

Afghanistan: The Perpetual Victim of Great Power Rivalry - A Comparative Historical Analysis

Dr. Sadaqat Khan

sadaqatshinwari100@gmail.com

Assistant Professor (Political Science), Qurtuba University of Science and IT, Peshawar

Waheedullah Weyarh

MPhil, Area Study Center (Russia, China and Central Asia), University of Peshawar, National Research University
"Higher School of Economics"

Abdul Hanan Stanikzai

International Relations, HSE university, Russia

Corresponding Author: Dr. Sadaqat Khan

Received: 22-01-2026

Revised: 04-02-2026

Accepted: 19-02-2026

Published: 06-03-2026

ABSTRACT

Throughout modern and pre-modern history, the Afghan land has been the battleground for a plethora of foreign powers for strategic, political and economic interests. This paper will look at the motives behind the recurring nature of the Great Powers' interventions in Afghanistan and how these interventions have never resulted in any enduring control over the people of Afghanistan. The position of the country, the multi-tribal and social system, topography, a fragmented political system and the oppositional culture, deeply embedded in the country, all play their part to thwart foreign occupation. The comparative analysis of the three historical episodes of this Great Game of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union's participation in the Cold War and the retreat of the United States since 2001 shows that there are certain patterning's of miscalculation, asymmetric resistance, and withdrawal. Some of the (much-needed) historical lessons and practical tips on the conduct of future international relations with Afghanistan have been included in the paper. The theme: Afghanistan, great power politics, Great Game, Soviet intervention, US led war, geopolitics, resistance, buffer state, graveyard of empires.

Keywords: Afghanistan, great power politics, Great Game, Soviet intervention, US-led war, geopolitics, resistance, buffer state, graveyard of empires.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has a unique and often a tragic position in the world history. The area was a waypoint for Central Asian, South Asian and West Asian civilizations and a cultural hotspot of different cultures, empires and trade routes, most notably the Silk Road (Chaganty & Baranwal, 2025). Afghanistan's strategic location on invasion and conquest roads has been overrun by the White Huns, the armies of the Arab Muslim world, the Turkish khanates and the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan. This centrality has often been a burden for Afghanistan in the form of being a victim of the great power competition (Rubin, 2023).

Regional- or world- powers have wanted to control the territory of Afghanistan throughout the centuries because of geopolitical power, ideological espionage or control over economic assets (Weinbaum, 2021). Nevertheless, all the endeavors to conquer the country since the imperial era have been an ongoing get-tangled (Barfield, 2004). Despite the huge military campaigns and the vast number of resources, not a single foreign power has ever been able to establish a stable and unchallenged rule over the ground (Attewell, 2017).

The Cold War brought Afghanistan as a hot spot as the Soviet Union intervening in 1979 to back the 'friendly' communist regime. That invasion set the stage for a ten-year war which depleted the resources of the Soviet Union and eventually helped to bring the USSR to its knees (Oberdorfer, 1998). Following the fall of the Cold War, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. has pursued a strategy of toppling the Taliban regime and wiping out al Qaeda as part of a regional anti-Taliban coalition (Rubin, 2013). But it was not a stable pro-western Afghanistan that was restored with foreign assistance (military, financial, political) and foreign influence being introduced for the past 20 years, it was on the contrary, after 20 years the foreign dominated Afghanistan was brought back by the Taliban regime, and it was yet another failure of foreign domination (Lynch, 2022).

It's a well-known tip-off of foreign entrapment, which Afghanistan carries the black tag of the Graveyard of Empires. The long-lasting uncertainties have led to chronic poverty, mass migration of refugees and significant regional consequences to the neighboring countries. According to some analysts, the instability in Afghanistan is a result of the so-called unruly nature of the people of Afghanistan, and the lack of strong political institutions. This paper, however, maintains that the primary reason of domestic instability in Afghanistan is due to ongoing foreign interference that in turn results in increased poverty, displacement and insecurity in the region.

It will respond to some of the basic questions – why is there a constant call for invasions of Afghanistan by outside powers? It is a question that is to be asked whether it's geographical, geopolitical or not. Does the theory of Halford Mackinder's "World Pivot" hold true? The research adopts a historic and analytic approach and compares three significant intervention episodes, attempting to answer these questions.

Historical and Geographical Setting

Geography has been a huge gift to Afghanistan and has greatly shaped the historical process in the country. The area has always been a crossroad of the main cultural and economic routes like Silk Road between Persia, India, Central Asia and China (Yar, Zahid & Miakhil, 2023). This made it very attractive for empires to seek control of the trade routes, or strategic depth.

Some parts of modern Afghanistan were conquered by the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the 6th century BCE and were incorporated into its administrative system. Although the Persian state had a centralized form of government, they still relied on intermediaries of sorts. Alexander the Great, having defeated Persia, conquered the area in the 4th century BCE. In spite of his tactical military triumphs, however, he was always faced with the dilemma of tactical victory and political control (Jalali, 2021).

The Greco Bactrians, Kushans and the White Huns (Hephthalites) arose during the later centuries. In the seventh and eighth centuries CE, Arab Muslim troops brought about Islam which over time became the main religion. Later, Afghanistan became part of the larger Islamic civilizations of the Oghuz Turkic and Persianate rulers. The peak of destruction was during the Mongol invasion in the 13th century. The armies of Genghis Khan decimated cities and people, and the power of the Mongols eventually waned and local autonomy began to emerge once again (Iqbal, 2021).

In the nineteenth century, the Great Game became centred on Afghanistan- a geopolitical conflict between the British Empire and the Tsarist Russia. Britain did not want to see her Indian jewel in the crown (Yapp, 1987) snatched from her and Russia was advancing south into the Central Asian lands. Afghanistan was consigned to the status of a buffer state, between the two rival empires (Jenkins, 2019). Three Anglo Afghan wars (1839 1842, 1878 1880, and 1919) were fought. Britain never imposed any colonial rule in Afghanistan although it did have some influence on the foreign policy of Afghanistan. But Afghan resistance, difficult terrain and supply difficulties abated British hopes (Farrell, 2010). The Great Game

was established by the British and the so-called shadow tournament of which Afghanistan was a key buffer (Afridi, 2023).

The Afghans modernized politically and socially during the twentieth century with their rulers such as Amanullah Khan. However, the conservative elements were always present to oppose the reforms and hence it is possible to observe the conflict between centralisation and local autonomy in the country.

During the Cold War the international situation of Afghanistan was transformed. In 1979, the Soviet Union intervened to prop up a wracking up Marxist regime (Saikal & Maley, 1989). The outcome of that invasion was that the USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and so forth backed a massive insurgency (Jones, 2008). The war escalated into a typical proxy war, using up Soviet resources and bringing the USSR down in 1991. Leake's recent research (2022) offers a new world history of the Soviet invasion, examining the war both on and off the Cold War grid, and the way in which the Soviet link gathered with the wind of modernity and anti-imperialism, which were buffeting the region. Withdrawal of the Soviet left a power vacuum, which was filled by a civil war in which various mujahideen groups contended for power. The Taliban emerged in the mid-1990s, and gained control of most of the country in 1996 (Rubin, 2013).

Since the September 11 attacks, a US led international coalition toppled the Taliban regime and took the Taliban on the roads by targeting their most important ally, al Qaeda. The Taliban could be defeated in a brief span of time, but this gave rise to reemergence of the insurgency and led to a two decade long war. A common theme throughout these historical events is that foreign powers intervene in the name of strategic gain, initial military success, but ultimately face strong resistance and a structurally determined limit beyond which it is impossible to go on dominating. (Rubin, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the historical pattern of foreign interventions in Afghanistan.
2. To analyze the strategic motivations of great powers in engaging with Afghanistan.
3. To identify structural factors within Afghanistan that limit external domination.
4. To compare the Great Game, Soviet intervention, and US-led engagement.
5. To derive historical lessons for future international policy toward Afghanistan.

Theoretical Framework

Geopolitics and realism, within the framework of international relations theory, have turned into the main sources of information in this paper. Realism is based on the assumption that states in an anarchic international system act in a manner that they pursue power, security and national interests. Geographically, Afghanistan lies in a strategic position and can be of interest to great powers, who could be interested in gaining some level of control in the area or a strategic buffer. The British, the Soviet Union, and the United States interested in protecting India, expanding their influence and expanding their strategic depth, and counterterrorism and stability in the region, respectively.

The political aspect of geopolitics is reiterated: Geography, landlockedness, and strategic location of the country to the bigger powers, offers both opportunities and challenges in the military field of Afghanistan. Occupational control over Afghanistan as an area surrounding could help in the occupation, which is hindered by the topography of Afghanistan (Breckler & Rafiq poor, 2020). The narrow passes like the

Khyber Pass, can be attacked by strong forces, but at the same time, also leave the forces present on them open to be ambushed and their logistic supply disrupted. Long-term military stay would be tough due to the severe winters, lack of facilities and isolation in rural areas.

Moreover, the aspects of constructivism contribute to the understanding of local legitimacy and role of ideology and identify. Foreign interventions are usually resisted because of cultural, religious and/or nationalistic reasons. These social issues impact politics other than material power issues. An example is the Soviet radical land reform, secularization policies and centralization that upset the traditional balance of power and alienated the rural societies which saw the intervention as an atheistic encroachment of a religious society (Wesa, 2002). Similarly, the US presented their operations as a 'War on Terror' in the global arena, claimed to be democratic, to promote human rights and to support the elimination of extremist networks, but civilian deaths and night raids challenged the good intentions. Likewise, the US characterized their operations as a 'War on Terror' in the global arena, demonstrated as democratic, human rights and eliminating extremist networks, but civilian deaths and night raids provided a counterpoint to the good intentions.

It is a blend of realism and geopolitics, and part constructivism to explain why interventions are undertaken and why there is often a failure of outside domination.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach is used in the research. It relies on secondary sources like academic books, journal articles, documents and policy analysis. The Great Game, the Soviet involvement and the American presence after 2001 are the three periods of investigation in the comparative case study. Some of the common variables examined in cases discussed in the paper include strategic motivation, military strategy, local systems of governance, external support of insurgents and results. Comparisons of these cases are used to identify similarities and differences, and the results of this comparison are presented in this research.

It employs an interpretative approach - not a statistical approach. It tries to grasp causal processes, continuity with history (but not to quantify the variables). There is a focus on long term structural factors, geography, political structure and social relationships. The one drawback is that it will be using off the shelf literature, there is the possibility of some historiographical bias. Triangulation of different sources is used in multimedia to provide greater reliability and depth of analysis.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Geography as Both Asset and Liability

It is in its strategic geography that the key to the reasons why great powers repeatedly become involved in Afghanistan can be found. Situated at the crossroads of Asia, Afghanistan is connected to Central Asia, South Asia, China and Middle East (Khan, Nazir & Jabeen, 2025). It has been a trade, migration and warfare route in the past. With Britain as an empire, Afghanistan was a buffer state against Russian invasion into British India. For Tsarist Russia, and later for the Soviet Union, Afghanistan was a gateway to warm water areas and to the south, to the expansion (Jenkins, 2019). Afghanistan, and especially since 2001, was the center of a counterterrorism policy, regional surveillance and increased geopolitical leverage in Eurasia in the case of the United States.

However, geography here is a blessing as well as a ban. The Hindu Kush mountains are found in Afghanistan covering the majority of its mountainous terrain and are hard for foreigners to control (Breckler & Rafiq poor, 2020). In the Anglo Afghan wars, it was impossible for British troops to provide supplies to

their troops in the areas under the control of the Afghans. It was the same with Soviet mechanized armies in the 1980s and with the NATO armies whose bases were dependent on the presence of huge logistic lines open to disruptions by insurgents (Soll frank & Boeke, 2024). But insurgent forces became accustomed to the geography of the region, through the use of guerrilla methods, movement and knowledge of the territory to compensate for any technological shortcoming.

Human Geography and Decentralized Political Authority

In addition to its physical geography, the human geography of Afghanistan also hinders it from being conquered from the outside. It is ethnically diverse and is linguistically composed of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen and so on (Siddique, 2012). It has traditionally been the historic tribal elders, religious leaders and regional commanders who have enjoyed political power. Rule of law does not always exist in a centralized, official body, but rather in unofficial, traditional means of coercion, or through patronage (Wang, 2014). Recent studies highlight the fact that the tribal society of Afghanistan is an overall egalitarian society that is highly fragmented, less inclined towards state interference and control, and enjoys high autonomy (Yan, 2021). Foreign interventions to consolidate authority in a powerful central government has in many occasions gone against these traditions of decentralization.

This may be dynamic in the British experience in the 19th century. The British policy makers thought that by installing a subservient ruler in Kabul they could have a buffer state Afghanistan (Choudhary, 2012). However, the installation of Shah Shuja in 1839 was not a domestic act, as it did not have the legitimacy of the people (Barfield, 2004). The tribal chiefs were not happy with any foreign interference and any sort of authority by imposition. The disastrous British withdrawal of Kabul in 1842 not only marked a military defeat but also the general lack of understanding of the political culture of the Afghan people.

The Soviet Union, similarly, has been neglectful of the force of local political and religious organizations. In the communist regime of Kabul, radical land reform and secularization policy and centralization (Wesa, 2002) were attempted. This brought about changes in the status quo and alienated the rural communities. It was not only supported by external forces, but also enforced by them, therefore it did not have legitimacy. It was such grievances that were exploited by the mujahideen organizations, and they declared themselves as the protector of Islam and Afghanistan sovereignty.

The same were the United States' actions since 2001. The first operations to remove the Taliban regime were quick, but the operations of building the state were oriented towards the building of centralized democratic structures along western lines. A strong presidential system in Kabul was created through the 2004 Constitution. Yet this centralization would likely be to the detriment of the local governance systems and local dispute resolution systems. Electro abnormalities, corruption and factional politics are the root causes of a lack of trust in the government (Bahadori, 2024). The Taliban re surfaced in most of the rural areas providing expeditious justice and shadow courts and taking advantage of disillusionment with government officials. The formal-informal dimension in the relationship between institutional and local context was broken and the validity of the post-2001 political system was undermined.

Internationalization of the Afghan Conflict

The other pattern has been repeated is the internationalisation of the Afghan conflict. The instability experienced in Afghanistan has seldom been limited to local matters. During the Cold War, Afghanistan was turned into a proxy war. Soviet influence was countered by the support provided by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and others to the mujahideen groups. The war became a global war due to the financing, arming and ideologizing of it (Rabush, 2021). Militarization and splintered resistance organizations were caused by the influx of foreign fighters and supplies of resources. Despite the positive

results of this policy which put the Soviet Union to the test, Afghanistan was left with a stockpile of arms and groups of armed insurgents that facilitated the resumption of its civil war (Reuveny & Prakash, 1999). In recent years there has always been an emphasis on the fact that Pakistan's participation in the Afghan Soviet war was a world-making process wherein postcolonial states contest and/at the same time reproduce world orders (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

The situation after 2001 witnessed regional competition once again coming to play. The country's security calculations, regional interests of Iran, strategic engagement of India and the policies of Russia and China made the situation complicated (Karim, 2023). The foreign stakeholders had agendas that were in conflict hence complicating the stabilization process. Some actors focused on counterterrorism while others were keen on regional power or to ensure the competitors did not appear. Reconstruction efforts were somewhat hindered as a result of this overlap of interest and the result was to keep fueling suspicions in the Afghanistan political arena.

Ideological Narratives and Legitimacy

Ideology has proved to be extremely conclusive, in the development of both intervention and resistance. In the Soviet Union there was international solidarity and a defense of a revolutionary government. In the Soviet Union, there was an international co-operation and a defense of a revolutionary government. However, to many Afghans it seemed as if it was religious people being invaded by atheists. Jihad mobilized inter-ethnic resistance, with the national liberation intermingled with religious identity (Kamel 2015).

The U.S. has used the battle to stamp out extremist networks and promote democracy and human rights as a rationale for its participation in the "War on Terror" as a global campaign (Fitzpatrick, 2003). Although a great deal of Afghans were happy with the end of the Taliban's oppressive regime, their prolonged stay in Afghanistan had triggered ambivalence and resentment. Civilian killings and arrests at night were a negative influence on the perception of good intentions. Propaganda of insurgency painted a picture of an international coalition that trespasses on Islamic and national sovereignty. The two strands of story – socialist internationalism or liberal democracy – were not universally supported when combined with foreign military force.

Economic Factors and the Narcotics Economy

Finally, there is the economic forces which shed light on the intervention and instability cycle. Some weaknesses in the formal sector and the high dependence on foreign assistance and informal sector activities (including agriculture and cross border trade) in Afghanistan are structural. Since 2001 the massive funds of foreign aid were funneled into the country which resulted in the formation of short term development projects and dependence and corruption as well. (Abdullah & Azim, 2023). It was expected that the capacity building programs in the community would not be included in the development process. It was assumed that programs to build local capacity would not be part of the development process. Foreign aid had been decreased and social resentment had increased. Similarly, during the Soviet years, reforms were without any economic underpinning to sustain them in the face of the withdrawal of external assistance.

This narcotics economy makes it even more difficult. The country of Afghanistan has been a big producer of opium in the past (Goodhand, 2005). The trade has benefited the insurgent groups, local power brokers and the criminal networks. Foreign campaigns against eradication of poppy cultivation at certain times made the rural farmers hostile toward the eradication at the same time they failed to offer alternative means of livelihood. Based on the UNODC's data, despite the ban by the Taliban, opium cultivation was estimated at 19 percent in 2024 reaching 12,800 hectares. According to UNODC's data, opium cultivation in 2024 was estimated at 19 percent, or 12,800 hectares, despite the ban by the Taliban. In 2024, smuggling became

more lucrative due to the increased price of dry opium, which has gone up to over \$6,000 per kilogram in 2024, compared to the price of 2022 of only \$2,000 per kilogram (UNODC, 2025). In this way, the security worries merged with marginalization of the economy, which benefitted the cycles of the resistance.

Miscalculations and Historical Memory

The issue of miscalculations is common in the fields of leadership and decision making in intervening powers. On each of the major episodes, policy makers did not anticipate the time, time resources, and political will necessary to stabilize Afghanistan. The British originally thought that a fast change of regime will guarantee their frontier. The leaders of the Soviet Union expected a minor intervention in order to strengthen a pro-Soviet government. The Taliban were driven out and the United States would see a quick democratization (Cristol, Cristol & Pusca, 2019). In both instances long battles replaced the positive suppositions. Domestic political pressures in the intervening states eventually forced a response of withdrawal, or strategic adjustment, that led to negotiated withdrawal.

The memory of the resistance of Afghanistan has an impact on the modern day politics. The consciousness of a collective victory over the imperial troops has its share in forming a national identity. In the domestic perspective the withdrawal of the British in 1842, the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 and the withdrawal of the US in 2021 are all seen as endurance wins (Braithwaite, 2022). These stories of potential "foreign subversion" and of "warfare for sovereignty" engender suspicion of foreign subversion and justify war in the name of "sovereignty". The West still sees Afghanistan as a graveyard of civilization, where the out-of-towners are bound to get trouble in their interactions with the undisciplined Afghan tribes, and the Taliban are continuing to peddle the myth of the graveyard of empires, and the myth of invincibility that they are selling (Dawn, 2025).

Regional Dynamics and the New Great Game

With the pullout of the U.S. troops, Afghanistan is again a big game playing country. It is the regional powers – namely, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran – that are now wielding influence. Russia, for its part, became the first country to officially acknowledge the Taliban in early July, 2025 (DW, 2025) and China, the first country to accept a Taliban-appointed ambassador in January of 2024 (Globalsecurity.org). The U.S. is courting the Taliban, and other nations are attempting to improve their diplomatic relations with it, including India, Pakistan and Iran (Al Jazeera, 2025). Pakistan, China and Afghanistan have agreed to extend China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan which could boost the GDP of Afghanistan by up to 6 percent per annum (The News, 2025).

There is also a sense of unity among regional powers, including Russia, China, Iran and the Central Asian countries, over the installation of foreign military infrastructure in Afghanistan, which extends beyond mere rhetoric (DID Press Agency, 2025). To China and Russia in particular, Afghanistan is a strategic opening to increase their influence in the Heart of Asia as well as to limit the influence of the US. The Moscow Format of October 2025 was a critical milestone towards the vision of an Afghanistan under the control of its owners, Russia and China, playing a pivotal role in the diplomatic efforts on Afghanistan (Hindustan Times, 2025).

The refugee situation is another aspect. Mid 2024, Iran is the largest host for the refugees and 3.8 million refugees are from 99 countries of which 99% are from Afghanistan (RIAC, 2025). According to ACAPS (2024), there are currently 10.2 million IDPs in Afghanistan, 3.2 million IDPs residing within Afghanistan, 4 million IDPs in Iran and 3 million IDPs in Pakistan. According to Reliefweb (2025), as of 2024, 1.5 million Afghans have been returned or deported by Iran and Pakistan (Relief web, 2025).

Persistent Patterns across Three Eras

The patterns during the Great Game, the Soviet intervention and the US led intervention exhibit regular features (Huntington, 1987). Firstly, perceived security threats are not limited to Afghanistan and are driving interventions. Secondly, foreigner would want to alter local political contexts to suit their aims. Third, geographical distance, social networks and ideology narratives contribute to local resistance movements' adaptation processes. Fourth, the reputation and popular support of the intervening state are undermined by long wars. Fourth, long wars take away the reputation and domestic support of the intervening state. Finally, there is no complete solution to the latent political disintegration by withdrawing.

Military force has proved to be a poor policy on numerous occasions. To achieve permanent stability, it is necessary to have legitimate rule based on domestic agreement, economic sustainability and regional integration. In their turn, external players tend to ignore these long term bases, which are more advantageous in the long term. By doing this, Afghanistan is continuously dragged into the intervention and incomplete reconstruction (Minko, 2025).

Geography, the decentralized political system, ideology mobilization, weak economies and great power rivalry have been the causes for the victimization of Afghanistan on multiple occasions (Bahadori, 2024). These combined make barriers to foreign domination. This is not to say that Afghanistan is an unmanageable country that can no longer be modernized, but rather that an all-out effort to democratize it, regardless of the means would not succeed without a greater sensitivity to local realities (Suhrke, 2007). If the principles of external competition rather than external cooperation are upheld in the context of international intervention, then the risk exists that Afghanistan will continue to be the arena of external competition and not stabilized in the process of becoming a sovereign state in the international and regional context.

CONCLUSION

Modern and pre modern history of Afghanistan shows that there has been always tendency for intervention by the outside powers because of the rivalry of great powers. Foreign players have tried to do the same as the previous empires did from ancient times when they wanted to either control or dominate Afghanistan as a strategic land. However, even all interventions have been open to challenges and disruptions in their structure, which end any sense of permanency. Limited external control due to a number of factors such as geography, political decentralization, strong social networks and tradition based autonomy. Lack of legitimacy and cultural knowledge and sustainable governance cannot be offset by military superiority. All three of the victorious powers—Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States—shared this challenge, of how to convert victory on the battlefield to victory at the ballot box in a complex and decentralized society.

The lessons learned from the Afghanistan experience are more generic in their nature in reference to international relations. Great powers are prone to be blind to history, by their ambition. Operation(s) that are viewed as security operation, or ideological operation may result in unintended outcomes such as insurgency, region instability, long term resentment. Afghanistan isn't a helpless victim in the meantime. Afghan actors also have agency—control over the consequences of acts, by resisting, bargaining and adapting. This is an important part of not having to resort to simplistic explanations because of the recognition of this agency.

The future relationship with Afghanistan must change the approach that relies on coercive dominance to the approach that relies on collaborative cooperation that is based on the respect of the sovereignty and local realities. The intervention and failure cycle can only be halted through learning the lessons of history.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Respect of Sovereignty:

The international community must engage in respecting sovereignty of Afghanistan and they should not impose externally developed political systems on the country. Sustainable governance should be domestically developed as opposed to foreign prototypes.

Regional Cooperation Framework:

minimizing proxy wars, a global system that would assist in preventing foreign interference would be beneficial. Moscow Format and other regional mechanisms should be enhanced.

Context Sensitive Institution Building: Based on the social, cultural context of Afghanistan, it is recommended that the governance be assisted. Decentralized designs may be more practical than a stringent centralization. Where appropriate, traditional institutions such as jirga- traditional tribal council of respected elders should be also included in the governance system.

Long Term Economic Development: LTED causes of instability can be addressed by investing in infrastructure, education and employment. Resilience of the economy can be achieved by integration of the regional economy with local economy. The extension of CPEC in Afghanistan, alternative trade route through Chabahar Port in Iran and Wakhan Corridor are key options that must be explored.

Inclusive Political Dialogue: There should be participation of diverse ethnic, tribal and political communities in the peace process. Marginalization leads to conflict and division. A Taliban government should be based on pluralism, cultural relativism and proportional power sharing if it wants to be accepted both domestically and internationally (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 2024).

Militarized Solutions should be avoided: The political conflicts can only be resolved by military action. The interaction of diplomats, development cooperation and conflict resolution should be first priorities in the efforts.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, D. K. A., & Azim, A. (2023). Exploring Opportunities and Challenges for International Investment in Afghanistan's Economic Development and Business Environment. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(5), 1016-1042.
- ACAPS. (2024). Thematic Report: Understanding the key human safety and security issues that returnees to Afghanistan are facing.
- Afridi, A. A. (2023). The Great Game of 19th Century: The Significance of Tribal Belt as Buffer to the Buffer State of Afghanistan. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 8(1), 99-106.
- Al Jazeera. (2025). Guess who India, Pakistan and Iran are all wooing? The Taliban.
- Attewell, W. (2017). 'The planet that rules our destiny': Alternative development and environmental power in occupied Afghanistan. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(2), 339-359.

- Bahadori, A. F. (2024). *The Role of Political Leadership and Its Effects on Political Stability in Afghanistan Between 2001 and 2021* (Master's thesis, Istanbul Aydin University).
- Barfield, T. J. (2004). Problems in establishing legitimacy in Afghanistan. *Iranian Studies*, 37(2), 263-293.
- Braithwaite, R. (2022). Afghanistan: Learning from History? *Afghanistan*, 15.
- Breckle, S. W., & Rafiqpoor, M. D. (2020). The Hindu Kush/Afghanistan. In *Plant biogeography and vegetation of high mountains of Central and South-West Asia* (pp. 43-91). Springer.
- Chaghaty, F., & Bagramwal, S. (2025). The Geostrategic Role of Afghanistan in Connecting Central Asia with South Asia. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 8(3).
- Choudhary, P. (2012). British Policy towards Afghanistan in the 19th Century. *International Research Journal of Commerce Arts and Science*, 3(2), 806-812.
- Cristol, A., Cristol, J., & Pusca, A. (2019). *US-Afghanistan Relations: A Historical Perspective*.
- Dawn. (2025). SMOKERS' CORNER: AFGHANISTAN'S ENDURING MYTH?
- DID Press Agency. (2025). Regional Consensus in Moscow Signals End of US Role in Afghanistan.
- DW. (2025). Afghanistan: Are the Taliban still isolated after 4 years?
- Farrell, T. (2010). Improving in war: Military adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009. *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33(4), 567-594.
- Fitzpatrick, J. (2003). Speaking law to power: the war against terrorism and human rights. *European Journal of International Law*, 14(2), 241-264.
- Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. (2024). Factoring Ethnicity in Taliban's Quest for Legitimacy.
- [Globalsecurity.org](https://www.globalsecurity.org). (2025). Russia, China, India Vying For Influence In Afghanistan As Taliban Seeks Legitimacy.
- Goodhand, J. (2005). Frontiers and wars: the opium economy in Afghanistan. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 5(2), 191-216.
- Hakimi, H. (2023). Why the West won't let Afghanistan define itself. Chatham House.
- Hindustan Times. (2025). Moscow Format: The new great game in Af-Pak.
- Huntington, S. P. (1987). Patterns of Intervention: America & the Soviets in the Third World. *The National Interest*, (7), 39-47.
- Iqbal, M. (2021). The impact of Mongol invasion on the Muslim world. *Economic and Social Ramifications*.
- Jalali, A. A. (2021). *Afghanistan: A military history from the ancient empires to the great game*. University Press of Kansas.

- Jenkins, D. B. (2019). The history of Afghanistan as a buffer state. In *Buffer States in World Politics* (pp. 171-189). Routledge.
- Jones, S. G. (2008). The rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: State failure and Jihad. *International Security*, 32(4), 7-40.
- Kamel, K. (2015). Understanding Taliban Resurgence: Ethno-Symbolism and Revolutionary Mobilization. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15(1), 66-82.
- Karim, U. (2023). The Pakistan–Iran relationship and the changing nature of regional and domestic security. *Global Discourse*, 13(1), 20-38.
- Khan, S. U., Nazir, J., & Jabeen, Z. (2025). The Afghanistan Factor: Its Influence on Regional Competition in South Asia. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 3(1), 115-131.
- Leake, E. (2022). *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Lynch, T. F. (2022). The Inevitable US Return and the Future of Great Power Competition in South Asia.
- Minko, A. E. (2025). POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION AFTER STATE-BUILDING FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN. *Security Science Journal*, 6(2), 54-70.
- Oberdorfer, D. (1998). *From the Cold War to a new era: the United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991*. JHU Press.
- Rabush, T. V. (2021). Involvement of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the Events in Afghanistan in the Late 1970s. *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*.
- Reliefweb. (2025). Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation: Final Report 2024.
- Reuveny, R., & Prakash, A. (1999). The Afghanistan war and the breakdown of the Soviet Union. *Review of International Studies*, 25(4), 693-708.
- RIAC. (2025). The Sanctioned Sanctuary: How Economic Pressure Creates Refugee Magnets.
- Rubin, B. R. (2013). *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*. Oxford University Press.
- Rubin, B. R. (2023). Once and Future Great Power Competition in Afghanistan: An Interpretive History. In *The Great Power Competition Volume 4* (pp. 371-393). Springer.
- Saikal, A., & Maley, W. (Eds.). (1989). *The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Siddique, A. (2012). Afghanistan's ethnic divides. *CIDOB Policy Research Project*, 1-11.
- Sollfrank, A., & Boeke, S. (2024). Enablement and Logistics as Critical Success Factors for Military Operations. *The RUSI Journal*, 169(7), 10-22.
- Suhrke, A. (2007). Democratization of a Dependent State: The Case of Afghanistan. *CMI Working Paper*.

- The News. (2025). PCJCCI says CPEC integration could add 6pc to Afghan GDP.
- UNODC. (2024). Afghanistan Opium Survey 2024.
- UNODC. (2025). Afghan opium prices soar after poppy ban.
- Wang, C. (2014). Rule of law in Afghanistan: enabling a constitutional framework for local accountability. *Harvard International Law Journal*, 55, 211.
- Weinbaum, M. G. (2021). *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors: An Ever-Enduring Struggle*.
- Wesa, T. (2002). *The Afghan agricultural extension system: impact of the Soviet occupation* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- Yan, W. (2021). “无政府社会：当代阿富汗部落社会的权力结构与秩序延展” [Anarchic Society: Power Structure and Order Extension in Contemporary Afghan Tribal Society]. *Journal of Historical Studies*.
- Yapp, M. A. (1987). British perceptions of the Russian threat to India. *Modern Asian Studies*, 21(4), 647-665.
- Yar, F. G. M., Zahid, S., & Miakhil, J. M. (2023). Afghanistan's Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance in Regional Connectivity and Development. *Journal of Political and Legal Sovereignty*, 1(3), 79-87.