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Strategic Interests and Geopolitical Considerations: Assessing the Importance of Afghanistan for the US Post-Withdrawal

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to understand the US's strategic interests, political goals, and geopolitical considerations in Afghanistan post-US military occupation, highlighting its strategic value for the US, given its connection to Central Asia, South Asia, China, and Russia, and its importance to US. This study used qualitative research to conduct a content analysis of the US's strategic interests and geopolitical considerations in Afghanistan post-withdrawal, using the theories of realism offensive and defensive to determine the value of Afghanistan for the US in the region, thereby revealing US's clear strategic interests. Afghanistan helped as a US strategic base, reducing China, India and Russia's influence in the region, promoting its weapons industry, energy resource, indirect engagement and diplomatic initiatives, counter-terrorism, and non-proliferation and regional stability. The US also established a military presence and stable government in Afghanistan, focusing on US interests. Afghanistan has become a battleground for great powers like US, India, China, and Russia, who has used its strategic location for their own interests. The US has worked for its interests in Afghanistan for 20 years, and its policy changes and goals remain safe after withdrawal. However, their interests remain constant. The Afghan government and future generations must recognize Afghanistan's significance for US strategic interests and geopolitical considerations. US's priorities and policies change in the region, and when regional and great powers pose challenges, US's presence in Afghanistan becomes possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Realists suggest power and self-interest influence states' foreign policy decisions (Sørensen *et al.*, 2022), with the US strategic interests in Afghanistan influenced by its location, resources, and potential regional stability. Afghanistan's strategic location at the Asia-Pacific crossroads allows for regional power projection and trade routes, its rich mineral deposits; including copper, gold, and lithium, enhance economic power. Stability in Afghanistan influences neighboring countries' security, prevents terrorism and extremism, and poses threats to the US and its allies. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was motivated by al-Qaeda's safe haven status and 9/11 threats (Gojree, 2015). The US aimed to eliminate the Taliban, prevent terrorist resurgences, and promote stability. The US also trained and assisted the Afghan government (Hafiza, 2023). Realism in understanding US strategic interests in Afghanistan is limited as it overlooks the role of ideology, domestic politics, and non-state actors in shaping foreign policy. Moral considerations, democracy promotion, global leadership credibility, domestic politics, and non-state actors like the Afghan people and Taliban also played significant roles. After the Soviet Union's defeat, the United States identified Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Afghanistan as Rouge regimes, viewing them as significant obstacles to national interests and aiming to eliminate those (Idrees & Anwar, 2017). During the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the US funded the Mujahideen, but after the defeat, the US left Afghanistan in a civil war, with informal interactions with the Taliban government (Mishra, 2023). The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1267, creating the al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee, linking the two terrorist entities and imposing sanctions on their funding, travel, and arms shipments, following al-Qaeda's ascendancy and the Taliban's sanctuary (Lyle, 2004). Al-Qaeda hijacks four commercial planes, causing 3,000 deaths. Despite Afghanistan being their base, none of the hijackers is Afghan nationals. U.S. President George W. Bush vows to win the war against terrorism and targets al-Qaeda and bin Laden in Afghanistan. Bush calls on the Taliban regime to deliver al-Qaeda leaders (Idrees & Anwar, 2017). US attacked Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 due to their weak economic and military status. Iran and North Korea, with their military strength, were considered perfect for invasion. US's strategy of overthrowing them with orange revolutions and pressures has not been successful (Lyle, 2004). On September 18, 2001, President Bush signed a joint resolution authorizing force against terrorists, leading to sweeping terrorism measures such as the invasion of Afghanistan, eavesdropping, and setting up the Guantanamo Bay detention camp (Mishra, 2023). On November 9, 2001, the Taliban regime collapsed after losing Mazar-e-Sharif to Uzbek forces, and strongholds crumbled after coalition and Northern Alliance offensives. The UN Security Council passes Resolution 1378, establishing a transitional administration and inviting peacekeeping forces (Thomas, 2023). Following Kabul's fall in 2001, the United Nations invited Afghan factions without the Taliban to a conference in Bonn, Germany. The Northern Alliance and former king's group signed the Bonn Agreement with Iran's support. The agreement installed Hamid Karzai as interim administration head and established

ISAF (Xenia & Michael, 2014). The Chairperson of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan, Karzai, is selected to head the transitional government. He returned to Afghanistan after 9/11 to resist the Taliban. Some observers accuse him of corruption. The Northern Alliance, dominated by ethnic Tajiks, checks presidential powers (Thomas, 2023). Afghan President Karzai and US President Bush declare their countries strategic partners, granting US access to Afghan military facilities for the war against terror and extremism. The alliance aims to strengthen ties and ensure Afghanistan's security, democracy, and prosperity. President Obama unveils a new strategy linking Afghanistan's success to a stable Pakistan, aiming to disrupt al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan. The plan includes increased aid to Pakistan, strict progress measurement, and additional soldiers for Afghan training. Afghan President Karzai supports the strategy (Xenia & Michael, 2014). US has approved \$450 million for Pakistan, a move that was previously stopped due to Trump's South Asia strategy. The funds are intended to combat terrorism and maintain nuclear weapons, with special significance for Afghanistan (Carolynne, 2022). U.S. Marines launch a major offensive in southern Afghanistan, targeting Taliban insurgency. The operation aims to restore government services, strengthen local police forces, and protect civilians (Thomas, 2023). NATO member countries agree to hand over security in Afghanistan to Afghan forces by 2014, starting in July 2011. The transition process will coincide with a drawdown of US troops, but concerns remain about the ability of Afghan forces to take over (Carolynne, 2022). U.S. forces in Pakistan, sparking debates about continuing the Afghanistan war, kill Al-Qaeda leader bin Laden. As President Obama withdraws surge troops, lawmakers call for a hastened withdrawal, while analysts argue for sustained military engagement. Afghan President Karzai emphasizes international forces should focus on the Pakistan border (Raj, 2022). Relations between the United States and the Taliban have been complex and fraught with tension since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan in response to the September 11 attacks, which were orchestrated by the Taliban's ally, al-Qaeda (Ghiasy, 2021). The United States quickly ousted the Taliban from power, but the group has since regrouped and continued to wage an insurgency against the Afghan government and its international allies. In recent years, the United States has sought to negotiate with the Taliban in an effort to find a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. The two sides have held several rounds of talks, but progress has been slow. The Taliban has refused to renounce violence and has insisted on retaining control of its territory in Afghanistan (Joshua, 2022). The United States had also been concerned about the Taliban's links to al-Qaeda. The group had denied harboring al-Qaeda leaders, but there was evidence that al-Qaeda members had continued to operate in Afghanistan with the Taliban's knowledge and support (Jakhar, 2022). The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 for several reasons. One reason was to achieve its ideological goals by combating terrorism, which it believed originated from the Middle East countries (Mishra, 2023). Afghanistan's geopolitical position, being close to the Middle East and Central Asia, made it a strategic platform for the US to establish military bases, protect



its interests in the region, particularly in relation to oil, and gas resources (Khaliq, 2023). Additionally, the US saw Afghanistan as a bridge to its geopolitical interests in Central Asia, but its policies based on democracy and human rights failed, leading to the search for an overriding global threat, which emerged after the 9/11 attacks (Laurel & Miller, 2022). The US's militaristic approach culminated in the War on Terror, but the mission faced challenges due to the complex security environment and the geopolitical thrust underlying it (Khaliq, 2023). Ultimately, the US invasion of Afghanistan aimed to eliminate terrorism and protect its geopolitical interests in the region.

The US motivations for invading Afghanistan in 2001 were multifaceted. One motivation was to retaliate against the terrorist group al Qaeda for their attacks on September 11, 2001 (Raj, 2022). Another motivation was to ensure that Afghanistan would not be used as a safe haven for terrorists in the future (Joshua, 2022). Additionally, the US saw Afghanistan as a strategic location in Central Asia that could serve its geopolitical interests (Yousif & Kakar, 2022). Afghanistan's proximity to the Middle East and Central Asia, which are rich in oil and gas resources, was economically important to the US (Joshua, 2022). The US also aimed to establish military bases in Afghanistan to counter the influence of powers such as Russia, China, and Iran. Overall, the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was driven by a combination of counterterrorism objectives and geopolitical considerations. The consequences of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 were significant. The US and its allies created a powerful central government that focused on resource extraction rather than service provision, leading to a failure of governance and erosion of the Afghan government's legitimacy (Hafiza, 2023). The war witnessed colossal war crimes committed by the US forces, including the killing of innocent civilians, women rapes, and abductions, which caused immense damage to Afghanistan (Joshua, 2022). The invasion also had global repercussions, shifting the balance of power in the Middle East, weakening US influence, and undermining the prestige of the United States (Yousif & Kakar, 2022). Additionally, the US occupation of Afghanistan resulted in a strategic defeat for the United States and its allies, damaging trust in Washington as an alliance partner and undermining the US's reputation (Thomas, 2023). Overall, the consequences of the US invasion of Afghanistan included governance failure, war crimes, geopolitical shifts, and damage to US credibility.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Analyzing of Doha Agreement

The Doha Agreement, officially titled the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, was a peace agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar. The agreement aimed to end the 2001–2021 war in Afghanistan and facilitate the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from the country (Amin, 2021). The United States agreed to withdraw all of its troops and those of its NATO allies from Afghanistan within 14 months of the signing of the agreement. The Taliban pledged not to allow al-Qaeda or any other terrorist group to use Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States or its allies (Farr, 2020). The agreement called for intra-Afghan negotiations between the

Taliban and the Afghan government to form an inclusive political settlement. A comprehensive and permanent ceasefire was to be implemented within 135 days of the signing of the agreement. The agreement included provisions for the release of Taliban prisoners from Afghan custody and the release of Afghan government prisoners from Taliban custody (Ibrahimi, 2022). The Doha Agreement was a controversial agreement, with some critics arguing that it gave the Taliban too much power and that it did not adequately address the issue of human rights in Afghanistan. However, others praised the agreement for ending the war in Afghanistan and for paving the way for a political settlement (Farr, 2020). In the months following the signing of the Agreement, the Taliban continued to make advances on the battlefield, taking control of large swathes of territory and besieging major cities (Amin, 2021). The Afghan government, meanwhile, struggled to maintain its grip on power, and its forces were often demoralized and poorly equipped. In August 2021, the Taliban launched a major offensive and quickly captured the capital of Kabul, ousting the Afghan government and taking control of the country. The collapse of the Afghan government was a stunning and unexpected development, and it raised serious questions about the insight of the Doha Agreement (Farr, 2020). The Doha Agreement has had a significant impact on the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban is now the de facto ruler of the country, and it has imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law. The human rights situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, and women and girls in particular have seen their freedoms curtailed. The agreement also had significant implications for the future of Afghanistan. The withdrawal of US and NATO troops created a power vacuum that the Taliban quickly exploited, leading to their rapid takeover of the country in August 2021.

The Taliban's return to power has had a devastating impact on Afghanistan, with the country plunging into a humanitarian crisis and facing a resurgence of terrorist activity. The Taliban's victory has emboldened other extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and it has raised concerns about the stability of the region (Ibrahimi, 2022). The future of Afghanistan is uncertain, but the Doha Agreement has played a major role in shaping the country's current trajectory. The agreement has had both positive and negative consequences, and its long-term impact will depend on how the Taliban runs the country and how the international community responds to its rule (Amin, 2021). The Doha Agreement remains a contentious issue, with many questioning its effectiveness in bringing peace to Afghanistan. The long-term consequences of the agreement are still unfolding, and it remains to be seen how the international community will respond to the Taliban's rule. Regarding realism the Doha Agreement is a self-interest action, signed in February 2020, and significantly influenced the US strategic interests in Afghanistan, with both positive and negative implications for offensive and defensive realism (Farr, 2020). Offensive realists view the Doha Agreement as a setback for US power in Central Asia, as it grants legitimacy to the Taliban and could lead to terrorist groups. However, offensive realists also see it as a strategic retreat, allowing the US to maintain regional influence through alliances with India and Pakistan. Defensive realists view the Doha Agreement as



a chance to reduce terrorism threats from Afghanistan and promote stability in the region. They believe the agreement could moderate Taliban behavior and create a more secure Afghanistan (Khan, 2020). However, they also acknowledge risks such as potential Taliban non-compliance and concerns about human rights. The Doha Agreement has affected US strategic interests in Afghanistan, and it is too early to predict its long-term consequences. The future of relations between the United States and the Taliban is uncertain. The two sides are diametrically opposed on many issues, and it is unclear whether they can reach a mutually acceptable agreement. If the conflict in Afghanistan continues, it is likely to have a significant impact on relations between the United States and the Taliban for years to come. The agreement has propositions to US, to improve relations with the Taliban. First, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan would be a more secure environment for the United States and its allies. Second, improved relations with the Taliban could lead to a reduction in violence in Afghanistan. Third, improved relations could also lead to the Taliban renouncing violence and accepting the Afghan constitution.

2.2. Us Strategic Interests and Geopolitical Consideration

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States' primary strategic interest in Afghanistan was to eliminate the Taliban regime, which had harbored al-Qaeda and provided a safe haven for terrorist activities. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was seen as a necessary step to prevent future terrorist attacks and to promote stability in the region (Zahir, 2022). Alongside counterterrorism objectives, the United States also sought to foster democracy and human rights in Afghanistan, but after the withdrawal, the US government declined it (Jakhar, 2022). The establishment of a stable and democratic government in Afghanistan was seen as a long-term solution to the country's instability and as a bulwark against the spread of extremism.

In 2014, the United States transitioned from an occupying force to a supporting role, providing training and assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The goal was to enable the ANSF to take over the responsibility of securing Afghanistan and to prevent the Taliban from re-emerging as a dominant force (Nazari, 2020). The United States' military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a significant shift in the country's strategic landscape (Ayalon *et al.*, 2022). The Taliban, which had been steadily gaining ground, capitalized on the power vacuum created by the withdrawal and quickly seized control of major cities and eventually the capital, Kabul. The Taliban's return to power has raised concerns about the country's future stability and its potential to serve as a breeding ground for terrorism. The United States and its allies have maintained a limited presence in Afghanistan to facilitate the evacuation of Afghans and to provide humanitarian assistance (Sumit, 2022). After the Soviet Union's defeat, Russia faced two options in international politics: joining the European Union or NATO. The US expanded NATO from Western Europe to Eastern Europe, while China was deemed economically less desirable. If there were a positive change in China's economy and people's lives improved, the US would increase their demands for a better life (Zahir, 2022). The Orange Revolutions,

promoting democracy, human rights, and other fundamental issues, were popular parts of US strategy. US donated based on these positive political slogans. The Islamic world was a major challenge for US, as it aimed to exploit reserves, minerals, oil, gas, and energy in the region. These resources were considered more important than anything else was for US (Charles, 2022). In 2001, US's long-term strategy was to establish a military presence in Central or South Asia, focusing on countries under Soviet influence—Pakistan with nuclear weapons, Iran with strong revolutionaries, and Afghanistan as a weaker country. Afghanistan has a unique political-strategic position on the world map (Zahir, 2022). The national interests of regional and international players are always attracting attention for a variety of reasons. Afghanistan's geographical location has remained very important throughout history. Afghanistan has exclusive bridge ability on the world map between South Asia and Central Asia. The USA is the only great power who get the regional hegemony, and the main goal of the USA is to establish the status quo of the international system and, in front of potential states, create hurdles that cannot compete with it (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The US has spent an estimated \$2.26 trillion on the war in Afghanistan over the past two decades, including military operations \$1.04 trillion, reconstruction efforts \$130 billion, veterans' care \$820 billion, and interest payments \$530 billion on borrowed funds. The cost has been steadily increasing, from \$500 billion in 2001 to \$2 trillion by 2021. The war has also significantly affected the US economy, costing the country \$2.5 trillion in lost economic output, Agreeing to the Congressional Budget Office (Karina & Karoline, 2022. Elena, 2021). The war has been a long and costly conflict for the US, and as it continues, the costs are likely to continue to rise. The cost of the war has been a significant burden on the US economy.

Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics were major contractors for the war in Afghanistan. Lockheed Martin was the largest contractor, receiving over \$45 billion in contracts for weapons and equipment such as F-16 fighter jets, helicopters, and missiles. Boeing supplied aircraft like C-17 cargo planes, Osprey tilt-rotors, and drones, receiving over \$30 billion in contracts. Raytheon supplied missiles and other weapons systems, receiving over \$25 billion. Northrop Grumman supplied aircraft and defense systems, receiving over \$20 billion. General Dynamics supplied armored vehicles and ground-based systems, receiving over \$15 billion in contracts. These companies contributed significantly to the US military's operations in Afghanistan (Karina & Karoline, 2022. Vinokourov, 2021). Private military companies (PMCs) played a crucial role in the Afghanistan War, providing security, training, and logistical support to the U.S. military and Afghan government forces. DynCorp International, one of the largest PMCs in Afghanistan, offered services such as security, training, aviation, and logistics. However, it was involved in controversial incidents like the 2007 Baghdad shooting and the killing of 17 Afghan civilians in 2009. Blackwater USA, another major PMC in Afghanistan, provided security and training to US and Afghan forces. Triple Canopy, a major provider of security services in Afghanistan, was involved in several incidents. Xe



Services, formed from Blackwater USA, continued to provide security and training services in Afghanistan but faced legal challenges (Elena, 2021; Vinokourov, 2021).

China is continually increasing its economic growth and trying to dominate Asia in the way of the USA, which got the domination in its western hemisphere and hegemony, (Zahir, 2022), but the USA checks on it and never wants that China get regional hegemony. Russia also has an economic and strategic interest in Afghanistan and this region. The main objective of great powers is to control the world's resources, to get and catch the maximum wealth (Mearsheimer, 2001). Afghanistan's importance has more increased because it is located nearest to de-facto nuclear states like China and Russia and de jure nuclear states like India and Pakistan (Zahir, 2022). To deal with both conventional and non-conventional threats and pursue its geopolitical objectives, US followed a militaristic approach. To meet diversified threats, many states increasingly relied on the United States for either the actual provision of security or the training and equipment necessary to perform security functions (Mearsheimer, 2001). Afghanistan's mineral deposits and concluded that Afghanistan can help solve the supply problem of rare earth elements.

Almost after eleven years of Soviet withdrawal, the USA got the legitimate permit for intervention in Afghanistan in the backdrop of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and toppled the Taliban regime (1996–2001) (Sattar, 2013). It became apparent that the US had not only to deal with terrorism; it had to contain the power of Iran, China, and Russia and diversify energy supplies to contain the dominance of these powers in energy politics (Charles, 2022). China and the USA had divergent interests at all three stages: strategic, political, and economic. Strategically, the US military presence in Afghanistan and its surroundings irked China because now the USA and China share the Wakhan Corridor. Politically, the USA is promoting the Indian role in Afghanistan's internal affairs, which is in conflict with China's expanding influence in South Asia. Economically, China has economic interests and wants access to mineral resources in Afghanistan, but here, the USA has interests to compete (Tasleem *et al.*, 2021). The Russian expert and strategist General Leonid Ivashov has stated that the USA's aim is not to promote democracy nor restore order, but to be using Afghanistan as a strategic bridgehead where it could keep putting pressure on China, Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia. Geopolitical studies emphasize how geographical configurations such as location, climate, natural resources, population, and physical terrain determine state foreign policy (Grygiel, 2006).

The United States of US is the most influential and determinant country, which has affected the geopolitical setting of Afghanistan. Vividly, it is quite interesting that, since 1979, Afghanistan has become the focal point of US geopolitical interest (Hilali, 2017). Treacherously, the USs had supported the Mujahidin with weaponry and logistics against the USSR's intervention. However, the 9\11 showed, it was exposed that the incumbent Taliban government had linkage with the notorious terror group Al-Qaeda (Taj, 2011), which was utterly responsible for an exterminated terror attack on the mainland of the USA. The Bush administration and NATO declared the global war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Post-9\11, the

principal objective of the U.S. in Afghanistan has been to prevent a terrorist attack on the USA and become a peril to its people and assets, or U.S. allies elsewhere (Mir, 2010). Further, ensure that Afghanistan's territory is not used to sponsor terrorism worldwide. Other US interests in Afghanistan are to maintain regional balance of power. Curb and crack down Chinese, Iranian, and Russian influence in South Asia, Central Asia, and oil-rich West Asia (Amiri & Habibyar, 2023). In the post-Soviet era, wielding sufficient influence in Afghanistan was considered vital to US strategic ambitions for multiple reasons. First, its geographic contiguity with most of the Central Asian states was considered instrumental in facilitating a greater US role in the energy-rich Central Asian region. Second, it could provide an alternative route to transport Central Asian energy resources to the world market, bypassing Russia and Iran, and therefore be deemed instrumental in denting their regional influence. Third, military bases in Afghanistan and in the surrounding region were considered important by US foreign policy makers to check the strategic moves of Russia, China, and Iran, the primary conventional threats in the post-Cold War era. Fourth, the geo-strategic location of Afghanistan was vital to allowing the US to develop multidimensional strategies based on the ocean as well as land (Ghiasy, 2021; Nazari, 2020). The United States' primary strategic interest in Afghanistan stems from its history as a breeding ground for terrorist organizations, particularly the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, which were orchestrated by al-Qaeda while operating from Afghanistan's territory, highlighted the direct threat posed by Afghanistan to US national security (Natalia, 2021). The United States has long seen Afghanistan as a haven for terrorists, and the Doha Agreement is intended to reduce the threat from these groups. The Taliban has agreed to prevent terrorists from using Afghan soil to plan or carry out attacks against the United States or its allies.

Afghanistan's strategic location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia makes it a critical player in regional stability. A stable Afghanistan is less likely to harbor terrorist groups or become a source of instability that could spill over into neighboring countries. The United States has a stake in ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a base for anti-US or destabilizing activities (Saima, 2023). Afghanistan is a strategically important country located at the crossroads of Asia. Stability in Afghanistan is important to prevent the spread of violence and instability to neighboring countries. The Doha Agreement is intended to help create a stable Afghanistan that is not a threat to its neighbors.

The United States has long championed human rights and democracy promotion as core values of its foreign policy. Afghanistan's history of human rights abuses, including the suppression of women's rights, has been a cause for concern for the US government (Sumit, 2022). While the US has not always been successful in advocating for human rights in Afghanistan, it has consistently used its influence to push for progress in this area. The United States has a long history of promoting human rights around the world, and it has been a strong advocate for human rights in Afghanistan (Sergei, 2022). The Doha Agreement includes provisions for protecting human rights, and the United States will continue to work with the



Afghan government to ensure that human rights are respected. The Taliban's human rights record has deteriorated since the group seized power, particularly with regard to women's rights. The US withdrawal has made it more challenging to pressure the Taliban to respect human rights, and the group has shown little willingness to do so.

The United States has had strategic considerations in Afghanistan, such as preventing the spread of illicit drugs, promoting economic development, and combating corruption. These issues are interrelated with the broader goals of countering terrorism and preserving regional stability. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 has undoubtedly affected its strategic interests in the country (Wu, 2022; ZAHIR, 2022). The Taliban's return to power has raised concerns about the resurgence of terrorism and the erosion of human rights. The US will need to continue to engage with Afghanistan through diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian channels to mitigate these risks and safeguard its remaining interests in the country. Offensive realists argue that states are competitive and constantly strive to increase their power to survive in an anarchic international system (Dunne *et al.*, 2021). The US's strategic interests in Afghanistan are driven by maintaining its hegemonic power and preventing rival powers from arising. They emphasize Afghanistan's strategic location and resource wealth as valuable assets for the US economy. The 2001 US invasion and subsequent engagement in Afghanistan aim to consolidate US dominance and build a strong, compliant Afghan state. Defensive realists argue that states prioritize security and minimize threats to survival (Sørensen *et al.*, 2022). The US's strategic interests in Afghanistan are driven by preventing terrorist and extremist threats, promoting stability, and preventing instability from spilling into neighboring countries. This includes training and equipping Afghan security forces to build a secure, unexploited Afghanistan. Both offensive and defensive realism offer insights into the US's strategic interests and geopolitical considerations in Afghanistan, but the weight of these perspectives has likely shifted over time. The United States is concerned about China's growing influence in Afghanistan. The Doha Agreement includes provisions for preventing the Taliban from providing sanctuary to terrorist groups that could threaten China.

The USA would benefit from staying in Afghanistan and directly connecting with the Taliban by establishing routine diplomatic engagement, implementing a development assistance program, and imposing tailored sanctions (Nandan *et al.*, 2022). This approach would help protect US interests in the region, including preventing Afghanistan from becoming a base for transnational terrorist groups, securing the departure of at-risk Afghans associated with the US occupation, and reducing anti-Western sentiment (Joshua, 2022). Additionally, engaging with the Taliban can provide an opportunity for international cooperation to counter terrorism in Afghanistan, in line with international law (Charles, 2022). By maintaining a presence and actively engaging with the Taliban, the USA can contribute to the establishment and recovery of the new Afghan government, which is currently facing an economic crisis and a lack of international aid and support (Jakhar, 2022). Remaining in Afghanistan and directly connecting with the Taliban

would result in the US losing the international consensus that aid should not be given to the Taliban government until it addresses issues such as inclusive government and the presence of foreign extremists (Thomas, 2023). It would also undermine Russia's efforts to assist Afghanistan and advertise its influence in Central Asia (Saima, 2023). Additionally, it would unsettle regional governments, especially China and Russia, who are trying to make diplomatic and economic inroads (Manish *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, it would risk tamping down anti-Western sentiment and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a base for transnational terrorist groups (Ayalon *et al.*, 2022). Lastly, it would make it practically more difficult to protect the fundamental rights of the people of Afghanistan and could lead to adverse outcomes for millions of people (Khaliq, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative research to analyze the US's strategic interests and geopolitical considerations in Afghanistan post-withdrawal. It used reliable data sources, an analytical discussion framework, and content analysis to provide valuable insights into Afghanistan's strategic location and highlight critical aspects of US interests. The theory of realism is used to determine the value of Afghanistan for the US in the region.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

20 years ago, US interests proposed attacking Afghanistan, ending Taliban rule, and establishing a new government due to the 9/11 incident. The US claimed al-Qaeda was responsible and should be punished. After 20 years, the US ended its presence, as Osama bin Laden was dead and the Taliban pledged to cut ties with al-Qaeda and prevent invasion. Afghanistan could be used against other countries, especially US. The United States prioritizes human rights, women's rights, civil liberties, and democracy, which is reflected in its military, intelligence, and political efforts. However, this approach often conflicts with human rights and democratic principles, affecting the legitimacy of every US war and affecting the history of US military, intelligence, and political efforts. US believes al-Qaeda has weakened, and Taliban pledges non-threatening behavior in Afghanistan. Military presence no longer necessary, but interests remain relevant. Afghanistan remains crucial to the United States for counter-terrorism, natural resources, regional stability, countering Chinese and Russian influence, non-proliferation, weapons industry development, military bases, no military presence, creating committed private military in the Asia, and geopolitical considerations, even after the withdrawal of US troops in 2021. The country's mountainous terrain and porous borders have long been a haven for terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and the ISIS. The US withdrawal has raised concerns about the potential resurgence of these groups, which could pose a significant threat to the US security interests and allies in the region. A stable Afghanistan can prevent the spread of extremism, promote trade and economic development, and enhance cooperation among regional nations. Additionally, Afghanistan's location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia gives it strategic importance in terms of trade routes and energy pipelines. Afghanistan's vast natural resources could



also become important to the global economy in the future. However, the US carefully calibrated its engagement with Afghanistan in the post-withdrawal era to promote long-term stability and security. Afghanistan's location has also made it a focus of geopolitical competition among regional powers, including India, Pakistan, China, and Russia. The US navigated this complex environment to maintain its influence and avoid being entangled in regional rivalries. Balancing relationships with these powers is crucial for ensuring regional stability and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a proxy battleground. The US has historically defended human rights and democracy promotion as core values of its foreign policy. Afghanistan's history of human rights abuses, particularly against women and minorities, has been a source of concern for the US government. The US has used its influence to push for progress on human rights and democratic reforms, although with limited success. The United States and Russia have long competed for influence in Afghanistan. The Doha Agreement is intended to create a more stable Afghanistan that is not a proxy for conflict between the United States and Russia. Afghanistan's strategic location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia makes it a critical node in regional security dynamics. The country's proximity to potential terrorist sanctuaries and its history of hosting extremist groups poses a direct threat to US national security and the broader global effort to counter terrorism. The US has long viewed Afghanistan as a key battleground in the War on Terror, seeking to prevent the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and the ISIS. A stable Afghanistan is essential for maintaining regional stability and preventing the spread of instability to neighboring countries. The country's internal conflicts and political instability can have destabilizing consequences for the region, potentially leading to cross-border violence, refugee flows, and the proliferation of weapons and illicit goods. The US has sought to promote stability in Afghanistan to maintain its own interests and those of its regional partners. The drug trade fuels corruption, violence, and instability in the country, while also contributing to the global narcotics market. The US has worked to combat the drug trade and promote alternative livelihoods in Afghanistan, recognizing its impact on security and development.

The United States of US may consider Afghanistan in the future due to strategic interests and geopolitical considerations. If the Taliban provide safe havens to terrorist groups or destabilize the region, the United States may be forced to re-engage militarily. However, if the Taliban moderate their behavior and pursue a more constructive role in Afghanistan, the United States may be more willing to maintain a hands-off approach. The increasing influence of China and Russia in the region may also affect the decision of the US to return to Afghanistan. If China or Russia seek to assert their dominance in Afghanistan, the United States may see the need to resume its military presence to prevent their influence. Public opinion in the United States will also play a role in determining whether the United States will return to Afghanistan. If there is strong public opposition to a new military intervention, the US government will be less likely to send troops back into the country. The US military is currently facing a number of challenges, including budget

constraints and the need to turn its attention to other parts of the world. If the US does not have the resources to start a new war in Afghanistan, it will be impossible to go back. The possibility of US coming to Afghanistan is uncertain. The decision will ultimately be based on a complex assessment of strategic interests and geopolitical considerations at the time. However, the United States will continue to be closely involved in Afghanistan, even if it does not resume a large-scale military presence. Meanwhile, the United States will likely continue to focus on counterterrorism operations, humanitarian assistance, and diplomacy to promote stability in Afghanistan. The US will also work with its allies in the region to coordinate their efforts and ensure that the Taliban does not pose a threat to the security of the region and the world. The US may re-engage militarily in Afghanistan if the Taliban continues to provide a safe haven for terrorist groups or destabilize the region. The rise of China and Russia could also influence the US's decision to return to Afghanistan. Public opinion and the availability of resources also play a role in determining the US's response. The US will work with allies to ensure the Taliban does not pose a threat to regional or global security. The US has realized that its 20-year presence in Afghanistan is not sustainable due to financial cooperation with Pakistan against terrorism, Afghan government expenses, and military presence. The US needs a stable government to maintain the US economy and maintain interests in Central and South Asia. The US has not considered other alternatives to protect its interests in Asia, but instead chose other regions to strengthen its arms industry, to sell arms there and avoid direct involvement. This decision highlights the need for a permanent government that balances stability and interests in Asia. The exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn and republican government from Doha agreements, suggesting that this exclusion may lead to unfavorable outcomes similar to those of the Bonn Agreement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the US's approach to Afghanistan is shaped by a combination of strategic, geopolitical, and humanitarian considerations. These factors shape its long-term goals, diplomatic engagement, military interventions, and humanitarian assistance programs in the country. The US must carefully balance these interests to maintain its influence, prevent the resurgence of terrorism, and promote stability and development in Afghanistan. The United States can effectively balance its strategic interests and geopolitical considerations in Afghanistan by pursuing a nuanced and multifaceted approach that combines diplomatic engagement, economic assistance, and targeted support for civil society organizations. Twenty years later, China and Russia are expanding their influence and challenging US hegemony in the Middle East, with India being the only country forced to travel with the US. The US is pursuing goals in Afghanistan, including preventing its territory from being used against it, reducing Pakistan's nuclear threat, and ensuring a stability, constant Afghan government that does not view US as a strategic enemy, despite the Taliban's significant role. The interests of regional countries and US goals in Afghanistan are closely related, with countries viewing stability as their own interest. The US believes regional countries should



participate more in peace and stability. Pakistan seeks stability, economic development, and connectivity with Central Asian markets after US military end, aiming to protect interests, avoid threats, and benefit from energy resources. Pakistan seeks stability in Afghanistan, avoiding Taliban secession, while China seeks China-Pakistan Economic Corridor connectivity, while Russia fears Afghanistan becoming a drug production hub. US military presence in Afghanistan benefits China and Russia, avoiding conflict, while Iran needs stability for economic growth and preventing warring groups, affecting Pakistan, China, Russia, Central Asia, and Iran. Now, US understand to change a game, need to transfer power and found a stable and reliable group to keep US interests. The United States' strategic importance of Afghanistan has evolved since the 2001 invasion, shifting from dismantling the Taliban regime to promoting stability and democracy. The country's porous borders and rugged terrain could make it a safe haven for terrorist groups, posing a threat to the US and its allies. Afghanistan's role in regional stability is crucial, as it is located at a strategic crossroads between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. A constant Afghanistan could prevent the spread of violence and instability to neighboring countries. Its untapped natural resources could make it an attractive destination for foreign investment and trade, benefiting both the Afghan economy and US businesses. It could also help counter drug trafficking, as it is the world's largest producer of opium poppy. A stable Afghanistan could also promote human rights and democracy, aligning with US foreign policy goals. The US will need to engage with Afghanistan through diplomacy, military assistance, and economic cooperation to support these goals.

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