

## **Structural Challenges Of The International System And The Us Security Strategies In Afghanistan**

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### **Abstract**

Afghanistan has always been at the center of competition between the great powers due to its geopolitical position in the world order and its active power cycle, experiencing severe interferences concerning its internal affairs. The policies of the great powers towards Afghanistan have always been affected by the rivalry in the global cycle of power and the structural challenges of the international system caused by the existence of such a cycle. Developments in the international system, especially after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, have caused Afghanistan to be one of the pillars of US regional policy. In addition, with the recreation of Russian power and the rise of China as well as the formation of the transition period in the world order, the international system has shown structural challenges regarding the United States. With regards to the two great powers of the international system \_Russia and China- challenging American hegemony in Afghanistan as well as the presence of US forces in this country, Afghanistan has turned into one of the connection centers of structural pressures related to the international system and geopolitical currents – which is being a response to such pressures. Accordingly, the research question is based on the structural pressures of the international system and US security strategies in Afghanistan. The present study regards Afghanistan as a geopolitical center by which part of the dynamic control of the power of the challenging countries is realized. Through the link between the global order and the geopolitics of Afghanistan, this study seeks to explore one of enduring problems of Afghanistan – i.e. the security strategies of the great powers- and to present a new research agenda in the field of the great powers and Afghanistan.

**Keywords;** Afghanistan, United States, Geopolitics, Russia, China, and Geopolitical System.

### **Introduction**

The establishment of Afghanistan as an independent country goes back to the midst of the eighteenth century by the death of Nader Shah Afshar and extensive changes in the territory of Iran. Combining several Pashtun tribes, Ahmad Shah Abdali established Afghan ruling in Kandahar in 1747. Afghanistan's geopolitical importance drew British attention to the region, resulting in its growing power in Afghanistan. Finally, in 1919, Afghanistan regained its independence from Britain and became a self-governing country.

The world's great powers have focused on Afghanistan since it declared its independence. With the independence of Afghanistan, the rivalries between Russia and Britain began in this country; Afghanistan's foreign policy at that point in history was influenced by the role of the great powers and the rivalry among them. Regarding its important geopolitical position, Afghanistan has been the focus of attention in the rivalry between Russia and Britain, as well as the United States and the Soviet Union, and sometimes-other global and regional rivalries.

The world conquerors and the great powers have always attempted to conquer and dominate this Afghanistan due to its geographical location. The history of Afghanistan in the last century, that is, after the independence of this country, has had the presence of three world great powers and their rivalries. The presence of any of the supra-regional powers has resulted in long wars in this country and has had harmful consequences for this country.

The geopolitics of power in Afghanistan initially provided a great game between Russia and the United States, and each of the two countries attempted to dominate this important geopolitical point and eliminate the rival. Previously, the great game between Russia and Britain took Afghanistan to the center of the intervention of the two great powers at that time; the developments of the international system and the will of the great powers were reflected in Afghanistan's foreign policy.

However, during the Cold War, geopolitics of power was based on the role of the United States and the Soviet Union as the two great powers of the time; the resulting rivalry in the region and in the sensitive country of Afghanistan was also of importance. During the Cold War and due to its strategic importance, the Soviet Union invaded and occupied Afghanistan; then a close rivalry was created between the United States and the

Soviet Union; in an attempt to raise its influence in Afghanistan, the United States challenged the Soviet Union by equipping and organizing opposition groups through the ISI of Pakistan.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, this country withdrew its forces from Afghanistan so the country was forgotten by the great powers for a short time; the United States of America as a world's great power did not pay much attention to Afghanistan. However, 9/11 and the subsequent events caused Afghanistan to be the focus of the attention of the great powers. Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, the United States concentrated on the geopolitical position of Afghanistan and moved to this country after the fall of the Taliban and the formation of a new government in Afghanistan; but this time, the US put long-term plans on the agenda in this geopolitical region.

The United States' ability to shape world order was limited due to the growing changes in the international system and the relative decline of this country's power as well as the emerging new powers such as China, Russia, India, and Brazil. The United States being strongly opposed especially by powers such as China tried to strengthen the structures and processes of global governance (Terhalle, 2015: chapter 1). The movements of Russia and China, as the great powers of the system, were justified by challenging the US security strategies in all parts of the world, including Afghanistan. The geopolitical systems in which Afghanistan is located have been and will continue to be tempting for each of the great powers throughout history. As a result, the influence of each of the great powers in this political geography will cause challenges. One of the main concerns of this study is to clarify the relationship between the global cycle of power and the conflict of great powers in the internal destiny of countries with geopolitical value causing strategic vulnerabilities instead of reproducing power. In modern international politics and at a time when the international system is in transition, Afghanistan is considered as one of the geopolitical centers of the region being part of the great geopolitical conflict in the area. Afghanistan connects the three regional networks of the great powers, namely China, Russia, and the United States, while challenging regional powers such as Iran are also located in this region. The emerging powers such as India also need and show interests in this area. The presence of the US forces in Afghanistan gives it an advantage to control territorial geopolitical currents and can therefore manipulate the transition. In addition, the emerging and challenging powers are aware of the fact that this control of the US over the region can hinder the transition and change the existing order. Generally, the global power cycle in transition and the presence of the United States in one of the most important geopolitical centers of the territory have increased the structural pressures in this regard. Hence, an important question is realized given the structural challenges of the international system, such as Russia and China as major powers attempting to have an active role in international affairs; what are the US security strategies in Afghanistan? In order to answer this question we need to concentrate on the existence of significant challenges by major powers such as Russia and China against the United States in Afghanistan's geopolitical systems; this has caused the US security strategies to be based on limiting rival powers such as China and Russia and consolidate its hegemony by building regional bases and control networks -regarding the fact that Afghanistan is one of the main centers of connection in this network. To test the hypothesis, this paper will first examine existing theories about geopolitics and its importance in the strategy of the great powers, and then briefly discuss the new US-centered order and its global challenges. Then Afghanistan and global and regional geopolitical regimes will be discussed, and finally the challenges of China and Russia will be considered because of their overwhelming interests in Afghanistan's geopolitical region and US strategies as well as its networking in Afghanistan to control rivals.

### **Review of the related literature**

Due to the anarchic nature of international relations, the great powers have always attempted to increase their own interests at the expense of the interests of others. A relentless rivalry to gain more power and reduce the share of others in power have become common among the great powers. In the realm of the great powers, Mearsheimer mentions the aggressive realism theory and the maximization of power by the great powers (Mearsheimer, 2000). Politics of the great powers and the world order from 1500 onwards and the struggle for hegemony have been discussed by Jeremy Black (Black, 2007), Gryngiel deals with the policies of the great powers and geopolitical changes (Gryngiel, 2006), Paul Kennedy regards the issue of the rise and fall of great powers and existing cycles (Kennedy, 1989), and Kleiman refers to the division of power in the 21st century among other great powers in the world order (Aharon, 2015).

Regarding the rivalry of the great powers in important geopolitical regions and Afghanistan, Roger mentions the key players in Central Asia (Roger, 2010), Tsygango states the asymmetric rivalry of Russia and the United States in Central Asia and the absence of a rival in this regard (Tsygango, 2009), the relations between China and Russia in Central Asia and geopolitical issues are discussed by Estephen (Estephen, 2014), the US security strategy and global order are focused on by Andrea Wivel (Wivel, 2008). Aharon discusses the great powers and the issue of geopolitics and rebalancing of international issues (Aharon, 2015), Fishman refers to

the new power challenge for The US and the world (Fishman, 2005), and Ikenberry states the struggle of china and the US for gaining world order (Ikenberry, 2015). Russia's Central Geopolitics in the New Age is referred to by Suslov (Suslov, 2016), and Wijk discusses the politics of power and the way Russia and China reshape the world (Wijk, 2016).

A review of the related literature indicates the desirability of the presence of the US in Afghanistan for solving the geopolitical problems of the world order. In other words, the US presence has been in response to the geopolitical pressures of the international system and solving them to establish its hegemonic order; however, this issue has not been thoroughly investigated by far. Therefore, this article is attempting to help reduce the inefficiency of the existing literature by emphasizing the structural challenges of the international system, especially the geopolitical challenges. The present paper examines the US strategies in Afghanistan's geopolitical systems against international challenges such as China and Russia, and emphasizes that the US security strategy in Afghanistan's geopolitical systems is primarily about controlling rival powers and establishing hegemony through regional networking and building bases; other issues can be analyzed through the gaps in this regard. One of the most prominent contributions of the present paper to the existing literature concerning the international relations is the position of the relationship among the global power cycle and the security strategies of great powers in small countries. This relationship can be reflected in the security policy of these countries.

### **Theoretical and conceptual foundations**

The theoretical foundations of the present study are based on three main aspects. The first foundation focuses on the transition of power and the patterns of order emerging from various turning points in the global cycle of power. The second foundation considers the structural pressures resulting from the changes in the global cycle of power as well as the changes in the pattern of relations among the powers pleased with the existing status and its challengers, intensifying the position of structural pressures from two directions. The first direction is through the structural pressures of powers pleased with the existing status who seek to prevent the transition and put pressure on the countries causing such a transition. The second direction regards the pressures that will be created by the growing powers to change the order making such transition possible. The third direction regards channels and operational regions that are considered as the pressure points, in which geopolitics can be considered as the point of creation, transmission, and stabilization of structural pressures.

Geopolitics being a form of knowledge and power was emerged during the imperialist rivalry -1870 to 1945, when rival empires reorganized, changed, and revised their lines of power during their wars. Such lines of power shaped the boundaries of the world's political map (Dalby, 1998: 15). These imperialist networks were formed by the great powers so that they could achieve their goals in the world. In other words, geopolitics in a simple definition can be described as what the great powers are involved in, what they do, and what they are best at (Klieman, 2015: 4).

Basically, geopolitics attempts to study how geographical factors, such as land, population, strategic location, natural resources, etc., affect relations between governments and how the governments attempt to gain power and dominate over others (Ghasemi, 2008: 4). It can be said that geopolitics is another type of human activity involved in political, economic, or strategic transformations. Nicholas Spikeman -geographer and political strategist- believed that geography is one of the key factors in shaping foreign policy priorities. The basic features of geographical areas (landlocked states) are their location, topography, climate, and natural "energy" resources. All these factors affect the political and socio-cultural environment of a state (Dhaka, 2005: 20). The growth and nature of this field of study has been a spatial issue by its virtue. The institutionalization of this discipline has led to the establishment of several schools of thoughts, such as the German school led by Karl Haushofer, the English school led by Halfred McNider, and later the American school led by Sorsky (Ibid).

### **Pioneers of geopolitical theory**

Frederick Ratzel	According to Ratzel, three characteristics of government namely territory, people, and the living space contribute to the geopolitical dynamics of government. He formulated an organic theory of states, being based on the hypothesis that the political existence of a state is similar to a living thing with space that needs a larger space to grow (Dhaka, 2005: 23).
Alfred Mahan	According to Mahan, the success of some countries (such as Britain) in the hierarchy of governments relies on the following factor. Therefore, he considered domination of the seas, especially strategic straits, necessary for the existence of great powers. According to Mahan, the geographical location of the northern hemisphere is the key to global power and within this hemisphere, Eurasia is the most important component. (Cohen, 2008: 49)

Sir Halford Mackinder	Mackinder named the three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa as global islands, and called the central axis of this island as Hartland. He then theorized that whoever ruled Eastern Europe would rule the heart of the earth and the region. Whoever rules the heart of the earth will be the ruler of the world island. Whoever rules the world island will be the ruler of the world. (Cohen, 2008: 49)
Nicholas Spikeman	In addition to Hartland's theory, Spikemann considered the areas around Hartland, which were stated by Mackinder, as "internal and external crescents", and named them "Rimland" and paid more attention to this region than Hartland. In refuting or responding to Mackinder's theory, he claimed that the main area in Heartland was the Inner Crescent; because this region has provided the possibility of a better combination of the power of the land and sea and has more human resources (Ezzati, 2001: 16). Spikeman stated that whoever controls Rimland rules Eurasia and whoever rules Eurasia controls the world's destiny. (Loro-Tual, 2001: 24)
Samuel Cohen	He paints a picture of the political world based on geopolitical and geostrategic regions. In his view, the environment is not strategically integrated, but it is a world being essentially divided into several separate regions. In dealing with this hypothesis, he uses the geographical concept called region. Thus, he focuses on a hierarchy consisting of two types of categories, namely geostrategic region and geopolitical region. (Ghasemi, 2005: 165)
Francis Fukuyama and the Geopolitics of the New World Order	Fukuyama's theory can be summarized as follows; liberal democracy is the ultimate form of a government in human societies. In Fukuyama's view, a new conceptual map is emerged being characterized by the division of the world into an ideological West, not a geographical one against the rest of the world, and a post-historical period against a historical period. In the geopolitical culture of the end of history, places around the world are not considered in terms of their geographical features, but in terms of the subjective and universal classifications of Western philosophy. It can be said with certainty that the theory of the end of history does not indicate the beginning of the discussion of geographical issues in the geopolitical debates. (Mir Haidar, 1998: 17)

The great powers are in the struggle of balance and geopolitical change. A great power can never stay at the top of the pyramid forever being followed by others; however, it is always balanced by other great powers. The great powers in the international system define their interests in dominating geopolitical regions and creating obstacles for their rivals. That is why the strategy of the great powers, using realistic theories, is always to increase the share of world power at the cost of reducing rival power. The United States as a unique power has been on the decline since the end of the Cold War, and the great powers of the system have sought to balance geopolitics.

With the importance of communication structures, the international system has become a complex and chaotic system. One of the features of such a system is the simultaneous concentration and dispersion of power. In fact, the focus is on hegemony in a particular region, but at the same time, the international system tends to disperse the power to deal with the pressures of concentration in that region.

In other words, the heterarchy model can be seen in the modern international system, although the system is a hierarchy in this model, it is a set of interconnected hierarchies. Accordingly, a country may be at the top of a hierarchy; however, this requires controlling other hierarchies to avoid potential challenges in overthrowing the hierarchy in which the hegemon is located. Thus, the most important structural challenge for the power concentration seems to be the existence of regions (competing hierarchies). Global structures of the regions need to be organized to rationalize the flow of power. In other words, a strategy based on confronting the cycle of power and the formation of regional hegemony is on the agenda of hegemonic power. In modern international politics, geopolitical structures have turned into networked structures; one of the basic features is network interference; if this network is combined with conflicting role of actors, it leads to negative aggregation and results in competition and enmity. It is one of the most prominent security strategies in regional networking and base building in order to create network centrality. (Ghasemi, 2020, 57-60).

### **Geopolitics of world order, structural pressures, and the United States**

The declaration of a new order by US President George Herbert Walker Bush and the support of a number of Western nations created the confidence that world leadership is in the hands of this country and that the world must adapt to the new order that the US focuses on and draws its lines of interests. The lines that the United States is drawing for a new world order are the global interests being the same as the interests of the United States itself; that is the United States is responsible for global "leadership". The new American-centered order may seem democratic and liberal at first glance, but when it comes to other nations, Americans' lack of understanding of the culture creates a kind of conflicting intolerance in the international relations. Scholars on the geopolitics of the US-centered world order and the structural pressures of the international literary system have all suggested that the US-centered geopolitical order cannot be accepted by the system.

The emergence of the People's Republic of China in politics is one of the most important events in world after

the end of World War I. As a leading military, political, and economic power in the world, the United States faces a tough challenge concerning China, especially in Asia. The beginning of the new century has posed a series of challenges for the United States with the rise of China forcing the United States to reconsider its strategies and policies. Russia and China, as the two important actors in the international system, are considered as potential challenges to the US-based geopolitical order, and the United States has lost its undisputed leadership power in the world.

Putin's Russia is also one of the emerging countries that tries to challenge the new US-centered order and seeks to play a role in the structure of the international system. Hence, there are structural pressures on the United States in this order resulting from the great powers.

### **Afghanistan and the Geopolitics of the World Order**

Afghanistan's special geopolitical position plays an important role in defining the geopolitics of the region being referred to by terms such as "Asia Crossroads" or "Asia's Heartland ". According to Mackinder, who believed that there were points on every continent that countries attempt to control, and such domination is seen as domination of the heart, and center of the continent, Afghanistan is one of the regions that various empires are trying to dominate (Hekmatnia, 2005: 100). Afghanistan is a landlocked country in the heart of Asia, connecting three major geographical and cultural regions: it connects the Indian subcontinent to the southeast, Central Asia to the north, and the Iranian plateau to the west. Geography may not be decisive, but it can pave the way for Afghanistan's history for thousands of years as a gateway for invaders to Iran or Central Asia or India (Barfield, 2010: 1). This region has always been the battleground of invading armies, ruled by different governments from time to time.

Since the term 'buffer state' was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1883, there has been a consensus on the buffer state of Afghanistan in the region's security structure. Prior to independence, Afghanistan was at the crossroads between the Russian and British empires in India and held the position of Cohen's quasi-independent state (McLachlan, 1997: 89). While in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan was the scene of rivalry between Britain and Russia, in the twentieth century, this rivalry continued after the independence of Afghanistan in 1919 until the end of World War II, and along with these two great powers, Germany became the other side of world power affecting the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is located in the following important geopolitical systems.

#### **1- Afghanistan and the geopolitical system of Central Asia**

Central Asia was part of the legendary Silk Road that stretched from China to Istanbul and Rome (McCauley, 2002: 55). It is generally known as Russia's sphere of influence. The formation of the Russian-centered Commonwealth countries has established Russia's superiority in this area. Central Asia or Turkestan (the land of the Turks) has been of considerable geopolitical importance for centuries. Turkestan lost its importance with the development of the sea route to have an access to eastern China. Today, East Asia has regained its geopolitical importance for two reasons: first, the issue of the war on terror and the second, the abundance of oil and natural gas in the region (McCauley, 2002: 56). If the flow of oil from the Middle East is stopped one day, Central Asia is of paramount economic importance to the United States.

The importance of Afghanistan as a region adjacent to the Central Asian geopolitical system can be seen as the following:

- 1- TAPI gas pipeline project: This project is extremely important for the countries of the region and even Pakistan, which usually wants Afghanistan to be unstable, needs a safe and stable Afghanistan in this project.
- 2- The way in which China and Russia interact in relation to US strategic actions and goals in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region.
- 3- Resolving Afghanistan's ethnic and tribal conflicts that can act as high potential for involving Central Asian countries.
- 4- The Lapis Lazuli and Casa Rout are one of Afghanistan's major economic projects in Central Asia, eliminating the need for Pakistani ports, is of great economic importance to Central Asia.

#### **2- Afghanistan and the Geopolitical System of South Asia**

South Asia is a scene of constant instability, big and small wars, and unrest. Fundamentalism is growing significantly in this region, both in its Islamic form and in its Hindu form. The nature of these issues in South Asia has resulted in a dangerous but important area causing all countries in the world as well as international institutions pay attention to it (Sari al-Qalam, 2008: 214). In the geopolitical spatial structure presented by Goldstein, Afghanistan is part of the South Asian region (Goldstein, 1999). India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

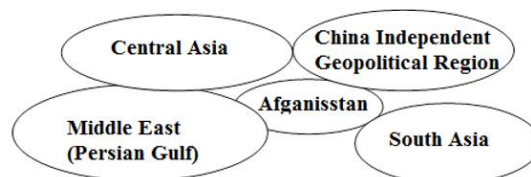
are among the most important countries in this system. However, in this system, India has a central position and Pakistan and Afghanistan have peripheral positions. However, if we use the contour and *Spiegel* model (Ghasemi, 2005: 176), the surrounding countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, and consequently India, will be the central country, the United States will be the main interventionist power after 9/11, and the great powers of the system seek to challenge the United States.

The main intervening factor in South Asia is the United States, which has firmly been present in the region since 9/11. US strategic goals and vital interests in South Asia, such as containment of China and Russia by participating in this geopolitical system, as well as the Kabul-Washington strategic alliance, have played a key role in Afghanistan's entry into the South Asian geopolitical system. Because the initial US strategy in Afghanistan, in addition to the issue of counterterrorism, has been to contain potential US and opposition forces.

### 3- Afghanistan and the geopolitical system of the Middle East

The strategic network of the Middle East is made up of distinct but interconnected links. The mentioned network consists of the following components: 1- Shamat area; 2- Western area; 3- Persian Gulf Basin; 4- Southwest Asia (Pakistan and Afghanistan); 5- Turkey Asia Minor (Ghasemi, 2010: 65). Two types of basic variables are involved in the formation of the Middle East geopolitical network, that can be conceptualized in the form of external and internal variables, which ultimately form the Middle East regional network through the interaction among the variables in the framework of the above five regions. Part of this network stems from the hegemonic power function of the international and foreign system that represents the global cycle of power. Meanwhile, the Middle East circle has been strongly influenced by the discourse of power and the intervention of power or foreign powers (Ghasemi, 2010: 65).

With the end of the Cold War, Middle Eastern governments have faced many challenges in accepting a unipolar world order. Various expectations were formed about the Middle East and North African region. According to Samuel Huntington, the issue of the clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic world in this region has been prone to burst. The US government had focused on "rebellious governments" and, after 9/11, focused on the lack of democracy and the rise of Islamism. The end of the Cold War in 1989 challenged the governments of the Middle East and the region as a whole (Wivel, 2008: 103).



**Figure 1- Afghanistan's position in regional geopolitical systems**

### US Geopolitical Challenges in Afghanistan's Geopolitical Systems

China and Russia each play major roles in the international system, and pose challenges to US foreign policy. The position of these two great powers is defined by their geographical size, economic growth, or military capabilities beyond their borders. While China and India are increasingly emerging powers, retreating Russia is also looking for ways to maintain its international influence (Flanagan & Schear 2008: 149). It is not easy for the United States to engage constructively with these challenging powers. China and Russia are concerned about US domination of the international system; they have criticized US military power and the presence of US forces in the region.

Although Russia is not as key a regulator of US foreign policy as the Soviet Union was in the second half of the twentieth century, complex relations with Russia are a major challenge to US foreign policy. As the heir to the Soviet Union, Russia, seeks to dominate the breakaway countries of the Soviet Union and control the Central Asian region as its backyard. The US presence in Central Asia demonstrates the geopolitical importance of the region. The long-term and grand goal of the United States is to prevent the Russia's formation of military alliances with different countries such as Iran, Russia, India and China and some Central Asian governments by entering Russia's backyard and presence in the region. Russia's goals and priorities in the Middle East stem from its global perspective on civilizations and the consultation of great powers in fundamental international decisions and the negotiation of acceptable governance behavior. Along this civilizational perspective, Russian foreign policy is increasingly based on geopolitical and cultural characteristics. Facing with growing global instability, Russian experts support a new civilization project that strengthens the country's cultural foundations and maintains relations with outside powers. Moscow sees the Middle East as crucial to transporting Russian oil to China and Europe. Russia's influence in Syria allows

Russian companies to control the transit route for Iranian and Qatari energy to Europe (Clark and Hook, 2014: 221).

China is finding an opportunity to influence the rules and norms of the world system. Other great powers may be struggling to influence the world order, but China and the United States are now so powerful that they are struggling to take the lead in the principles and logic of world order in the 21st century (Ikenberry, Jesi, Feng, 2015: 3). The new century poses a set of China-centric challenges for the United States. These challenges force the United States not only to develop effective policies, but also to fundamentally re-evaluate its relationship (Swain, 2011: 1).

The structures of US and Chinese interests concerning the Central Asian region are contradictory. In the field of non-traditional security, the two countries have common enemies and goals, but in the field of traditional security, they have very different interests. These cases have complicated the relations between the two countries. Although the two sides can work together to fight terrorism in Central Asia and define common security interests, the US military presence in the Central Asian region raises Beijing concerns. This is the complex nature of US-China relations: both countries seek to fight terrorism as a threat to security and stability, but any cooperation between the two countries raises traditional security conflicts. This contradiction between realism and geopolitical logic is implicit in the relations between the two countries in the post-Cold War world (Zhao, 2012: 187).

### **US Security Strategies in the Structural Challenges of the International System**

The geopolitical construction of the international system will have a direct impact on the strategy of countries, including the hegemon, as an agent of systemic order, and the type of boundaries necessitates special control mechanisms. Now, the US strategy has also changed with the formation of a new geopolitics (Ghasemi, 2011: 408). 9/11 happened at a time when the United States was considered the hegemon and controller of the system. The set of geopolitical challenges facing the United States in Afghanistan caused the country to redefine its security strategies. The strategies that the United States puts on the agenda are:

### **US-Afghanistan regional networking strategy to control China**

Since China has sought a multilateral order for the past few decades, the United States has sought to establish extensive military and security ties with countries around China in order to curb the growing trend of China gaining power in the Asia-Pacific region. This could both prevent them from forming alliances and security alliances with China, prevent a shift in the global power cycle in China's favor, and degrade China's strategic position in Asia-Pacific. The United States seeks to isolate China by expanding its military and security ties, increasing its military presence in Asia, and concluding military agreements with Japan, South Korea, and India as rivals to China.

The infiltration strategy adopted by the United States during the Cold War against the Soviet Union does not work against China today. Rather, Washington needs a larger strategy than China to balance the rising China. It must adopt a strategy that limits China's economic and military expansion in Asia and the world and China's dangers (Blackwil & Tellis, 2015: 4). A strategy must be adopted by the United States to ensure US supremacy in the world system in the 21st century

The United States is seeking to shift its strategic priorities in Central and South Asia. In this regard, it encourages Afghanistan to achieve security, improve its relations with Pakistan, and make diplomatic efforts to end tensions between India and Pakistan. It will also use collaborative efforts to reduce the threat of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan (Rynning, 2017: 105). Therefore, Afghanistan's position in US security strategies in this country and against the Chinese threat could be the issue of regional networking consisting of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan so that China's presence is further limited forming a regional coalition against China. US approach in South Asia is defined and redefined based on networking against Chinese influence and presence. Hence, India, although as a potential power, can be dangerous for the United States, in the short-term strategy of the United States, India can be regarded as an ally against China. The United States is dissatisfied with the close relationship between China and Pakistan and attempts to control China in the region by forming a network of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Another strategy that the United States is pursuing to control its rivals through Afghanistan is an economic networking strategy to resist Chinese influence in the region. The United States seeks the economic integration of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and South Asia to build a unified regional economic network against Chinese economic influence. The "New Silk Road Strategy" pursued during the Obama administration was practiced with the goal of liberalizing trade, accelerating economic cooperation, increasing the volume, and improving the level of human communication between the two regions of Central Asia and South Asia. The US strategy against its emerging rival, China, is mostly economic because no significant military moves have been made by China yet. However, there are concerns among White House officials concerning China's military nature

due to its high potentials.

As a link between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan is of particular importance to the United States in its regional networking strategy to stay at the top of the power cycle. Afghanistan's position in US security strategies becomes even more prominent when Washington seeks Afghanistan's trade and economic ties, especially in the transit of goods and energy transmission lines between Central and South Asian countries (India and Pakistan).

Building bases in Afghanistan's regional network to control Russia

The United States is considering infiltrating Central Asia by providing economic support to newly independent states. However, the US war on terror, which began in Afghanistan, fully consolidated US influence in the region by establishing military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (Ibid). This war brought US forces to the heart of Central Asia (Kleveman, 2004: 2). The United States has actively put the strategic issue of the Caspian oil and gas pipeline project on its agenda (Ibid). Washington also actively sought to infiltrate the South Caucasus through economic and military cooperation with Georgia and Azerbaijan (Kuzio, 2002). The fact that the political elites of the new Eurasian states were trying to establish sovereignty and avoid Russian domination facilitated the pursuit of US goals in the region (Kanet, Raquel 2010: 81). The United States is also working to control Russia and consolidate its hegemony in Central Asia. Central Asia is the geopolitical and geoeconomic center for the United States. Separating Russia from the Soviet republics, reducing Moscow's dominance over its traditional sphere of influence, and marginalizing it from regional security equations are important US geopolitical strategies in which Afghanistan plays an important role.

The United States' strategy against Russian influence is the Great Central Asia Plan to implement its policies in the region. The plan is a strategic matrix (origin) in Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and Afghanistan, within which the United States seeks to link local geopolitics and politico-military as well as geoeconomic developments (Central Asia and Caucasus, 2009).

After its presence in Afghanistan, the United States discovered the important and decisive role of Central Asia and found Afghanistan as a point where it could lead the United States to build a base in Russia's backyard. After the US invasion to Afghanistan, the logistical importance of the Central Asian region increased sharply due to the erosive process of war in this country, (Kalji, 2015: 415).

## **Conclusion**

According to geopolitical theories, Afghanistan is a country in the heart of Asia that has a unique geographical location in its tumultuous history. In fact, it can be said that the political developments in Afghanistan have been influenced by two elements, geopolitics and the international system throughout history. The extreme weakness of the domestic governments and the interventions of the great powers due to the special geopolitical position of this country have made it impossible for Afghanistan to use its special geographical position to improve its regional position. Although at some point in post-Cold War history Afghanistan is insignificant to the great powers and their rivalry in the country has somewhat diminished, after 9/11 the country is once again drawn into the context of the international system.

The long-standing US presence in Afghanistan's geopolitical region and the region's geopolitical systems was aimed at controlling the system's challenges to the country's hegemony. Dominance over key regions of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East was critical to US security strategies. Meanwhile, the great powers of the system could not tolerate such a colorful presence, and a strategic confrontation began between the United States and the great powers of the system, such as China and Russia. Russia has been at the forefront of its agenda and foreign policy because of its strategic culture and throughout its geopolitical history because it attempts to restore its position in the international system as a superpower alongside the United States. It knows its own interests and strives to target American interests in the region and to fill its place in the region's geopolitical systems.

China, referred to in the American doctrine as the sleeping dragon, is one of the countries struggling to emerge as a hegemon in the international system. Although there are optimistic and pessimistic views about China, pessimistic realists believe that China is out of control and has been able to rise to a position that could easily challenge American hegemony. Accordingly, for China, the US presence in regional geopolitical systems such as Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East is intolerable, and China is trying to create challenges for this presence. The strategic confrontation between China and the United States can be seen in the political, economic, and sometimes military aspects in this region. Given the existing structural challenges, the United States' security strategy in Afghanistan is defined and redefined based on control and confrontation of major powers such as China and Russia, establishing regional bases and networks in Central and South Asia to avoid structural pressures of the international system.



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