemology because it portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing.

The interpretivist paradigm informed this study in an effort to understand the geo-political history of the Eurasian region, and how foreign policies of countries like Britain, France, and Russia have shaped global security. In this research, it is important to note that there are different people and different groups that have different perceptions of the world (Willis, 2007, p. 194). With regards to Afghanistan, interpretive research is of essence to understand how members of a social group, through their participation in historical and social processes, enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning, and to show how these meanings, beliefs, and intentions of the members help to constitute their actions (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, p. 13). By studying individuals with lived experiences, it is possible to gain rich and detailed data that can be interpreted to understand the current geopolitical position of Afghanistan.

The Qualitative Research Methodology/Epistemology

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding interpretations of a particular time and particular context, learning how individuals interact and experience their social world, the meaning it has for them which is considered as an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Ely et al. (1991, p. 4) concur that qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives (Ely et al., 1991). Individuals from Afghanistan have better knowledge and understanding of their socio-cultural life which informed the epistemological position of this study. Using this qualitative approach, the study was carried out to bring about an understanding of foreign policies employed by European countries and their impact in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2) assert that "qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter". This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). It is this approach that

was deployed in this historical case study to explore the impact of the Great Game by European powers in light of global peace and international security. Afghanistan served as a reference or the natural setting in which these historical activities relating to international security are being studied. With this study focusing on geo-political activities, it was necessary to employ a qualitative epistemology for the generation of meaning from the country under study to understand the present situation and how it can affect the future. This interpretive aspect of this methodology was considered so as to pinpoint the impact of the Great Game and how history is shaping the current socio-political context of Afghanistan. The multi-method approach as explained by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2), was used taking cognizance that the qualitative epistemology uses "a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives".

Ely et al. (1991) is also consistent with Denzin and Lincoln (1994) on qualitative epistemologies, stating that:

> Qualitative implies a direct concern with experience as it is `lived' or `felt' or `undergone' ... Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it (p. 4).

Rowley (2002, p. 17) is of the view that the best methodology in research is determined by the kind of questions asked. Investigations or case studies are considered as qualitative methods whereby "a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 1994, p. 9). These characteristics shaped research questions in this study as seen in their nature. An example is research question number two, which says; How are the forces within and outside Afghanistan shaping its role in international security? According to Yin (1994, p. 6), a case study is useful in the understanding of 'how' and 'why' questions. The other aspect of such questions considered in this study is their descriptive and explanatory nature (Yin, 1994). In adopting a case study approach as a qualitative methodology, the position of understanding reality is still underpinned by a social construction, not an objective truth, and that there exist "multiple realities" associated with different groups and perspectives (Maxwell, 2011, p. 10), which entails the need for explanation of social phenomena. Therefore, a descriptive and explanatory case study approach was used in this research to locate the

interpretation of the current situation in Afghanistan and the implications of the involvement of Western powers.

Research Design

A research design is a logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of a study to ensure coherence (Rowley, 2002, p. 18). According to Kerlinger (1986, p. 276), a design is research in the plan, structure, and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and solve problems. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 166) also view research as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research question. This research used a case study strategy, which in itself is a design frame incorporating a number of methods (Simons, 2009, p. 21).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 24) assert that when conducting a qualitative study, the "research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project". This is due to the fact that the activities of data collection and analysis, refocusing research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats are generally taking place more or less at the same time, each influencing all of the others (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 24). The main purpose of a research design is to collect and analyze evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed in the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of the techniques of data analysis.

The design of this study will be explained in the following subsections, looking at the aspects of the research strategies, sampling methods, and research procedure showing how they were employed in this study to bring out qualitative data. This study used this design to understand Afghanistan's geopolitical and geostrategic importance for international security which was informed by the qualitative approach which fits within research.

Case Study Design

A case study is defined as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a real-life" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). This approach involves a description and analysis of an individual matter

or case with the purpose of identifying variables, structures, forms, and orders of interaction between the participants in the situation in order to assess the performance of work or progress in development (Mesec, 1998, p. 383). Sagadin (1991, p. 31) states that a "case study is used when we analyze and describe, for example, each person individually, a group of people, individual institutions or a problem, process, phenomenon or event in a particular institution in detail. It is in this context that this strategy is employed to understand the dynamics behind global security, the institutions involved, and the significance of the country under study. Narratives from individuals and those with lived experiences in Afghanistan are constituents of the data collected for this research

Descriptive and Explanatory Case Study

A descriptive case study "is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred," Yin (2003) cited in Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 548). An explanatory case study is used when the researcher seeks "to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. In evaluation language, the explanations would link program implementation with program effects," Yin (2003) cited in Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 548). Adopting this strategy, was in line with the descriptive and explanatory nature of research questions.

The study used this design in accordance with Yin's (1994, p. 6) supposition that case studies can be investigated through 'who' 'what' 'where' and 'how' questions. Looking at the nature of research questions for this study, 'how' questions reflected a descriptive dimension, whilst 'what' questions sought to explain relationships between Afghanistan and the European countries which are entangled in the Great Game. The combination of these approaches was deployed to ensure a qualitative generation of data in response to the research questions.

Sampling

Sampling is "where to go to obtain the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 201) or "choosing informants" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 45). In this study, Afghanistan was selected as a target area for carrying out research. In selecting this country, the study further employed sampling strategies on the relevant or target countries so as to gain insight into geo-political activities surrounding the

Eurasian region where the Western powers are battling for supremacy. This aspect was done in line with Stake's (1995) argument that choosing cases and data sources is imperative for the researcher as it helps it "best help us understand the case" (p. 56). Afghanistan, marked as the Grave Yard of Empires, emerged as a relevant research area chosen for this study considering its significance and its impact on world peace. The sampling frame and size were drawn from this region in accordance with Cohen's (2000, p. 351) suggestion, that concepts of validation, such as sample size, sampling selection criteria, members' checking, and empirical generalization are concepts that belong to the languages of qualitative methodologies. These concepts will be discussed in the following subheadings on how they were used in this study.

Sampling Frame

Given the fact that the researcher had an opportunity to be a resident of Afghanistan, the region was purposefully selected for this study as it enabled the playing of participant observation role which will be explained in the data gathering tools section.

The study will employ a historical analysis or a documentary procedure and a breakdown of timelines for the analysis will be set between 2001 and 2014. The study will focus in the international conflict in Afghanistan beginning in 2001 which was sparked by the September 11 attacks. The First Phase- removal of the Taliban group which was an ultraconservative political and religious faction and harboured Al-Qaeda. The Second Phase (2002-2008)- was marked by the US strategy of defeating the Taliban militarily and rebuilding core institutions of Afghanistan. The Third Phase (2009-2014)- increased US troops presence in Afghanistan.

Purposive sampling

This is a technique was used in selectively choosing a target population for gathering data. This was done in consistency with the views of Patton (2015) who sates that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry". Patton further argues that "studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding" (p. 264). In this case, Afghanistan was selected with the idea that its domestic policy is intertwined with foreign policies of various Western countries that have

interests in governing the state, which in turn has shaped international peace. Individuals who are from Afghanistan and those who have had an opportunity to live there formed another sample The approach of using smaller samples is synonymous with qualitative research designs. This is supported by Gentles et al. (2015, p. 1782), stating that "whereas quantitative research requires sufficiently large sample sizes to produce statistically precise quantitative estimates, smaller samples are used in qualitative research. This is because the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon".

People or individuals who had been residents in Afghanistan were selected for this study as they were appropriate informants compared to those who had no lived experience. This was motivated by Yin's (2011) selection concept, that the selection of data or sources is "based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions" (p. 311). Those people coming from Afghanistan and online platforms were deemed significant for this study in order to generate rich data that resonates well with research questions.

After this selection, a criterion was followed in grouping the participants in order to break them into more manageable samples to make certain of participation and meaningful contribution by all individuals. A gender-inclusive based approach was employed to ensure the participation of men and women in the groups. This was in line with the suggestion by Charmaz (2014, p. 197) that" for initial sampling, you establish sampling criteria for people, cases, situations, and or settings before you enter the field". The population understudy was categorized into the following criteria:

- Sample for individuals who have been or live in Afghanistan.
- Academics who are conversant with world history.

This will be presented in the following table.

Table 1: Sampling criteria

SAMPLING CRITERIA	Age and Sex		
	18-60		
		M	F

Sample of individuals who have been/who are resident in Afghanistan		10	10
Academics [historians]		5	5

That sample of individuals who had been residents in Afghanistan was created on the basis that they had the potential to contribute meaningfully to the study. Their stay in Afghanistan rendered them relevant informants on activities that inform the socio-political state of Afghanistan. It is for the same reason that individuals from Afghanistan were selected. Purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method was used instead of other techniques such as simple random sampling (probability sampling) to avoid the selection of informants who do not know anything about Afghanistan and have never been there. This is following Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 199) who suggest that "sampling is done with some purpose in mind". The purpose of the selection was to get key informants relevant to the study.

Research Procedure: Triangulation of Data Gathering Tools

The study took a multi-approach in data gathering, using historical analysis, and in-depth interviews. These methods were triangulated in order to overcome weaknesses posed by each method. Denzin (2012, p. 82) asserts that "the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question". One of the greatest strengths of case studies as compared with other methods is that evidence can be collected from multiple sources because triangulation uses evidence from different sources to corroborate the same fact or finding (Rowley, 2002, p. 23). The efficacy of this technique is also seconded by Yeasmin and Rahman (2012, p. 157), who assert that "triangulated techniques are helpful for cross-checking and used to provide confirmation and completeness, which brings 'balance' between two or more different types of research. The purpose is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. Often this purpose in specific contexts is to obtain confirmation of findings through convergence of different perspectives." The aforementioned triangulated methods, as used in this study, will be explained below.

Historical Analysis/Documentary Analysis

This method "is a scholarly attempt to discover what has happened" (Mouly, 1978). According to Gay (1981), historical research is "the systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of those events which may help to explain present events and anticipate future events". In defining history, Phan Ngoc Lien (2011) states that it "is the process of the objective reality of the previous human society or the history of events, phenomena, and characters that existed in the past, meaning the history of human and becoming the object of awareness of those who research, teach and study history". With this study specifically looking at the history of Afghanistan and its current geo-strategic position in world security, and the historical battles between imperialist countries, this method becomes relevant looking at the timelines in which events occur. This method will involve looking at documents that have information relating to the events that occurred in the Eurasian region. This approach is consistent with the views of Thien (2014) who concurs that, "nothing can replace documents - without them there is no history. Historical data exists objectively, independently of the perceiving subject and on the basis of information obtained from the results of historical analysis, historians reconstruct history".

In-depth Interviews

This technique was employed to get detailed information on opinions about the role of Afghanistan in the maintenance of global peace. The researcher selected respondents on an individual basis to award them an opportunity to express their views, which gives additional strengths to the other method used. Agar and MacDonald (1995) cited in Morgan (1996, p. 11) argue that the dynamics of individual interviews put more burden on the informants to explain themselves to the interviewer so that the elaboration of initial statements often occurs with relatively little input from the interviewer. Using this technique, the researcher followed up these statements by constantly reviewing and referencing events that took place in Afghanistan.

One advantage of this method capitalized in this study is backed up by Morgan (1996, p. 11), that it relies on "the individual interview's ability to produce greater depth and continuity". This approach fills in a gap or weakness left out by historical or documentary analysis, they are

usually centered on the researchers' interests (Morgan, 1996, p. 14). This method will also help to focus on current affairs and developing trends in the region.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Hatch (2002, p. 148) states that data analysis is a "systematic search for meaning". It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, and make interpretations (Hatch, 2002). This study used thematic analysis and pattern matching to bring out meanings from the research.

Thematic Analysis

This is a qualitative method used in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in rich detail interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme is determined by something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The case of Afghanistan was analyzed by formulating themes based on the nature of the research questions. Three thematic areas matching research questions and objectives were designed for analyzing data generated by Afghan respondents. This was done in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to data analysis which is; (1) becoming familiar with the data (2) Generating initial codes (3) Searching for themes (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining and naming themes (6) Producing the report.

This method was chosen due to its flexibility, that it can fit within the descriptive research dimension and is useful in analyzing 'what' questions as demonstrated by Ayres (2007), cited in Vaismoradi et al. (2013, p. 400). This study is informed by descriptive research, which led to the adoption of this technique. In line with the methodology used, thematic analysis was considered a flexible tool, as argued by Braun and Clarke (2006) as it provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data. The use of more than one data-gathering method required the use of thematic analysis because a theme must "describe the bulk of the data" (Joffe and Yardley, 2004, p. 67). In a situation where the researcher needs to explain relationships by gaining insight within

a particular social setting, it is a requirement that the researcher needs to describe a large amount of data. It is in this background that this approach was used considering the triangulation of data-gathering methods.

Pattern Matching

Pattern matching is comparing two patterns in order to determine whether they match (similarities) or do not match (differences) and it is the core procedure of theory-testing with cases (Hak and Dul, 2009, n.p). Trochim (1985, p. 581) suggests methods of pattern matching that can be used for theory testing, which are; program pattern matching, measurement pattern matching, and effect or outcome pattern matching.

Program pattern matching; involves the correspondence between a program theoretically conceived and the program as it is operationalized (Trochim, 1985). In relation to the study, this aspect was used to match historical events that have taken place in the Eurasian region in relation to the foreign policies of Western countries that are key players in the Great Game. In using this method, it is important to take note of the thoughts about how policies were implemented, the structure of the international organizations such as the UN, the approaches used in conflict handling, and the relevant groups (Chen and Rossi, 1984). The concept was used to theoretically match the historical engagements of countries within and outside the Eurasian region.

Measurement pattern matching; this involves first constructing the conceptual pattern for the constructs to be measured (Trochim, 1985). This pattern is then matched to the pattern of relationships obtained, whether the constructs of interest are being reflected and distinguished from each other. This aspect was used within the explanatory dimension of the study, where it is informed by 'what' questions. One of the questions that shape this study is what are the problems that Afghanistan faces as a geopolitical and geo-strategic positioned state. In answering this question, it would in establishing a pattern of the historical events that have informed the Great Game.

Effect or Outcome measurement pattern; this pattern is on the conceptual side, specifying how the constructs are expected to be affected by the program (Trochim, 1985). These involved

generalizations made by the study. It is at this juncture that conclusions were drawn, matching the conceptual side of the research and the events informed by the Great Game Theory.

Research ethics

In this study, it was important to observe certain ethical principles before data collection. This was to ensure fair participation of respondents to enable them to contribute meaningfully to the study. The first ethical concept observed was informed consent. This was in line with the suggestion by URDC (2008) that:

> It is the responsibility of the researcher to explain as fully as is reasonable and appropriate, and in terms meaningful to the participants: the aims and nature of the research, who is undertaking it, who is funding it, its likely duration, why it is being undertaken, the possible consequences of the research, and how the results are to be disseminated (p. 4).

The researcher briefed the participants about the nature of the research and that their responses will be taken down in note form and recordings. Participants were given consent forms to sign before collecting data began. This was to ensure that respondents were willing to contribute to the study at their own disposal.

The second ethical consideration was confidentiality. This was done by looking at the nature of the study, its focus is on geopolitics. It was important to protect the identities of participants considering that individuals might fear socio-political consequences by providing information to this research. Since issues surrounding geopolitics are intertwined with domestic politics, it was possible that informants highlighted politically driven matters that required anonymity on their part. This was carried in consistency with views from Palys and Lowman (2001), that:

> In some cases, information shared with a researcher may be so sensitive – and its disclosure so potentially damaging – that the fate of the individual may literally rest in the researcher's hands. In such situations, both the researcher's ethical obligations and the need for a solid bond of trust are clear. If people do not trust researchers, they will not share sensitive information, and the value of research to society will diminish (p. 163).

This ethical standard was to ensure that the researcher gained rapport with the informants. Participation was one key issue required in this study, hence it was necessary to allow respondents to be at ease, and give them assurance of their safety from any political consequences. It was important to note that the case of Afghanistan was within the broader socio-political context where

even the government might be skeptical about researchers doing a study that has a political dimension.

Limitations & scope for further study

The researcher was limited in sourcing certain information for in-depth interviews. It was not possible to go deep into Afghanistan to understand the day in a life of an Afghan citizen due to the political nature of the research. There is however a further scope of study, looking at the role of Afghanistan in the new Great Game whose dynamics have been changed by issues such as the industrialisation, the battle to control semi-conductor or micro-chip technologies. These has brought about new dimensions in the Great Game, new international relations, and invigorated rivalries.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

A historical and thematic analysis of the Great Game in the Eurasian Region

In this study, a historical approach was employed in order to understand the current state of affairs of geopolitics that are influenced internal and external forces that are at play in the Afghan soil. It was imperative to acknowledge that the region has been at the epicentre of global conflicts, starting from ancient societies, going through the two World Wars, the Cold War, to the current new global nuclear arms race and mass production of semi-conductor microchips. The desire to control resources in the region with the aim to industrialise the homes of the colonisers directed each country towards an inevitable conflict of interest, which later created hostilities that have lasted up to date. It is under this historical context that Afghanistan has endured external threats, domestic political upheavals and instabilities due to insurgencies whose pioneers felt they were politically disenfranchised and needed to be part of the Afghan government and deal with external threats. Moreover, this research discovered that the western countries (USA, France and Britain) have never ceased to vest their interests in the region. Their shared rivalries have sparked a race for military superiority which have affected world security, incessant conflicts in the Eurasian region, and creating uncertainty of ever achieving world peace. Data collected from this study will be

presented thematically, using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis. Subthemes were drawn from the study's objectives which are:

- To understand the contribution of Afghanistan's geopolitical and geo-strategic position to international security
- To understand how forces within and outside Afghanistan shape its role in international security
- To understand the problems that Afghanistan face as a geopolitical and geo-strategic positioned state in international security

Afghanistan's geo-political and geo-strategic position & international security

During the study, it was noted that Afghanistan, in a stable and non-conflict environment, can initially fill the security vacuum along its borders with neighbouring countries (Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.) and ensure a comprehensive security presence along these lengthy borders. Secondly, it can prevent the waves of migration and asylum-seeking by Afghan citizens that have become a challenge for regional countries. Countries like Turkey, and the European Union countries are greatly influenced by security developments in Afghanistan. Thirdly, with a stable government in Afghanistan, we can witness economic development and new economic opportunities within the borders of the country. However, the crucial question that should not remain unanswered is how the governing system should be structured to meet the security needs of this land ripe for development.

Afghanistan has always played a vital role in traditional geopolitical theories based on geographical determinism. Proximity to the region with energy resources, neighbourhood with global and regional powers such as the former Soviet Union and Iran, access to Central Asia on the one hand and India and the East of the world in general on the other hand, access to the open waters of the Indian Ocean make this country important. In short, Afghanistan's geopolitical and geo-strategic position has significant implications for international security. During an interview, one respondent stated that:

Its location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East has made it historically important for regional and global powers. Here are some key contributions and considerations like Central Asian Crossroads, Contest of Powers, Terrorism and Extremism, Drug

Trade, Balancing Regional Powers and ...If I summarize I should say that Afghanistan's geopolitical and geostrategic position has made it a focal point for global and regional power struggles, terrorism, and other security challenges. Its instability and conflicts have had far-reaching consequences for international security, making it a key concern for governments and organizations worldwide.

This means that Afghanistan being at the epicentre of geo-political interests, conflicts between major powers are inevitable. The recent developments in Afghanistan, including the Taliban's return to power, have further highlighted the complex and evolving nature of these challenges. Another respondent (a former head of security in Afghanistan), stated that *the country is a connecting point for four regional and international powers, namely the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, and the Islamic Republic of Iran and therefore plays a crucial role in geographical exchanges between these powers*. Additionally, Afghanistan's presence of mineral resources and its geographical links between the Pamir region and Pakistan, India, and Iran, makes Afghanistan significant in economic terms and for the regulation of water and hydro policies. These geographical characteristics of Afghanistan are rooted in the origins of two major civilizations.

From an international framework, the definition of international security in Afghanistan differs for the Americans, the Russians, and the Iranians. In general, if a threat emanates from Afghanistan, particularly targeting neighbouring countries and it poses significant risks. Afghanistan poses two major threats: Islamic fundamentalism and exporting instability. This becomes a substantial international security concern when there is a lack of internal security, leading to the influx of migrants into the West and the United States. One could argue that the most significant international security threats are rooted in the ideology of Islam and the issue of migration.

The impact of the Taliban and Alqaeda In The Eurasian Region & their influence on global security

The presence of radical and extremist forces in Afghan soil, regardless of the role they play, not only fails to contribute to lasting peace but has also led to a long-term shift in the regional powers'

approach towards Afghanistan, inducing a sense of insecurity throughout the entire region. With the presence of extremist ideologies in Afghanistan, the shadow of war will always loom over Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

During an interview, Respondent 1 stated that:

"*The presence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda networks in Afghanistan has multifaceted implications for peace and security. It destabilizes Afghanistan, poses a direct threat to neighboring countries, contributes to regional power struggles, disrupts development, and raises concerns about international terrorism and human rights. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves regional and international cooperation and diplomacy, counterterrorism efforts, and efforts to promote good governance and sustainable development in Afghanistan*."

The absence of a formal government in Afghanistan practically prevents the realization of its available capacities, as discussed in the first question, and leads to stagnation, erosion, and even the exploitation of these capacities by criminal networks. This situation creates the potential for future conflicts. However, with the emergence of the Islamic Emirate and the Taliban's presence in power, some of these dynamics have changed, and the country may find itself in a non-constructive peace and stability. The presence of Taliban and al-Qaeda networks in Afghanistan has greatly affected the state of peace in the country and its neighbours. The activities of these groups could lead to breaches of regional security and disrupt the peace process. It also highlights their support for terrorism and its global impact on regional and global security. Therefore, the presence of these networks as an important security challenge has many impacts on the peace situation in Afghanistan and its neighbors.

Afghanistan's geographical and strategic location is important in international security. Geographically, Afghanistan's location as a crossroads in Central Asia facilitates communication between South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia. This geographical situation makes Afghanistan to play a key role in regional deployment and affects the balance of power in the region. From a strategic perspective, control over Afghanistan provides an important advantage and allows for an impact on decision making and access to vital resources. The geographical and historical importance of the country as a crucial nut in the region makes global powers pay special attention to Afghanistan to influence the region and research their strategic goals. Overall,

Afghanistan's geographical and strategic importance plays a key role in continuing international security dynamics and focuses on the interests and strategies of all kinds of countries in the field of interrelationships

The impact of foreign interference on Afghan cultural, political, and economic life

Foreign intervention, under any pretext, without the support of local residents and landowners, has consistently resulted in failure. The years of foreign intervention in Afghanistan support this view. Coercive interventions not only fail to improve the existing situation but often lead to significant damages. Any foreign involvement can only be acceptable when aligned with the collective will of local individuals and in the direction of humanitarian assistance; otherwise, it is destined for failure and rejection. Foreign interference in Afghan activities has had a profound impact on the cultural, political, and economic life of local citizens in Afghanistan. These effects can be both direct and indirect, and they vary depending on the nature and intentions of the foreign interference. These influences are complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative consequences. The long-term effects of foreign interference often depend on the motivations of the external actors, the nature of their involvement, and the responses of the Afghan population and government.

The absence of a national identity and the prevalence of negative collective perceptions discourage foreign interference. Instead, cultures associated with external counterparts gain prominence. For instance, Uzbeks or Tajiks may attempt to resemble citizens of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to establish a national collective identity. Foreign interference in Afghanistan's domestic activities has had a far-reaching impact on the cultural, political and economic life of the local population. This intervention has had an impact on policy and governance by creating cultural changes as a reaction to the values and compositions of the local population, as well as leading to the formation and change in the local economy. These issues, especially when effective coordination with the needs and votes of the local population has not been done, can cause dissatisfaction and increase tensions.

In an interview Respondent 3 said that "*foreign cultural influences may lead to changes in local values, beliefs, and habits*". He added that Interference from different cultures may lead to

cultural abnormalities or frictions and categorised these into political and economic. At length, he said: *Politically: foreign intervention can lead to the formation of stable or unstable local governments. Competition for influence in domestic affairs may lead to political tensions and disorder. Economically, impacts include resource distribution, economic opportunities, and infrastructure development. Special financial obligations from foreign countries may lead to developments in the economic structure of the region.* Overall, foreign intervention can determine the future of Afghanistan and play an important role in shaping developments in local cultural, political, and economic dimensions.

Afghan domestic policies and their effect on world peace

The domestic policies of Afghanistan can have significant implications for world peace in various ways like Stability and Security, Terrorism and Extremism, Regional Relations, and Refugee Crisis some other. Afghanistan's domestic policies have far-reaching consequences for world peace. A stable, secure, and well-governed Afghanistan is more likely to contribute positively to regional and global peace. On the other hand, policies that lead to instability, terrorism, regional tensions, or resource conflicts can undermine peace efforts not only within Afghanistan but also in the broader international context. International actors have a vested interest in supporting policies and initiatives that promote peace and stability within Afghanistan. Afghanistan's domestic policies can have a direct and indirect impact on world peace. Measures that contribute to the realization of peace within the country can also contribute to strengthening the establishment of peace in the region and the macro world. These measures may include resolving internal conflicts, promoting human rights and strengthening the legal system. Also, economic and social development within the country can help reduce the factors that cause insecurity and tension in the region and the world. In general, Afghanistan can play an effective role in maintaining world peace by advancing domestic policies based on peace and stability.

How Afghan citizens perceive the international community and countries involved in its domestic affairs

From this study it was established that the majority of the Afghan people view the foreign forces that occupied Afghanistan for years negatively, considering them as hostile occupiers. This perception is widespread, with only a few political groups expressing the need for foreign military

support. The perceptions of local Afghan people towards foreign countries, including the United States, which have conducted military actions in Afghanistan, are diverse and can vary significantly based on individual experiences, regional differences, and historical context, the perceptions of local Afghan people towards foreign countries involved in military actions in Afghanistan are complex and diverse. They are influenced by a multitude of factors, including personal experiences, regional dynamics, historical context, and the overall impact of foreign involvement on their lives. It's essential to recognize the diversity of these perspectives when discussing the consequences of foreign actions in Afghanistan. This war continues to shape Afghanistan's trajectory in the 21st century.

Respondent number 4 said that the "*the prolonged unrest and wars in Afghanistan have shaped a skeptical view among its people towards foreign governments, assuming negativity unless proven otherwise, based on the principle of burden of proof to the contrary*." The views of Afghan locals on foreign countries, especially the United States, which have had military actions in the past, are diverse. Some may see these measures as an attempt to establish security and stability, while others may interpret it as occupation and military intervention. Individual, cultural, and economic opinions are influenced by people's diverse experiences over decades, and these differences in views can lead to a diversity of opinions.

In his response, Respondent 5 stated that *local people may have divided perspectives that are both positive and negative. Some Afghans may have a positive attitude toward foreign countries, as a result of cooperation in the development, education, and improvement of infrastructure. Others may have negative opinion and consider past military actions as unpleasant and negative impactful interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. In confrontation with differences views vary among different people of Afghanistan, and some may have ethnic, ethnic or religious differences in their view of foreign countries*. Overall, Afghans' views on foreign countries are very complex and different, depending on personal experiences, especially local conditions, and their individual needs. Women think they sold the US to the Taliban.

The post-Doha agreement developments; the impact of US-Taliban peace making agreements

The U.S.-Taliban deal, officially known as the Doha Agreement, signed in February 2020 aimed to reduce U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and pave the way for peace and stability in the region. While the situation in Afghanistan has evolved since the agreement was signed, the Doha Agreement marked a significant step in the efforts to stabilize peace in the region by reducing U.S. military presence, facilitating negotiations, and addressing the presence of terrorist groups. However, it also faced challenges and uncertainties, and the situation in Afghanistan has remained complex and evolving. The effectiveness of the agreement in achieving long-term peace and stability in the region remains a subject of ongoing concern and international diplomacy.

The absence of any contribution to the Doha Agreement has severely exacerbated the crisis in the region. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan will have detrimental consequences, and in the next four or five years, we will witness the repercussions. Currently, the Taliban intermittently engages in conflicts with Pakistan and at times confronts Iran. Regarding the U.S.-Taliban agreement in Doha in 2020 to reduce military presence in Afghanistan, it did not contribute significantly to stabilizing peace in the region. Unfortunately, Afghanistan continues to face political and economic crises, lacking internal legitimacy and global recognition. Socially, there has been widespread displacement, loss of lives, and disruption of communities. Politically, it led to a series of changes in government and governance structures, attempting to establish stability. Economically, the country faced challenges due to infrastructure damage and a disrupted economy. In terms of foreign relations, Afghanistan's geopolitical position gained significance, attracting international attention and involvement. However, the impact on these aspects is complex and multifaceted

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. The geostrategic importance of Afghanistan in international security is significant due to its location at the crossroads of South Asia and Central Asia. Over the centuries, major powers such as Britain in the 19th century, the Soviet Union in the 20th century, and NATO led by the United States in the 21st century have engaged in military interventions in this country.

2. The presence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda networks has a profound impact on the peace situation not only in Afghanistan but also in its neighbouring regions. While the tragic events of September 11 were a historical lesson for the global community, hegemonic policies of some major powers have jeopardized peace and stability worldwide by engaging with terrorist groups.

3. Foreign interventions in Afghanistan, both regional and global, have shaped the cultural, political, and economic life of the local population. Regional and trans regional powers, exploiting abnormal political and economic conditions and the weakness of non-popular governments, have greatly influenced all aspects of life in Afghanistan, providing a fertile ground for external interference.

4. Regarding the ways in which Afghanistan's domestic policies affect global peace, despite its historical significance as a focal point during the Soviet-Afghan War, Afghanistan currently holds a diminished position in the international community, but it continues to impact global politics.

5. Current political leaders face tremendous challenges in ensuring peace and stability in the country, struggling with internal conflicts and a lack of contemporary diplomatic knowledge. Consequently, collaboration with the global community and international organizations in pursuit of peace and stability in Afghanistan is met with considerable complexity.

6. The local people of Afghanistan, especially in light of past military interventions by countries like the United States, harbor a lack of belief and trust in foreign nations, viewing the current difficult circumstances as a result of the dual policies of these countries.

7. Afghanistan, given its geopolitical importance, poses challenges for countries like Britain, Russia, and the United States. Over the past five decades, these nations have continually been concerned and engaged with Afghanistan.

8. Examining the "War on Terror" which was a military campaign conducted by the United States in Afghanistan, the global perspective towards Afghans is now different. The Afghan people, no longer resembling those of the 20th century, are politically aware and perceive terrorism as a product of the failed policies of the "New World Order" pursued by the United States and its allies, driven by unhealthy competitions in the region and the world.

9. The "War on Terror" has significantly impacted the social, political, and economic life of Afghanistan and its foreign relations. Under the banner of countering terrorism, Afghanistan has become one of the most backward and impoverished countries globally, with acknowledgement from former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto that extremist terrorist groups were created through American, British, and Saudi Arabian assistance and military training provided by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

CONCLUSION

From this study, it is important to note that Afghanistan has a long way in achieving political stability and be able to create a conducive environment for its neighbors. This brings to light that the global community still has to abandon military intervention as it is not an ideal peace making resolution mechanism, but it is only a catalyst for rivalry amongst the countries participating in the Great game. Afghanistan should therefore come up with strong internal and external policies to strengthen its position in the global arena, hence a move that might be a positive step towards improving international security.

The study found out that the global economic and political order is being redesigned by Cold War relations. Another major issue is the deterioration of relations between Western and Eastern countries as found out in this study, with the Great Game taking another dimension of technological warfare. This study made use of historical analysis and thematic analysis to understand the dynamics surrounding Afghan internal and external politics. Through this study, patterns were identified from this perspective and they provide important lessons about the state of affairs in Afghanistan and the events that might prompt peace, and during peace might prompt war. It was apparent that external interventions can interrupt internal affairs of Afghanistan and world peace at large. By employing a qualitative approach, it gave the researcher an opportunity to understand Afghan internal politics and how it affects geo-politics, including how it has changed.

The idea that Afghanistan is a Grave Yard of empires provides a historical overview of inevitable conflicts without resolutions, only to end by a defeat of an involved major power. This

has however left an enduring legacy of political violence in the region, creating a politically unstable Afghanistan. From the September 11 attacks at the World Trade Centre, Afghanistan has remained a nation of interest for Western powers, with countries in the East such as China also making a move as they expressed concerns on the involvement of America and EU countries in the Eurasian region, a development they perceived as invasion of their space and sphere of influence. This study has made an attempt to develop some themes and understand some patterns from the turbulent history of Afghanistan and its current state of affairs. It is necessary to take these themes and trends as the basis of mitigating conflict in the country, improve its international relations and promote world security.

This study also established that Interference by outside powers has been a trend featuring most of Afghanistan's history, since the pre-World War era to date. Afghanistan appears to have been most stable when outside and particularly regional influences were controlled by a stable and a practically operative Afghan government. Problematic involvement on the part of regional countries and certain interest groups has been a major factor in derailing peace efforts which has relentlessly restrained the country's governance, its participation in the global arena and international relations.

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