T.C.
ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY
GARDUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE UNENDING WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: ANALYZING THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DYNAMICS BEHIND THE FAILURE

MASTER'S THESIS

Ahmad Zubair NABIZADA

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ANKARA, 2022

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Asst. Prof. Dr. Merve Seren YEŞİLTAŞ

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APPROVAL PAGE

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PLAGIARISM PAGE

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work; otherwise I accept all legal responsibility. 02/02/2022.

Ahmad Zubair NABIZADA

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ABSTRACT

The Unending War in Afghanistan: Analyzing the Internal and External Dynamics Behind the Failure

Afghanistan is a mountainous, landlocked country in South-Central Asia in a geopolitical and geostrategic location that connects the Middle East with Central Asia and the Indian Continent. The country's name has become synonymous with violence and terror, and this has been undergone due to the civil wars internal and external interventions, as being one of the volatile countries in Asia. Like many others around the world, Afghanistan's conflict highlights the diversity of state and non-state players and the intersection nature of their goals. The Afghanistan conflict is more than merely a terrorist, extremist, or battle between ethnic groups. But is the result of many dynamics that contributed to the continuation of war, including strategic, proxy war, nationalist, economic, religious, ethnicity, drug, and criminal issues.

September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. led the eyes to turn to Afghanistan, and the U.S. and other international communities launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against Taliban-led Afghanistan. The operation was aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime and stop Afghanistan from being a base of global terrorism. After 20 years of intervention, Afghanistan is still far from safe, no sign of peace and stability has been seen, and the Afghan people are still living in poverty. Even worse, the Taliban continued its terrorist activities and took territorial control of the country on 15 August 2021. This study examines the dynamics of continuous war in Afghanistan as a set of actors and factors since 2001. In doing so, it examines the evolution and ramifications of internal and external dynamics that influence the ongoing conflict and the role of regional and global power struggle in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Conflict, Taliban, U.S, NATO, Al-Qaeda.

ÖZET

Afganistan'da Bitmeyen Savaş: Başarısızlığın Arkasındaki İç ve Dış Dinamiklerin Analizi

Afganistan, jeopolitik ve jeostratejik konumuyla Güney Orta Asya'da, Orta Asya ve Hindistan'ı bağlayan dağlık ve karayla çevrili bir ülkedir. Ülkenin adı, Asya'daki son derece istikrarsız ülkelerden biri olarak iç savaşın yanı sıra iç ve dış müdahaleler nedeniyle şiddet ve terör ile eş anlamlı bir hâle gelmiştir. Afganistan çatışması bir terörist, aşırılık yanlısı veya etnik gruplar arasındaki bir savaştan daha fazlasıdır. Bu; stratejik üstünlük, vekalet savaşları, milliyetçilik, ekonomik ve dinî ihtilaflar, etnisite, uyuşturucu ticareti ve kriminal konular gibi savaşın devam etmesine neden olan birçok dinamiğin sonucudur. Afganistan çatışması, dünyadaki diğer bölgelerdeki gibi devlet ve devlet dışı aktörlerin çeşitliliğinin yanı sıra bu aktörlerin hedeflerinin kesişme noktasını da temsil etmektedır.

11 Eylül 2001 ABD'ye yönelik terörist saldırılar, gözlerin Afganistan'a çevrilmesine neden oldu ve ABD ile diğer uluslararası topluluklar, Taliban liderliğindeki Afganistan'a karşı Kalıcı Özgürlük Operasyonu'nu (Operation Enduring Freedom) başlattı. Operasyon, Taliban rejimini devirmeyi ve Afganistan'ın küresel terörizmin üssü olmasını engellemeyi amaçlıyordu. 20 yıllık bir müdahalenin ardından Afganistan hâlâ güvenlikten uzak bir ülke, barış ve istikrar belirtisi görülmüyor ve Afgan halkı hâlâ yoksulluk içinde yaşıyor. Daha da kötüsü, Taliban terörist faaliyetlerine devam etti ve 15 Ağustos 2021'de ülkenin toprak kontrolünü ele geçirdi. Bu araştırma, 2001'den bu yana Afganistan'daki sürekli savaşın dinamiklerini bir dizi aktör ve faktör olarak incelemektedir. Bunu yaparken devam eden çatışmayı etkileyen iç ve dış dinamiklerin evrimini, sonuçlarını ve ayrıca Afganistan'daki bölgesel ve kuresel güç mücadelesinin rolünü incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afganistan, Çatışma, Taliban, ABD, NATO, El-Kaide.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	: Afghan National Army
ANDSF	: Afghan National Defence and Security Forces
ANBP	: Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program
CASA-1000	: Central Asia-South Asia Power Project
CEO	: Chief Executive Officer
CIA	: Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	: Commonwealth of Independent States
DDR	: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
FATA	: Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
IEC	: Independent Election Commission
IGC	: Intergovernmental Commission
IMU	: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IWA	: Integrity Watch Afghanistan
ISAF	: International Security Assistance Force
ISI	: Inter-Services Intelligence
ISIS-K	: Islamic State of Khorasan Province
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
NSIA	: National Statistics and Information Authority
NUG	: National Unity Government
OEF	: Operation Enduring Freedom
PDPA	: People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PRT	: Provincial Reconstruction Teams
RSM	: Resolute Support Mission
SCO	: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SIGAR	: Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction
TAPI	: Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India
TTP	: Tehrik-Taliban Pakistan
TUTAP	: Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan & Pakistan
UN	: United Nation
UNDP	: United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	: United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	: UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	: United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	: United Nations Security Council
USINDOPACOM	: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Afghanistan has been the cradle of civilizations and the transit area of cultures since prehistoric times, and strong states have emerged from this land throughout history. Despite historical conflicts and geopolitical issues, Afghanistan nations have always managed to preserve their freedom and national identity due to neighbors with significant countries. Afghanistan has a reputation for being a challenging country to manage. Despite winning wars and making gains into the region, empires and global powers have failed to conquer the modern territory of Afghanistan, earning the area the nickname of "Graveyard of Empires." Afghanistan is extremely difficult to conquer due to the three elements (Seren, 2021).

Firstly, since Afghanistan is located on the predominant land route connecting Central Asia, South Asia, and Iran with the Middle East, it has been conquered and colonized by various tribes, most of whom were mutually opposed and hostile to each other. Secondly, due to the greater incidence of invasion and prominence of tribalism in the country. Thirdly, Afghanistan's geographical environment makes conquest and governance incredibly difficult, reinforcing the country's tribalism (Pillalamarri, 2017). Scientific excavations show that around 6,000 years ago, humans had established a civilization on the territory of Afghanistan and in neighboring lands (Habibi, 1967, p. 2). Due to its geographical importance, Afghanistan is known as the "Parade of Conquerors" and the "Heart of Asia," this country is the crossing point of Central Asia, West, and South Asia.

In the land called today's Afghanistan, there was a settlement 3000 B.C, and it had a prosperous land and crowded cities. These lands were previously named Ariana and Khorasan. This country did not only attract ancient civilizations with its insurmountable mountains and rugged terrain, but it also influenced the end of the Cold War, the competition between the two great powers of the 20th century. Even in modern times, its geopolitical importance is considered highly authoritative. The territory of Afghanistan used to be a gateway to the conquest of India for Alexander the Great and the Mongol invaders. In the nineteenth century, it was the only frontier separating the sphere of

influence and interests of the two great British and Russian empires. In the twentieth century, it was a source of concern and debate between the Soviet Union and the U.S., two new superpowers that sought to strengthen and expand their influence in Central and South Asia. After all, Afghanistan has paid a heavy toll on this. Each war and invasion has left a great deal of destruction and turmoil that are not easy to overcome afterward. History has shown that no one can rule this country using military force. But the defeat of the Great Powers has never really made freedom possible for the country and the nation. On the contrary, various governments have been formed with external support (Tanin, 2005, p. 8).

1.2. Introduction

Afghanistan is strategically located at a crossroad of geopolitics and geostrategic importance in Central Asia and South Asia. On the one hand, it is near to global power such as Russia. On the other side, it shares borders with a country like China, which has emerged as a significant and rising player in recent years, and fast-emerging countries like Pakistan, Iran, and India. Afghanistan has been frequently occupied by great nations such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union and other sovereign powers simply because of its position. The studies of events in Afghanistan over the past forty years have largely neglected the role and intervention of major external forces in the formation of political currents of this country and internal conflicts.

However, one of the most significant outcomes of World War II, which influenced world politics, was the outbreak of the Cold War on the ideological axis. After World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed with each other, without entering into a direct war, to divide the world's economic spheres. This global trend has strongly influenced Afghanistan's political movements. Afghanistan’s government was forced to turn to Moscow to gain Soviet support after the collapse of the British Empire. The condition of Russia's consent to the monarchy in Afghanistan was to pave the way for pro-Soviet communist movement activity in Afghanistan. In 1964, Afghanistan's New Democracy-based Constitution recognized the actions of political parties and led to the birth of political parties (Jafri & Jafri, 2014, p. 169). These parties were influenced by the rival movements of the two powers, east and west.

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) began to work, following the line of thought of the Soviet Union. Islamic Movements of Afghanistan (also known as

Nohzat-e Islami) started a series of reactive activities on the Afghan political scene against Marxist Left parties. The rivalry and conflict between the two movements have changed the political sphere in Afghanistan. The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 transformed the country into a major theater of a worldwide battle, bringing together lots of new regional and international players to fight in the towns and valleys of the country. Afghanistan's war moved from anti-Soviet resistance to a proxy struggle between neighboring states and other regional actors. Over time, it grew increasingly complicated, including numerous local and international state and non-state actors (Seren, 2021, pp. 11-14).

After the victory of the Resistance groups (Afghan Mujahideen) in 1992, their bloody struggle for power among themselves prevented the restoration of stability, the restoration of national unity, and the creation of an effective leadership structure. The Mujahideen, whom, with the support of the U.S. and Pakistan, had won the war and struggle after ten years of jihad and armed struggle against the Soviet Red Army and the Soviet-backed government of the PDPA. The Red Army was forced to leave Afghanistan, and the Mujahideen seized power in Kabul in 1992. After 1992, the collapse of the state and society intensified. The central government lost its true meaning as an effective national structure because of the rivalry between Mujahideen and warlord groups. The government, the army, the national economy, and the education system were subjected to collapse and disintegration. As the intensified chaos, the Taliban regime has emerged and took control of the country in 1996 with the support of some foreign forces. The Taliban ruled over about three-quarters of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 implemented a harsh definition of Sharia, or Islamic law (Seren, 2021, pp. 14-16).

Following the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, Afghanistan gained a reputation as a terrorist-supporting country, making it a target for both the U.S. and other Western countries. The U.S. backed Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda, was in Afghanistan, and he conducted a series of operations and intervented in Afghanistan. Following the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan entered a new era, with the signing of the Bonn Agreement in 2001 resulting in the establishment of an interim government. The UN Security Council (UNSC) launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2001 to create interim governance and urge member countries to send peacekeeping forces to maintain stability and aid delivery to the country. The UNSC

established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2001 to preserve the country's security.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed the authority of ISAF in Afghanistan in 2003. Between 2003 to 2009, the number of coalition forces increased from 5,000 to more than 100,000, and in July 2011, Obama set a deadline for the pullout of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. NATO-led the UN-mandated ISAF from August 2003 to December 2014 to allow the Afghan government to exercise its authority throughout the country and build the capacity of Afghan national security forces, including the fight against international terrorism. ISAF was NATO's most challenging and longest mission during 2003-2011, with more than 130,000 troops from 51 NATO members and other nations.

The transition of the security responsibility to Afghanistan's national forces started in 2011, and the ISAF operation was completed in 2014. By the end of 2014, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRTs) had been phased out, and their functions were handed over to Afghan authorities. In January 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to train, provide advice and assistance activities to the security-related ministries and work closely with different elements of the Afghan army, police, and air forces. At the 2016 NATO Summit, Allies decided to strengthen and enhance the partnership with RSM through political dialogue and practical cooperation (Afghnaistan & NATO, 2021).

On February 29, 2020, the Trump administration dealt with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. The U.S. committed to withdrawing all its troops by May 2021 in exchange for the Taliban accepting some conditions, such as no operations on U.S. and coalition forces. According to the deal, the U.S. would reduce its soldiers from 13,000 to 8,600 over the next three to four months, with the remaining U.S. forces leaving in 14 months, or by May 1, 2021. The withdrawal of U.S. soldiers from Afghanistan might be part of a new U.S. effort to give the Taliban some political credit (Saeedi, 2020).

The Doha agreement brought enormous prestige and status to the Taliban, enhanced the Taliban's hand and power over the Afghanistan government, and resulted in a regaining of power. According to some Afghan commentators, the U.S. action might be a psychological war to compel the Afghan government and people to be more flexible in negotiations with the Taliban. According to U.S. President Joe Biden, the U.S. military

presence in Afghanistan would finish on August 31, 2021, which was stated 18 months ago. On the other hand, things did not turn out as planned. Taliban militants took control of their first provincial capital on August 6, 2021, and by August 15, they were at the gates of Kabul. As a result of their quick progress, tens of thousands of people were forced to escape from their homes, with many arriving in Kabul and others moving to neighboring countries. Anarchy raged in Kabul as President Ashraf Ghani, and many of his fellow Afghans rushed to flee the country. Afghanistan's security forces have entirely collapsed despite 20 years of foreign aid, billions of dollars in investment, a sophisticated training program, and U.S. air support. After a rapid assault in May, the Taliban gained control of Kabul on August 15, and U.S. and NATO soldiers began to leave. In late August, an ISIS-K suicide bomber targeted U.S. evacuation operations at Kabul's international airport, causing chaos and fear on the field as civilians tried to swarm and besiege the airport. The blast, which killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. military soldiers, was one of the country's deadliest attacks in recent years (Associated Press in Kabul, 2021).

The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, the longest U.S. war, lasted for 20 years and was chosen as a milestone because it put Afghanistan in another civil crisis. The war led to the U.S. failure and re-emergence of the Taliban. The U.S. war in Afghanistan cost billions of dollars and thousands of human lives. On the other side, this war put Afghanistan in another phase of the game between global and regional powers. So the analysis of internal and external dynamics of conflict that led to the failure of western countries in Afghanistan is a subject that deserves further research.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine and explore the dynamics of the unending war in Afghanistan. It considers the evolution and ramifications of internal and external dynamics that influence the continuance of the conflict and the role of regional and global power struggle in Afghanistan. To better understand the topic, factors such as Afghanistan's geostrategic and geopolitical location, state system, drug trafficking, Taliban, corruption, the role of ethnicity and tribalism, natural resources, and other critical features have been thoroughly examined in this study.

The study also considers the implications of how Afghanistan has become a battleground for global and regional powers such as the U.S., Russia, and China. Besides these reasons of conflict, the study also looks at regional causes of the ongoing war in Afghanistan, how the regional countries saw Afghanistan as a strategic depth of their

policy, and what elements and factors they follow to influence and affect Afghanistan's internal affairs. Moreover how Pakistan, Iran, and other countries use proxy groups to proceed their interests in Afghanistan. Although this study covers the historical dynamics of conflicts in Afghanistan from a broader perspective, its reference period is from 2001 until the end of 2021. The violence that erupted with the U.S. withdrawal paved the way for the Taliban insurgent groups to come to power for the second time, make Afghanistan more unstable, create the human crisis, and again settle the country into new heaven of terrorist groups such as ISIS-K.

1.2.1. Problem Statement

The study's main issue to be explained is the dynamics of the unending war in Afghanistan. In order to examine this issue, internal factors of the ongoing conflict should be discussed from the very beginning, and an analytical approach toward the study should be developed. In light of historical data, the dynamics of internal factors, which led to the West's failure, should be emphasized. Based on these results and other dynamics, this paper will attempt to explain the regional and international dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. When these pieces are put together, the internal and external dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan that led to the U.S. failure will be revealed. Thus, it will be possible to discover why the unending war has continued in Afghanistan throughout history.

1.2.2. Research Questions

Afghanistan has always been linked with invasions, interventions, and terror as a result of internal and external intermediation, as well as civil war, and is considered one of Asia's most unstable countries. The dynamics of conflicts in Afghanistan had various aspects throughout history. In the last four decades, the 1979 USSR invasion, civil war, rise of Taliban, and 2001 U.S. intervention clarify the complexity of the country’s conflicts, and these reasons originate the research questions regarding the dynamics of the conflict after 2001. This study aims to examine the unending war in Afghanistan as a context of internal and external dynamics behind failure.

Therefore, for the study to achieve its purpose, it is necessary to answer the following questions;

a) How did Afghanistan become a battleground for regional and international powers?
b) What are the internal and external dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan?
c) Why couldn't the probable failure in Afghanistan be predicted during the 20 years of existence of the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan? If it was predicted, why couldn't it be prevented?

When these questions are answered, the unending war in Afghanistan will be understood. Accordingly, the internal and external dynamics behind the U.S. failure in Afghanistan will be revealed.

1.2.3. Objective of the Research

Developments in the country's internal structure affect other states when they go beyond the borders. Struggling with emerging threats requires concerted and collaborative efforts. Firstly, the events take place regionally. Specific opportunities and threats bring states together to cooperate and create the region's dynamics. Afghanistan, a country surrounded by various countries, is located in the center of the regions, namely South Asia, Central Asia, and in a sense, the Middle East. This connection can also be a source of threat to ensure stability and peace in the region. In general, Afghanistan continued to maintain its importance for centuries and play an influential role in shaping the world order in the 21st century.

Due to the obvious and complicated multi-party dynamics of Afghanistan's conflict, there are numerous uncertainty and misunderstandings in political discussions that hide the truth in Afghanistan. This study aims to enlighten the dynamics of war in Afghanistan and identify and explain the disruptive roles that regional actors play in the country. The study will contribute significantly to a better understanding of the unending war in Afghanistan and clarify the internal and external dynamics behind the U.S. failure since 2001. The findings of the study will also help to get a deeper knowledge about Afghanistan's conflict in general, as well as its political, military, diplomatic, economic, and social-cultural positions with regard to its regional and international engagement.

The most important contribution of this study is to provide an opportunity to perform a holistic and comprehensive analysis by considering the internal and external dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. In this way, the importance of Afghanistan's war can be understood by comparing the whole picture. This study will pave the way for political analysts and policymakers to adopt a more realistic discourse regarding Afghanistan's conflict and regional issues. In conclusion, The outcome of this study is believed to bring a valuable contribution to the literature of war in Afghanistan.

1.2.4. Limitation of the Research

The topic of Afghanistan is broad, and it requires a lot more research and studies, whereas this study has attempted to highlight the main dynamics of the topic to the utmost. Further understanding of the topic necessitates more academic research and access to accurate data and information. The study's main limitation is the insufficient internal, Persian, and Pashto language resources due to the limited research institutes and formal academic institutions in Afghanistan. The other limitation of the study is the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study explored primary and secondary data to lighten the shortfall in the volume of required information for the research.

1.3. Methodology

This study uses qualitative research to find answers to research questions by considering "The Unending War in Afghanistan: Analyzing the Internal and External Dynamics Behind Failure." The unending war in Afghanistan by analyzing the internal and external dynamics behind the failure has been evaluated by utilizing primary and secondary sources of information. Afghanistan is a country that has always been prioritized due to its strategic locations and its significance for world politics since its foundation. Whereas Afghanistan plays a significant role in world affairs.

This study uses a qualitative research technique with primary and secondary sources to discover the causes and motives underpinning the Afghan conflict when looking at the internal and external dynamics of the never-ending war in Afghanistan that lead to the west's defeat. The primary sources of information usually consist of news and articles from various media organizations. The media organizations used as the primary source are Afghanistan's newspapers such as Hasht-e Subh, Daily Afghanistan, Tolonews, Etilaatroz

News, BBC, DW. In addition to these, The utilized secondary sources are usually books, academic articles, and reports related to the topic. The data used in this study is mainly in English, Persian (Dari, Farsi), and Turkish language, which allows us to look at the issue from a larger point of view. As a result, the present study methodology would be descriptive.

1.4. Literature Review

Afghanistan, regarded as NATO's most significant operation since the coalition's foundation in 1949, remains one of the U.S. and its partner's top military objectives. The Afghanistan war has now exceeded the Vietnam War, the longest in U.S. and British history. Rebuilding Afghanistan has been a massive issue for the UN, which has been involved since the 2001 U.S.-led involvement. The ongoing violence and upheaval in the country are overflowing into the neighboring area and beyond. War and the narcotics generated there affect many country's societies and political stability. Indeed, terrorism, instability, drug trafficking, ethnicity and tribalism, a weak and fragmented economy, and foreign country's interventions on Afghanistan's internal affairs have been the most critical concerns for decades. In recent years, much has been written on the war in Afghanistan, particularly after the U.S.-led interposition in the country.

Thousands of books, hundreds of study papers, and media articles have been written to assist and analyze numerous aspects of the country's situation. Various authors have used multiple approaches and methods to focus on different perspectives of the dispute. Some authors have looked at the conflict in Afghanistan through the lens of U.S. national security and the global war on terror (Friedman, 2003). Many of them have linked the war to Islamic fundamentalism and extremist Islam (Rashid, 2002) , while others, like Ahmed, regarded it as a struggle between the center and the rural and tribal perimeter (Ahmed, 2013). Some authors ascribe Afghanistan's conflict persistence and the Taliban's revival to the West's "wrong" strategy and plan, particularly the decision to go to war and consequence of the Afghan government's corruption and mismanagement (Abbas, 2014).

Several have looked at the conflict and armed uprising in Afghanistan from an institutional standpoint, pointing out how the rise of the opium trade and underperformance diminished the Afghanistan government and accusing the U.S. of neglecting to provide all the appropriate resources to the Afghan government and ignoring armed group havens

throughout the Pakistani border (Jones, 2009). Some commentators describe the Afghanistan war as mostly a proxy war, claiming that rebels have been protected and aided by Pakistan's security (Waldman, 2010). Many academics, such as Barfield, regard the struggle as an expression of the tension between two divergent cultural viewpoints, a clash between the old and new, regional custom and world standards, traditionalist and enlightenment, and conservatism and modernism (Barfield, 2010a, p. 65). So many other experts have identified ethnolinguistic divisions as the country's primary source of instability (Rais, 2009, pp. 27-51). Numerous researchers have looked at the situation in Afghanistan through the perspective of "narco-terrorism," examining the ties between insurgents and the opium trade (Peters, 2009). Rubin utilized a political economy method to look at the situation in Afghanistan, focusing on the internal dynamics of the war by looking at how the government acquires and allocates resources (Rubin, 2000).

Recent research on current conflict either failed to find the main drivers or emphasized some while discrediting others. The literature on the Afghanistan war generally plays an essential role in clarifying the conflict's reasons and motives and boosting knowledge of the situation. It emphasizes particular aspects and specific dynamics of the conflict rather than examining it at all; likewise, it either minimizes or magnifies the involvement of particular players and variables in the onset and continuation of the war. As a result, drawing a complete picture of the situation is impossible. Another widespread issue in most recent studies of Afghanistan is that they tend to neglect the influence of foreign players and the significance of Afghanistan's geoeconomic and geopolitical situation (Azami, 2015).

In order to have a more in-depth understanding of Afghanistan's conflict, it is necessary to consider all dynamics, including local/national, regional, and worldwide, and all key players and variables that contribute to its bloodshed. Afghanistan's war is one of the world's longest and most complicated. It combines several critical problems, including geopolitics, proxies, ideology, nationalism, ethnicity, tribalism, and criminal activity. There is a need for an integrated and comprehensive strategy that combines all of the primary themes and methodologies in the academic literature to comprehend the war in general, especially in Afghanistan. Using only one, two, or three ways does not appear to be enough to understand and explain the country's decades-long struggle.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

Nowadays, security is the most ambiguous, the most contentious, and the most widely used and, at the same time, the most central concept in international politics. Because of the distinct perceptions of security and its considerable importance in the study of international relations, the concept does not have a single and precise meaning but acquired various notions and has constantly been changing in historical periods (Sarem, 2014, 31). During the Cold War, security studies were based solely on threats to the regime, armed force use, and military affairs management. However, various scientific efforts and research were developed in the last years of the Cold War to expand the concept of security. In the meantime, theorists have discussed key issues like external and domestic threats, the weakening of governments in establishing security, the impact of international non-governmental organizations on national security, and internal factors affecting security (Baldwin, 1995).

Over time, the concept of security has become more complex, which influenced the complexity of defining this theory. The concept of security studies in developed, transition, and third world countries has been discussed separately by different scholars and thinkers. Afghanistan is one of the third-world nations, and it is necessary to refer to the theories in this study specifically to explain the third-world countries. The leading theorists regarding "security in third-world countries" are Barry Buzan, Mohammed Ayoob, J. Martin, and Caroline Thomas.

Caroline Thomas was one of the first theorists to discuss security issues in his book "In Search of Security: Third World in International Relations," published in 1987. According to Thomas, third-world countries face a security challenge because of military factors and the relative weakness or lack of independence and vulnerability and claim that Internal factors are the most influential matters concerning security. Mohammed Ayoob is another of the most critical national security theorists in third-world countries. In his article entitled "Security in the Third World: The Worm About to Turn?" he addresses the issue of security in third-world countries. In his view, the critical challenge for third world countries to ensure security is the apparent lack of a strong government (Ayoob, 1995, p. 96).

As mentioned above, we can conclude that the phenomenon of security is complex and ambiguous in international relations. The study of security issues can be unlimited to domestic causes, the presence of a strong government and political culture, the complexity of the global system, theories of the hegemony of major powers and regional powers, and other vital factors detrimentally affecting the security of third-world countries. However, this study utilizes the idea of "constructivism" to analyze and examine the topic of War in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, Caroline Thomas and Mohammed Ayoob's ideas and views would also be used to explain issues related to third-world countries, especially Afghanistan. Constructivist security studies are based on two main hypotheses; first, the fundamental structures of international politics are constructed and addressed by social structures. Second, innovation in international relations can lead to a change and improvement in the global security situation. This assumption means that if our thinking changes, the security situation will also change (Zehfuss, 2004, pp. 10-33).

It seems that the above hypotheses can fundamentally address security challenges, at least in the Middle East and Asia. The view also can apply to the Western world. Even after the First World War, the victorious countries and even the defeated nations created the United Nations to develop a collective security system. Concerning the second hypothesis, it can say that that the Middle East is precisely in such a situation. The existence of religious ideas and other factors is one of the most fundamental causes of war in the Middle East. The Syrian war represents a war of a moderate government with moderate religious perceptions. On the other side, a sharp group with extremist views has led to the continuation of the conflict in Syria. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia proves the same issue. At the same time, the rivalry between India and Pakistan also includes the ideological and intellectual. On one side of the border are the Hindus with Hindu ideas, and on the other side are the Pakistanis with relatively extremist Islamic views. Therefore, the prevailing norms on both sides of the line have caused a conflict between the two countries.

Given that today the topic of security represents a global issue and the threat can make other places insecure, the competition between Pakistan and India, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the existing Shiite and Wahhabi ideas in Afghanistan directly or indirectly affect the security of this country. Therefore, it seems that implementing the framework of "constructivist security theory" in this study would allocate more value.

Theorists of constructivist theories believe that the material and objective world, as realists say, shapes human action and how it interacts and is influenced by human deed and interaction. Thus, constructivists believe in the mutual influence of the material world and man; On this basis. It is claimed that there is a material basis for understanding international relations, but what is important is the construction and payment of the material in the ideological matter, so international relations are preferably social rather than purely material. In this regard, ideological factors have a decisive influence on the processes and results of phenomena (Nugroho, 2008, p. 91). Given this issue, we can say that the prevailing ideas in Afghanistan's neighboring countries and the region directly affect the national security of Afghanistan.

Constructivists identify security and insecurity as sources of actor's thoughts about issues, especially interests, and threats. They believe that the more inconsistent and contradictory the actor's perceptions and mutual logic about phenomena and positions are, the more distrust between them and the more governments move towards self-help and self-centeredness. But if a structure of shared knowledge is established, nations can be led to a more peaceful security community. The current security of Afghanistan can attribute to the above theory. However, there is no denying that the intervention of the great powers in creating and perpetuating insecurity in Afghanistan has not been effective. But it can be stated; the influence of the great powers to create security or insecurity in the region has also been achieved by employing the ideas and norms that prevail in the area.

It could therefore be said that one of the crucial issues in international relations remains the issue of “cooperation and conflict.” These two phenomena, namely cooperation and conflict in individual and social life have led some to believe that cooperation and conflict are fixed, permanent, and eternal characteristics of human life. Socialists believe that conflict arises from social circles and interactions in the constructivist theory. Realists and others believe in “being constructed” and its formation in the process of social interaction. Therefore, such norms, beliefs, ideals, and competitions cause conflict and affect national security.

Unlike neorealism and neoliberalism, the constructivist philosophy emphasizes the importance of normative, material structures and the role of identity in constructing the interests, actions, and interaction of the agent structure. This theory holds that structures, institutions, and agents maintain a mental aspect or at least a discourse and that these exist

only based on human understanding. Therefore, the importance of normative and material structures and identity in constructivist theory is essential and causes conflict and cooperation (Zehfuss, 2004, pp. 151-153).

Alexander Wendt, one of the structural theorists, considers cooperation and conflict between states as a phenomenon related to the "identity" of states. According to his emphasis on the semantic dimensions of social life (ideas, values, norms, procedures, beliefs, interactions, etc.), he considers identity a phenomenon formed and established in the relationship between oneself and another. It is not a phenomenon that has been given but is created in interaction and affects the interests and preferences of individuals and governments. From this point of view, security can be a normative phenomenon formed from the clash of identities. Put differently, norms, beliefs, identities, and cultures are of enormous importance in making security decisions. The existence of scattered identities, or in other words, the presence of a multi-identity space in Afghanistan, is one of the internal factors of conflict in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the constructivist theory emphasizes the security effect of norms and identities. According to this theory, country's national security is directly affected by norms and identities. On the other hand, Buzan's definition of the region is that security obtains not just internal security in today's world, but proximity is also significant insecurity because many threats are more accessible to travel short distances than long distances. This study will utilize constructivist theory and discuss Afghanistan's national security according to the theory's emphasis based on norms and identity competition. In addition to the constructivist approach, we will use the views of Caroline Thomas and Mohammed Ayoob, who wrote about the security issue of the third world countries, which Afghanistan is on top of that in the category.

The conceptual framework for this thesis is structured into three main variables. The three key variables are determined in the context of the research problem statement, research questions, and after reviewing the literature and work of various scholars and writers. The three primary variables of this study are; Internal factors of the Afghanistan conflict, regional dynamics, and the international dynamics of the Afghanistan conflict, which is the final significant variable. The main variables are each divided into sub-variables. The first primary variable, which is the internal dynamics of conflict in Afghanistan, is divided into sub-variables such as Geostrategic and geopolitical location of

Afghanistan, state system, the role of ethnicity and tribalism, Taliban, drug trafficking, corruption, weak and fragmented economy, and finally natural resources.

Like many others throughout the world, Afghanistan's conflict, which has multidimensional aspects, highlights the diversity of state and non-state players and the intersection of their goals. The second primary variable's substitute variables are according to the importance of the regional dynamics of the Afghanistan conflict, which directly relates to the main topic. And is divided into sub-variables such as Afghanistan-Pakistan tension, India-Pakistan contest in Afghanistan, Iran-Saudi Arabia competition for regional dominance, and the role and interest of Central Asian countries in Afghanistan. The final variable of the conceptual framework is the international dynamics of the Afghanistan conflict, which is determined due to the vital importance of the variable in the topic where the international factors directly impact the Afghanistan situation. The substitute variables for the final primary variable are Afghanistan before September 11, Afghanistan's security environment following September 11, the Global war on terror (U.S.'s new doctrine), the aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF); UN and NATO missions, Taliban's second-term, Russia's new Afghanistan policy, and China's new engagement approach.

As illustrated in the study, the Afghanistan war is more than merely a terrorist, extremist issue, or a battle between ethnic communities. The country's war results from several causes, including strategic, proxy, nationalist, economic, religious, identity, drug, and criminal issues. The variables and dynamics had a direct and indirect impact on the failure of the West in the last 20 years in Afghanistan. The conceptual framework model has been developed accordingly. The following chart represents the developed conceptual framework model for this study.

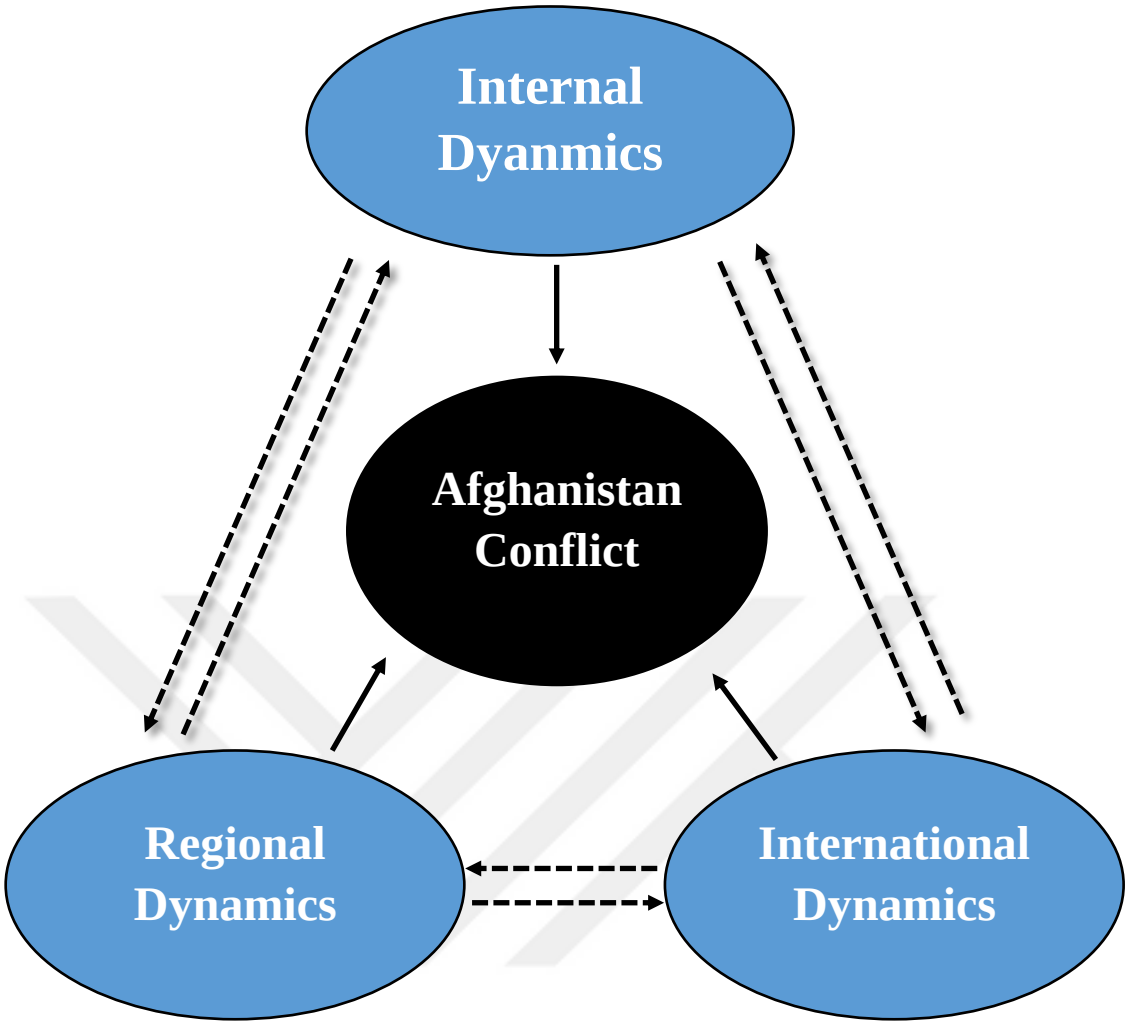


Figure 1. Afghanistan's conflict

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

In order to understand the unending war in Afghanistan in particular, critical internal and external dynamics behind the failure have been discussed in this project. The thesis is composed of six chapters. Chapter one provides a general introduction regarding Afghanistan's history and its security situations before and after the U.S. intervention. Furthermore, the chapter also contains a problem statement, research questions, research assumptions, objective of the research, methodology, conceptual framework, and literature review.

The second chapter covers the internal factors of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. It contains the geostrategic and geopolitical location of Afghanistan, state system, the role of ethnicity and tribalism, Taliban, drug trafficking, corruption, weak and fragmented

economy, and natural resources. The third chapter examines the regional dynamics of conflict in the country. It discusses the Afghanistan and Pakistan tension before and after 2001. It also covers Afghanistan and Pakistan relationships during the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani periods. India and Pakistan contest in Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia competition for regional dominance and the role and interest of Central Asian countries in Afghanistan are also discussed.

The fourth chapter analyzes the international dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan. It contains Afghanistan before September 11, Afghanistan's security environment following September 11, global war on terror (U.S.'s new doctrine), the aftermath of operation enduring freedom; UN and NATO missions, Taliban's second-term, Russia's new Afghanistan policy, and China's new engagement approach. The fifth chapter is the general discussion part, concluding the data obtained. As analyzed through internal and external dynamics behind the failure, the unending war in Afghanistan is determined. The sixth chapter includes the references that have been used in this study.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the internal dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. In order to comprehend the ongoing war in Afghanistan, it is necessary to determine the most important domestic dynamics that lead to the continuation of the conflict. In this way, how the internal factors affected the ongoing war in the last two decades and how it has been over time would be clearly understood. To better understand this development, this chapter deals with eight specific domestic dynamics that have played a critical role since 2001 and led to the West's failure in Afghanistan. The reason for the inclusion of these factors is due to their interrelations with regional and international dynamics. For these reasons, analysis of the domestic dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan needs to be well examined.

2.2. Geostrategic and Geopolitical Location of Afghanistan

Afghanistan holds a pivotal geographical location in the heart of Asia. The country is situated between three economic, cultural, and geopolitical zones of the region; In the south and east of the country in South Asia, in the north is Central Asia and in the west is Iran. In the north, Afghanistan shares a border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan; to west Iran, to the south and East Pakistan, and the northeast is China. Afghanistan's strategic importance originates mainly from its location. In reality, Afghanistan has served as a crossroads for Central Asia, West Asia, and South Asia, as well as a boundary between land and sea powers and a center for regional opposition groups (Tanin, 2005, p. 7).

Afghanistan has been one of the leading players in the “Old/New Great Game,” where the regional and global powers have struggled for their interests. In this context, it has found a central place in Mackinder's “Heartland” and Spykman's Rimland “Edge Belt” theories, which formulate the acquisition of global sovereignty (Seren & Ozer, 2012, p. 138). Due to its geostrategic and geopolitical location, Afghanistan was named the

“Graveyard of Empires,” where great powers from Alexander the Great to the U.S. struggled to fight, conquer, and rule the country. Besides an energy corridor on the Russia-China-Iran axis, Afghanistan has the world's richest subsurface and most prominent rare earth elements.

Afghanistan's geographical position has earned it the title of “bridge country” between Central and South Asia. It is in a strategic position as one of the most significant resource-rich countries. This position has been the driving factor behind regional and global power invasions, occupations, and interventions throughout history Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are located in the north of Afghanistan and are rich in energy resources such as natural gas, electricity, oil, and other raw materials. Pakistan and India, both in the south and east of the nation, are in severe need of energy and raw minerals. This situation has given particular geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic importance to Afghanistan. This condition, meant to create the foundations for Afghanistan's growth and prosperity, has historically transformed the land into a battlefield of global competition and has not allowed the people of this land to have the necessary peace and comfort (Seren, 2021, p. 3).

Afghanistan was the entrance to the Indian subcontinent for the two main colonial powers of the period, Britain and France, till the end of the 18th century. In the 19th century, the country served as a barrier between Russia and Britain. In the 20th century, it became a battleground between the U.S. and the Soviet Union with the start of the Cold War. In the 21st century, it serves as a competitive arena between the regional and global powers, particularly Russia and the U.S. Afghanistan at the heart of Asia. It has been repeatedly attacked throughout its long history and has inflamed the desire for worldviews (Ghobar, 2012, p. 125- 133).

Afghanistan is located among the four most populated regions globally; South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East, which are rich in mineral resources. Despite its arid land, Afghanistan's geographic location due to its closeness to significant countries and the discovery of oil and gas in Central Asia and the Persian Gulf has given the country a strategically vital position in the region (Rahimi, 2014, p. 516). Afghanistan's strategic position as a link between Central Asia and South Asia has played a vital role in major regional economic projects.

As the shortest and cheapest transit route between Central Asia and South Asia, Afghanistan plays a crucial role in opening up the potential for complementary trade between the two regions and, thus, creating new trade throughout the region. Afghanistan can provide the quickest and most cost-effective road, train, and gas and electricity transmission routes between Central and South Asia compared to alternative routes. One gas transmission project that passes through Afghanistan and connects the region's countries is the TAPI pipeline (Arya, 2016). TAPI is derived from the first names of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It is Turkmenistan's gas transmission line from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Pakistan to India. According to what has been said thus far, the immediate economic benefits of this project for Afghanistan include using %16 of the gas in exchange for payment and receiving $400 million in transit taxes each year. Similarly, other projects that have been undertaken in the past few years and have created the conditions for Afghanistan to play a crucial economic role is the CASA-1000 and TUTAP power project.

As a result of its location between these two areas, Afghanistan has the potential to grow into a significant energy market in the region. On the one hand, Afghanistan's involvement may contribute to the two area's economic growth and the extension of cooperation. Besides these, it can enhance Afghanistan's macroeconomic and political prospects. Because of Afghanistan's strategic location in the region, it plays a critical role in facilitating regional cooperation. Afghanistan was once a center at the heart of the world economy, with the Silk Road. It served as the primary commerce route between the East and the West. The historic Chinese commercial Silk Road, which was utilized over two thousand years ago, is still well-known worldwide. The Silk Road has played an essential part in the material and civilizational contacts between the East and the West as a link between China and countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa (Seren, 2021, p. 4).

In the New Silk Road core, Afghanistan can reclaim its rich historical position in trade and culture and serve as a unifying factor. Transportation infrastructure and energy resources are the cornerstones and critical features of every economy. Afghanistan is an important transit route for Central Asia, linking landlocked countries to the global market. The prosperity and stability of Afghanistan are connected to the country's geographical position, long-term economic stability, and the political development of surrounding nations and the region.

Afghanistan can play a significant role in regional integration by pursuing a strategy of increasing security and good governance and giving possibilities for direct foreign investment, building transportation networks, and developing economic and social infrastructure (Arya, 2018). Afghanistan is located in a geopolitically important region. For this reason, it attracted the attention of the global powers of the period throughout history and was subjected to constant invasions. Afghanistan has always been the domain of regional and international powers that want to dominate Eurasia since it stands at a critical intersection point in the southeast of Eurasia. Afghanistan has been important for global powers that wish to conquer India and dominate Eurasia in various periods of history.

Afghanistan lies on the modern silk road established for international trade originating from India and China to Central Asia and Europe. The main reason why the U.S. focuses on Afghanistan is that Afghanistan is very close to nuclear-powered countries such as Russia, China, Pakistan, India, and Iran, which is on the way to having nuclear power. It is a factor that increases its importance for large states. For this reason, it has always attracted the attention of great expansionist powers (Weinbaum, 2006). The important point underlined here is the transfer of energy resources in the Caspian Sea to the world market. Four main lines are envisaged to transfer the resources to the world market. The first transfer line is from the north of the Caspian Sea to Europe and the Atlantic via Russia. The second line to the Pacific via China in the east. The third line to the Indian Ocean via Pakistan and India in the south, and the fourth line to Europe from the south of the Caspian Sea via Iran and Turkey.

In Brzezinski's work titled “The Grand Chessboard,” published in 1997, he claimed that if America conquers Eurasia, it will control two of the three most prosperous and most productive regions in the world. Cooperation between Russia and China, known as the fastest-growing economy globally, has been defined as the most significant obstacle or competitor to the interests of the U.S. in the Middle East and Central Asia. The U.S. later added Iran to these rivals, trying to activate its influence in Central Asia (Brzezinski, 1997).

In this context, considering the strategy of the U.S., it wants to establish sovereignty in Central Asia and the Caucasus through Afghanistan to achieve its goals. Afghanistan was also mentioned in the region defined by Brzezinski as the Eurasian Balkans. For this

reason, Afghanistan's geography is needed for the expansionist powers that want to dominate the Eurasian Balkans and reach their goals.

2.3. State System

Afghanistan’s political history has been labeled with the “coup,” “revolt,” “uprising,” “assassination,” and “execution” concepts; following Nadir Shah, Muhammad Zahir Shah, Muhammad Daoud Khan, Hafizullah Amin, and Nur Muhammad Taraki’s power struggle had put a long-term devastating effect (Seren, 2021, p.11). After 2001, even the establishment of the new constitution of 2004 couldn't pave the way for the institutionalization of the state system. There was no state system where all ethnic groups could live together and feel like part of the government. There are many reasons why the state system failure happened in the past 20 years of Afghanistan.

To begin with, the rule of law and constitutions just remained on paper failed to implement in practice. Moreover, ethnicization of politics, corruption, and other critical issues were the cause of the state's breakdown, which resulted in a rapid collapse under the presidency of Ashraf Ghani in August 2021. One of the significant challenges to establishing stability and security in the country was the uncertainty of the value and place of law in people's conscience and the structure of society and politics. Although, in appearance, everyone favored the rule of law and was suffering from the non-implementation of laws. In reality, the main problem was that the law was not institutionalized, and the rule of law remained on the social character and management of the country (Khosrowshahi, 2013).

Many innovations and improvements have been made in the country's history to establish a more effective and efficient structure of the Afghanistan public administration. Since 2001, significant changes have been made in the country's state system, especially after years of war. However, it should be highlighted that essential modifications have often stayed at the legislative level and have not been enacted in many areas (Miller & Perito, 2004). For example, the central government could not control the country's rural areas. It even failed to establish local institutions and provincial councils to carry out constructive development projects that would benefit the people and bridge the power gap between rural and central governments.

A result of long-running conflicts and the country's backward status led to the failure to form a democratic government. Its obvious case can be the government's inability to conduct councils or municipal elections (Lister, 2006). When it comes to the Afghan administration system, there were specific legal administrative units and actors that have not been implemented in practice, as well as illegal actors and institutions that do not have a legal existence but continue to operate traditionally.

The cohabitation between what should be and what is currently occurring causes arguments over the system's legitimacy. This bad image is detrimental to the people's internalization of law and public power. Institutional procedures in democratic nations adhere to the law. On the other hand, Tribal, cultural, political, and monetary factors shape the state system in backward societies. Undoubtedly, the Afghan society experienced a period where tribal fanaticism, ethnicization of politics, and traditional politics governed the state system. Because of these fundamental issues in Afghanistan's public administration, corruption has become nearly open in many governmental institutions and organizations. At the community level, relatively few people are willing to execute their tasks properly. Unfortunately, idealists remained a small minority among this big community (Lauri, 2013).

The coexistence of multicultural and social structures variable in the historical process of Afghanistan has brought some administrative problems within it. The formation of a unified and peaceful political structure was hampered by ethnic conflicts and the country's continual foreign threats and occupations. Following the U.S.'s recent operation in Afghanistan, Russian pressure on the country's state system social and cultural structure gave way to US occupation. Without a doubt, the current situation in Afghanistan is not conducive to the development of an ideal political and administrative system. As a result, the country's governmental institutions lack contemporary systems, technology, and an optimum allocation of tasks and powers. Instead of training modern staff that will establish a modern state structure, existing qualified administrative staff are also moving away from the state administration. This situation had harmed the development of the Afghanistan bureaucracy (Hashimi & Alot, 2016).

Consequently, Afghanistan's state administration had a highly centralized structure, which had several challenges both within and outside. Put another way; the central government determined the administrative system in the center and the administrative

processes at the province and district levels. In this case, the role of councils at the local level generally were remained in the advisory role. The effectiveness of those formations was deficient against the central administration.

Local governments must be reinforced, and responsibilities in public institutions and organizations must be distributed among competent and duty-conscious persons, particularly those who care and support the country's progress. As a result, instead of being a legal article, the state system and law will become successful in the country's administration, eradicating difficulties in all institutions, private and public. There are no tribal chiefs or similar powers in a country where a powerful bureaucracy has been built; people who regard the nation's interests will have authority in the institutions. Elections and the people's free will, like in every democratic country, will be required.

The formation of a modern and harmonious administrative system that will meet the needs of the people in Afghanistan will primarily be a matter of question with the existence of an independent state. The country's complete independence is mainly possible when tribal, ethnic, and other social groups prefer to be together instead of fighting. The construction and implementation of this idea can be realized by the emergence of conscious and far-sighted staff, which are versatile, free from prejudices, who command universal values and take part in the management by taking responsibility. It can be the case due to valuing people in the social structure and integrating with the world (Lorenzo, 2014).

2.4. Role of Ethnicity and Tribalism

“Tribalism” is a phrase used to describe Afghan society, which is not as simple as it seems. Afghanistan’s culture is complicated; the outcomes of years of colonial history, intervention, political decline, state-building, extensive spiritual, artistic, social prosperity, and devastation and catastrophe. According to Bernt Glatzer, the terms “tribe” and “ethnic group” are frequently confused among scholars and readers and divided into two groups. Tribes are sub-units of the ethnic group. Tribes; are social groups made up of families or communities united by family connections, sharing the same culture and dialect, and led by a leader of their tribe. Ethnic; is a social group with a shared and unique culture, religion, language, and other characteristics. People belonging to one ethnic group can live in

several geographical locations and share several differences among themselves (Glatzer, 1998, pp. 167-181).

Afghanistan is a country that owns multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual characteristics. In the 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan, fourteen ethnic groups were determined, which are; Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Nuristani, Pachaie, Arab, Aymaq, Qizilbash, Qirghiz, Brahwui, Gujar, and other tribes (CP, 2021, p. 4). Due to decades of conflict, there is no precise census of the country's population. Afghanistan is a religiously homogenous country; its population is reported to be 99% Muslim, with 84-89% Sunni Muslims, 10-15% Shiite Muslims, and the remaining 0.3 percent other religions. Afghanistan also has a total of 45 indigenous languages. On the other hand, the constitution recognizes just eight languages, including Farsi and Pashto, as the country’s formal languages (Qutb, 2020).

There are four main ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The first four categories, Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek, are large communities with significant influence on the country's political life. The estimated proportion of each ethnicity is widely disputed due to the lack of a census. Pashtuns are Afghanistan's most prominent Sunni Muslim ethnic group, accounting for over 40% of the population residing in the south and east. Sunni Muslim Persian speakers, the Tajiks, are Afghanistan's second-largest ethnic group. Tajiks, who make up around 30% of Afghanistan's population, are clustered mainly in the northeast and west.

Afghanistan is a diverse country which is consists of many ethnic groups. The Hazaras, Shiite Muslim ethnic group, form the third most prominent ethnic group in Afghanistan, accounting for 15% of the population and primarily concentrated in the country's central region. The Uzbeks, who account for roughly 10% of the people and live mainly in the country's north, are the fourth-largest Sunni Muslim community (Sinno, 2021). While considering Afghanistan's conflict, it is necessary to analyze the roles of the country's diverse ethnic groups and tribal histories and a historical factor. In Afghanistan's political past, ethnicity has operated as a source of political instability and governance, and political power (Hanley, 2011).

The foundation of Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durani in 1747 established a historic and tricky tie between the Pashtun authority and other ethnic groups of Afghanistan. Since

then, the Pashtuns have dominated the nation. However, the origins of divergence, or to put it another way, the politics of ethnic issues in Afghanistan, can be traced back to the 1880s and 1900s, when Amir Abdul Rahman Khan established a central authority based on ethnic divides in the nation. Abdur Rahman Khan's acts inflicted severe wounds on Afghanistan's multi-ethnic society and created enmity and division among Afghans (Qadiri, 2020). According to the Ayoub Arwin, the Pashtuns have preserved their tribal structure. Durrani, Ghilzai, and Karlani tribes are the great tribal systems of these people. But the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks have said goodbye to the tribal structure.

For this reason, Pashtuns have entered the modern era with more traditional values than other ethnic groups. Ethnicity and tribe are seen as the foundation and supporters of political power in Afghanistan. Tribal norms have been used to establish the legitimacy of Afghan ruler governments, especially the role of tribe elders in Jirga (traditional assembly of leaders) cannot be overstated (Arwin, 2013).

Even the Pashtun nationalists, who are thought to be the only ones in Afghanistan, have had an eternal rivalry for centuries when it comes to ethnicity. It should be noted that this power struggle, which was reflected in the political, military, and economic fields, was mainly over the Durrani and Ghilzai tribes. The rivalry between the Durrani and Ghilzai tribes continued up to now; for example, to analyze the Taliban from an organizational standpoint, it is essential to understand that the relationship of belonging with the Ghilzai tribe is one of the most critical dynamics regarding the issue. Because the Taliban are primarily rural Pashtun Ghilzai people who advocate a traditional Sunni understanding and Pashtun nationalism, most Taliban leadership, including Molla Omar, are members of the Hotak Ghilzai tribe, which ruled Afghanistan in the 18th century.

Although the rivalry between the Durrani and Gilzai Pashtuns has been an ongoing conflict for centuries, the Ghilzais were able to take over the power only three times (Mirwais Hotak in 1709, Nur Muhammad Taraki in 1978, and Molla Omar in 1996) until 2001. While Karzai, who came to power after the U.S. invasion, had the support of the Durranis. It is an often mentioned subject of criticism that his successor, Ashraf Ghani, as a Ghilzai Pashtun, removed leading Durrani figures from the decision-making mechanism as soon as he came to power. The possibility of deepening inter-tribal rivalries within the same ethnic group should be considered, as the Taliban regained control in August 2021 is supported by the majority of the Ghilzai tribe (Seren, 2021, p. 6).

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan for a short time, the ethnic issue was replaced with nationalism, and all ethnic groups united against the Soviet invasion. Between 1992 and 1996, the country entered a new chapter of civil war after the fall of the Afghan communist regime. The battle was rooted in ethnic division. The civil war concluded in 1996 with the Taliban's victory. However, ethnic differences were blown to flames when the Taliban came to power with a Pashtun body (Qadiri, 2020). It is often considered that ethnicity has a more significant role in Afghanistan's political power structures than any other factor. In this context, language, religion, and ideology are other most important factors after ethnicity. In many ways, behind many political behaviors, traces of ethnicity can be found. The traces of ethnicity can be seen in Afghanistan's politics, especially after 2001. The inclusion of ethnic group names in the Afghanistan constitution and national anthem being in the Pashto language and the establishment of ministry to deal with ethnic and tribal issues indicates their crucial role in the official politics of the country.

The role of the ethnic element in the political behavior of Afghan politicians is also clearly recognizable. This element has been the source of many fundamental changes. The clearest example could be the Afghan civil war in the 1990s. The ethnic issue has played a crucial role in the state and political formation of the country since 2001 because what was agreed at the Bonn Agreement meant the division of power among the tribes in proportion to their ethnicity and estimated population. After that, even though Afghanistan's new constitution prohibited any political activity based on race, it has all ethnic colors, from the state structure of political power to the organizational structure of major parties and the behavior of political players (Arwin, 2013).

The role of ethnic identity can be seen clearly in the country's previous presidential and parliamentary elections since 2001. Various ethnic groups and political leaders devoted their efforts to increase the number of seats in the parliament. For example, in the 2010 parliamentary elections, the appointment of the house speaker took five months due to ethnic tensions. Although the parliament was legally inaugurated, it could not elect a speaker due to ethnic and ideological divisions. There were two candidates, one from Pashtuns and the other from the Tajiks ethnic division, and no one could get enough votes to be chosen. Thus, the parliament was without a speaker for an extended period.

An Uzbek was elected speaker of the Afghan parliament for the first time. Finally, all members decided that a third non-Pashtun and non-Tajik should be appointed. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups in Afghanistan, ethnicity has been a deciding element in the country's divergence and the state-nation-building process. The absence of an integrated government is due to a lack of coordination and reconciliation of transnational identities inside the country's boundaries and a lack of unity and national identity. After the Taliban regime, there was a great chance to form a national administration and continue on the path of progress in this country, but ethnic divisions in the country continued to play a role, even though not developed, and the ethnic issue remained. Political and economic development and the expansion of security are possible in societies in which nation-building is taking shape. While the state dominates the territory, the nation feels united and prefers nationality to its sub-national identities (Qeyam, 2012).

In Afghanistan, ethnicity and a set of facts duplicate each other. A large part of the Afghan people is still governed on a tribal basis. As a result, ethnicity is one of the most significant roadblocks to Afghanistan's growth. Factors such as neighboring countries interference, the Afghan people's traditional perception and performance in elections, pessimism about youth and reliance on traditional elites, the lack of alternative ethnic ideas to mobilize the people, the abuse of political elites and ethnic parties to gain their support, and the central government's weakness. Afghanistan’s future will be determined by whether the actors maintain to exploit ethnicity as a tool of war that always ends badly on those who utilize it. It will also depend on Afghanistan's neighbors and regional powers, who continue to feed the Afghan civil war and actively exacerbate it by selecting their 'friends' based on ethnic characteristics.

2.5. Taliban

The word Talib came from an Arabic word. In Arabic, the word “Talib” means “desire,” the one who seeks knowledge. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Arab countries, students who study in religious madrasahs are called Talib. The word Taliban means students, plural of “Talib” (Schott, 2012). During the Afghanistan-Soviet conflict and the Afghanistan civil war, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq was president, and General Akhtar Abdur Rahman was president of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) under Pakistan's state government. President Zia-ul-Haq, who benefitted from the idea of “Political Islam” in

Pakistan's foreign policy, equipped the Pakistani army with the Sharia doctrine and taught militants jihad propaganda in the name of Islam during Afghanistan war.

Zia-ul-Haq has created hundreds of Islamic madrasas in Pakistan's Suba-Sarhad, Wazirabad, Hayatabad, and Waziristan regions, with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, and put them to use for the proxy war (Knipp, 2021). Among the thousands of international fighters in the northern and eastern Suba regions of Pakistan and millions of Afghan refugees who came to Pakistan from Afghanistan during the Soviet war, many young people and children were educated in those religious madrasas and sent to wars Afghanistan. As a result, as the Soviet war in Afghanistan proceeded, the Taliban movement was founded in Pakistan (Maizland, 2021).

Following the Soviet withdrawal of 1989, which resulted in a significant defeat for the Red Army, due to the incompetence and greed of jihadi leaders, it resulted in the civil war and a long period of instability. The Taliban's establishment in Afghan society was influenced by political changes following the Soviet departure, the incapacity of Mujahideen leaders to form an inclusive administration, and the expansion of disputes among various jihadist factions. The Taliban organization launched operations in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on October 29, 1994, under the banner of “protecting the Islamic and human rights of oppressed populations and confronting dictatorial terrorist groups from now on.”

Molla Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's commander and a regular madrasah student and mosque imam, led the first operation to protect the rights of the victim during a kidnapped by Tanzim forces in his area alongside his students (Salahshoor, 2020). Molla Mohammad Omar managed to take complete control of Kandahar province in a short time. As pointed out above, Molla Omar was the one behind the relevant operation and achieved success in his very first operation with his external consultants. The defenseless people, sick and tired of civil wars, and those who want order have supported the Taliban from the country's internal borders. On the other hand, foreign countries such as Pakistan worked on the Taliban project for years and provided support like: money, logistics, and military equipment to implement these projects.

Under the guidance of Molla Omar, the Taliban organization grew from 30 students in October 1994 to a potent military force of 12,000 people in two months. While these

advances were accelerating, the southern and south-western provinces of Afghanistan, Herat, Nimroz, Zabul, and Kandahar, were entirely under the control of the Taliban in the first three months of 1995. These astonishing developments in this short time resulted from external interventions, not internal parameters (Kuehn, 2018, p.37).

Although the movement of the Taliban organization started in 1992, it captured almost all provinces of Afghanistan in 1996. After seizing Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, the Taliban declared their victory and announced the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban met with fierce opposition, particularly after asserting its understanding of law and order. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban rule in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 (Salahshoor, 2020).

The Taliban created a brutally authoritarian rule by combining a rigid religious ideology, Deobandi traditionalism, and Wahhabi puritanism with a conservative Pashtun social code (Britannica, 2021). Many observers used the phrases like “fundamentalist,” “fanatic,” and “medieval” to describe the Taliban groups. The Taliban, on the other hand, described themselves as members of a Sunni school of thought that dates back to India's colonial period in the late 1800s, a school called after Deoband, a tiny country town northeast of Delhi where the movement's first madrasa or seminary was built in 1867 (Metcalf, 2001).

In the early days of the Taliban, the citizens took a warmer and more reliable attitude towards the Taliban’s sharia law government. Taliban promised to construct safe civilian settlements and restore law, bring order, stability, and security to the country through Friday sermons, radio broadcasts, and written publications. Until the Taliban achieved their own goals, they used soft power to disarm the people and break off their relations with other parties and armed groups. After establishing its authority in the capital cities of Kabul and Kandahar, the Taliban regime used two methods. Taliban forces enforced Sharia law and Amir Al-Muminin Molla Omar's commands on society and the people.

The first was the application of extreme and strict Sharia rules to prevent civilians from revolting against the newly established Sharia administration. The second was to fight the armed groups of Afghan citizens and non-Pashtun ethnic groups and bring them under the flag of the Taliban administration with their military power. The Taliban regime

would execute men who violated Sharia rules and leave their corpses hanging in the most populous part of the city for a few days to frighten citizens who opposed their rule. Likewise, Women were strictly prohibited from reading, attending school, and wandering alone in the streets and markets. Women were not allowed to leave the house without men. Regardless of religion, sect, and belief, all men were required to attend mosques and perform Friday prayers. People who committed theft were taken to the streets and markets, with their hands and fingers cut off and tied around their necks without being judged. The Taliban regime was executed all prisoners in open public squares without trial (Taliban Change, 2021).

The Taliban regime used violence and torture against civilians and destroyed historical artifacts, vineyards, schools, and new government buildings. Molla Mohammad Omar, the Taliban leader, ordered to destroy the 2500-year-old historical artifact in the Bamyan province of Afghanistan. Regarding this order of the Taliban, national and international public organizations, academics, history scientists, especially United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) members made severe objections to the decision of the Taliban and tried to prevent the destruction of the historical monuments. The Taliban leader Molla Mohammad Omar ordered to detonate the world's most historic and most significant idol statues by placing dozens of mines, ignoring many objections. The Taliban leader said, “Why were these people so ignorant? I only had two stone statues crushed” in his response to this incident (Shafaee, 2021).

Among the Afghan ethnicities, the Taliban regime very dominantly consisted of the Pashtuns in its internal organization, excluding fighters from abroad. Only citizens of Pashtun ethnicity could participate in the central administration of the Taliban regime. Non-Pashtun leaders and intellectuals were considered enemies of the government. Essential people and party members such as Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the Tajiks, Abdul Ali Mazari, leader of the Hazaras, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum, leader of the Uzbeks, were considered as the biggest enemies of the Taliban regime. Ethnic groups and some Pashtun ethnicities against the Taliban regime have decided to act against their common enemy, the Taliban regime. The Afghans who opposed the Taliban regime allied under the name of the Northern Alliance against the administration of Molla Mohammad Omar. Afghanistan Northern Alliance started its activities against the Taliban regime as a powerful alliance consisting of Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Pashtuns (Sarwary, 2011).

After the 9/11 attacks, which killed over 3,000 people, the Taliban refused to surrender to Al-Qaeda commanders at the request of the U.S., and the U.S. attacked Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Peace returned to Afghanistan in the early years after the Taliban's fall. As boys and girls returned to school, women were allowed to work, free media expanded, and government and democratic institutions were formed and strengthened. Including the adoption of the constitution, the formation of the army, holding of presidential and parliamentary elections, the disarmament of irresponsible groups, and the formation and strengthening of the military forces. From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban ruled over more than 90% of Afghanistan until the U.S. attacked on September 11, 2001. The primary perpetrator was Al-Qaeda, and due to the presence of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, the U.S. intervened and ousted the Taliban. However, the Taliban never went away and continued to gain territory every day (Mehdi et al., 2021).

According to statistics, the Taliban controlled approximately half of Afghanistan's land in 2017, undermining the legitimacy and position of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani's administrations. It got to the point where the U.S., which said it had come to Afghanistan to destroy the Taliban and promote and build democracy, decided to make peace with the Taliban. On February 29, 2020, a Taliban-U.S. peace pact based on the departure of foreign forces was signed, as well as an agreement to begin inter-Afghan discussions (Saeedi, 2020). As intra-Afghan-Taliban peace talks failed to yield favorable results, Taliban militants began to ramp up their attacks on the Afghan government. The circumstances favored the Taliban, and on August 15, 2021, the Ashraf Ghani administration collapsed, and the Taliban gained territorial control of Afghanistan.

2.6. Drug Trafficking

Drug manufacturing and trafficking are two of the most significant challenges affecting human society in the twenty-first century. The complex problem of drugs and addiction worldwide is due to the production of narcotics in Afghanistan, which alone produces more than 80% of the world's narcotics. After 9/11 events and the fall of the Taliban regime, drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan increased in such a way that today the country's economy is tied to the drug trade (Alokozai, 2021). The nearly four-decade-long conflict in Afghanistan has affected its society in every aspect. The consequences of war negatively impacted the economy, security, culture, and human lives

in Afghanistan. The Afghan economy is mainly centered on agriculture and animal husbandry.

As a consequence of the continuation of wars in the country for years, no long-run institutionalization has been done, which led to the collapse of the country's economic structure. Furthermore, it has created the opportunity for drug smugglers, militant groups, warlords, and mafia to use the land in the favorite of their interest. Drug production, drug trafficking, and widespread use of drugs by terrorist groups such as the Taliban have been the cause of instability and one of the most important reasons for the continuation of the war in recent years (Fishstein, 2014).

Molla Mohammad Omar, the founder and a former Taliban commander, legitimized opium and drug cultivation to solve Afghanistan's economic issues after taking over the country's governance. One of the fundamental reasons why opium and drug cultivation became widespread in Afghanistan in a short period could be its low cost and very high profit. For this reason, the production of drugs and opium has spread throughout Afghanistan within a short period of three years. Drug cultivation, which has become a culture where terrorism has existed, continued until Molla Omar prohibited opium production on July 27, 2000 (DuPee, 2010). As described above, one of the Taliban's most significant sources of income was drugs and opium. They encouraged farmers of the regions under their control to plant opium and narcotics.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), more than 80% of the morphine and heroin produced and trafficked worldwide are made in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2021). In Afghanistan, especially the southern and south-western provinces bordering Pakistan and controlled mainly by the Taliban were the regions with the highest drug cultivation. Drug and opium cultivation was more prevalent in areas where the Taliban and other armed opposition groups were against the state. UNODC 2010 stated that despite all the measures and efforts have taken since 2009, opium and drug production and the prices of drugs are increasing intensively in Afghanistan. According to the reports, it is possible to observe an increase of 72% in the prices of dry opium and 92% in the prices of fresh and non-dry opium. The intense increase in drug and opium prices encouraged farmers dealing in drug and opium fields to plant more and supported the income and earnings of terrorist organizations (Fields, 2010). The growing spread of drug addiction, creating a class divide resulting from the cultivation and sale of this opioid, and

strengthening the economic and political mafia associated with this substance has created new social anomalies. Figure 2 shows the opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan from 1994 to 2020 in terms of hectares. As indicated in figure 2, opium poppy cultivation had significantly increased when the Taliban terrorist declared their existence in 1992.

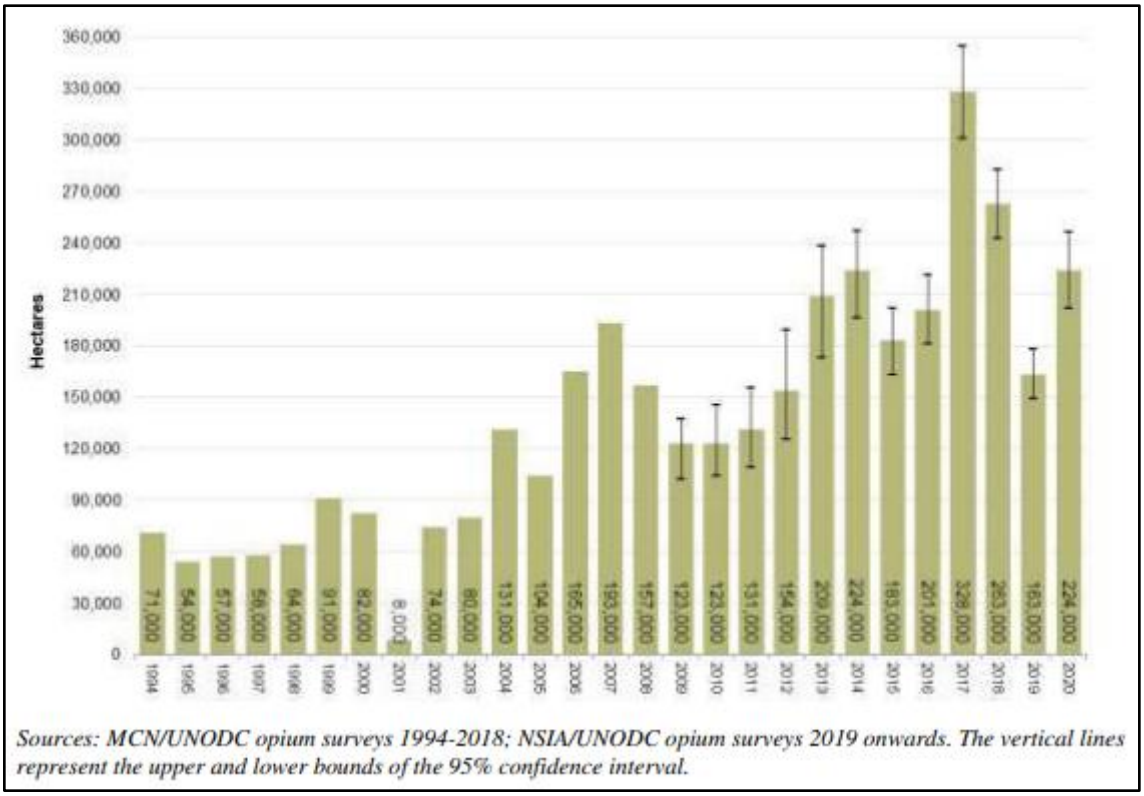


Figure 2. Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, 1994- 2020 (hectares)

During the Taliban's regime, opium cultivation has been an average of 68,142 hectares in the areas where the Taliban dominated. During the years of the U.S.. intervention in Afghanistan, there was a slight decrease in opium production. However, after 2002, drug production increased day by day, and farmers planted drugs until it reached about 124,540 hectares in 2004. Drug cultivation increased to 193,247 hectares of land in 2007. It was primarily produced in Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Helmand, located in the eastern and southern regions of the country and partially northern provinces. In 2014, the drug and opium cultivation area reached its peak with 223,451 hectares all over Afghanistan (UNODC, 2021, p. 5). In 2014, with the withdrawal of the Coalition forces, the security situation got worse in the country. After this, the Taliban raised their terrorist activities, and the Taliban concentrated more on opium production to compensate for their terrorist activities. Drug production and opium cultivation reached the maximum level in

Afghanistan's history in 2017. In 2017, opium planting expanded the highest in 24 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, particularly in Helmand, and it increased by 79% in the south. In contrast, it was fivefold in Balkh province (Salahshoor, 2017).

According to the UNODC reports, farmers allocated 328,183 hectares of land to opium cultivation in 2017. Due to the drought and a reduction in opium prices in 2018, drug output fell marginally from 328,183 hectares to 263.140 hectares in 2018, compared to 2017 (UNODC&MCN, 2018). In 2020, the overall area under opium production was predicted to be 224,202 hectares, a 37% increase or 61,000 hectares over 2019. Except for the Eastern area, all regions witnessed a rise in opium cultivation in 2020. The Southern part saw the most extraordinary relative growth, where the Taliban militants have been predominant since they were founded. The southwestern region remained the country's leading opium-producing region, accounting for 71% of overall opium production in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2021). Since 2014, drug and opium production has increased intensively in Afghanistan and drug addicts. Today, the number of drug-addicted civilians in Afghanistan is estimated to be more than 3,5 million, including 200,000 children and 850,000 women (Salahshoor, 2017).

In recent years, the production of drugs and opium produced and obtained in Afghanistan has broken the world record. This trend poses a serious threat to the people of Afghanistan and the whole world population. As stated in reports released by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), parents addicted to drugs in Afghanistan initially affect their children, and these children are under serious threat of drugs (Mukhtary, 2018). In 2020, Afghanistan's narcotics economy was worth $4 billion, or 34% of the country's GDP, and only a quarter of that, or about $1 billion, goes to the farmers. The remaining $3 billion would go to organized crime groups, insurgents, and warlords. Currently, 1.6 million Afghans, or 6.4 percent of the country's population with 245,200 families, are working to make a living from poppy cultivation (Alokozai, 2021).

Following the report of UNODC, opium planting has been a critical source of employment in Afghanistan, which has provided about 120,000 jobs in 2019. According to the U.S. State Department, the Taliban gain from opium taxation and indirectly from processing and trafficking. Opium farmers are supposedly subjected to a 10% cultivation tax. The Taliban's annual share of the illicit drug economy is estimated to be 100-400 million dollars. According to the SIGAR report, the drug trade contributes to up to 60% of

the Taliban's yearly earnings (SIGAR, 2018). Statistics show that global opium income is between 300-500 billion dollars per year, whereas Afghanistan's annual income from narcotics is more than 75 billion dollars.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and doesn't have maritime and sea routes. Because of that, the country's narcotics are transported through its five neighboring countries. The first route is the country's northern highway, which connects Russia and Europe via Tajikistan, has become particularly important in recent years. A major drug trafficking route runs along the country's southern road, connecting to Pakistan's Baluchistan area. The other crucial routes are Iran's the Persian Gulf, Balkan ports, and Africa, ending up in Western Europe. Baz Mohammad Ahmadi, a former deputy minister of the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, claimed that opium was responsible for 30% of the country's conflict. The drug cartel, terrorist supporters, and the Taliban are complicit in the war's escalation. According to Afghan experts, the three main factors of corruption, mafia, and mismanagement are the main factors contributing to the significant increase in narcotics cultivation and production in Afghanistan. They believe that the fight against drug planting and trafficking has not been effective (Salahshoor, 2017).

As a result, opium farming has played a significant part in Afghanistan's society and politics. The Taliban, warlords, mafia, and international traffickers are the principal beneficiaries of this illegal manufacturing. In Afghanistan, especially after 2001, drug manufacturing was one of the most crucial conflict dynamics. As indicated above, there has been a link between drug production and Taliban factions that make most of their money from narcotics. The presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan was supposed to reduce drug production. Drug manufacturing has expanded 40 times, contrary to forecasts, and the fundamental reason was that the West was not just unwilling to combat the drug trade aggressively. Instead, they played a crucial part in its continuation. It could be one of the reasons behind the West's failure in Afghanistan (Alokozai, 2021).

2.7. Corruption

Corruption is like a chronic illness that affects every institution. It is difficult to remove it, but all governments work to reduce it. Corruption is one of society's oldest and most chronic injuries and is influenced by society's political, economic, cultural, and judicial systems. Because this phenomenon is not only a violation of administrative justice

and a loss of citizen's rights, but it is also very harmful to society's economic development. Afghanistan has been named from one to the third most corrupted country in the world for the past decades.

In Transparency International's definition, corruption refers to the abuse of power by government officials for personal gain. In Afghanistan, corruption has been problematic as insecurity and terror in the last two decades. In the previous 20 years, corruption has been the leading factor in continuing war (UNAMA, 2020). However, the number of anti-corruption institutions within the government framework has sometimes led to corruption rather than anti-corruption. According to the statistics, 90% of the people in Afghanistan made it clear that they feel the presence of corruption in their daily lives and knew this as an ominous sign (UNDP, 2016). In a UNODC survey in 2012, corruption was a vital concern for the security problem.

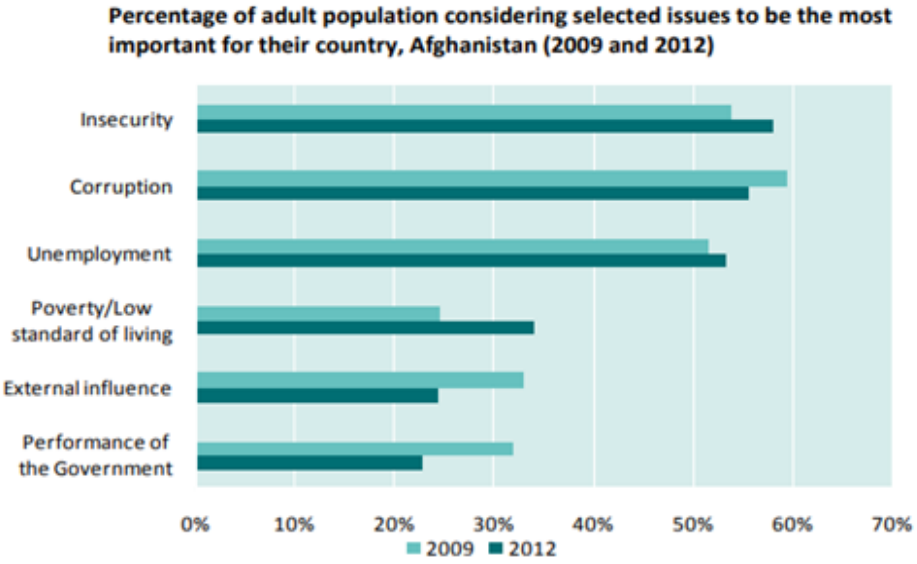


Figure 3. Considering selected issues to be the most important for your country

As shown in figure 2.1, considering all of these factors, the people saw corruption, along with instability and unemployment, as one of the most severe concerns confronting their lives in 2012, ahead of poverty, external influence, and government performance (UNODC, 2012). Corruption has been seen in every institution of the government. In line with the sources, the Afghanistan parliament was one of the reasons for spreading corruption in the country. The parliament member was used their political power to employ

their relatives in the institutions regardless of their education capacities (Pyman, 2015). According to an international report cited by one of the Afghan government's official bodies, corruption is not restricted to people, nor is it limited in scope. Bribery is entrenched in the country, and some people even consider it their right of duty. There is corruption everywhere, and everyone is a collaborator in corruption. As a result, corruption has grown rooted in Afghan society.

In addition, systematic and organized corruption causes clashes and tensions within the nation sociologically. Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) report regarding Afghanistan stated that corruption was the second biggest problem after security. According to this report, the failure of the state to take its proper place within the institutions and bodies raises the expectation of social and institutional corruption (Sopko, 2014). If we give an example of the most extensive organized financial corruption in Afghanistan, we can refer to the economic crisis of Kabul Bank in 2011 (Daryabi, 2014). One of the biggest tragedies of countries in transition to a free economy is the organized and violent growth of the economic mafia. Of course, we should not ignore the changes and difficulties experienced during this transition and the damages they caused. But the main point is that the system imposed by institutions, political bodies, and economic mafias on the leading country's economy develops on the protection of the illegal rights of the organs mentioned, rather than supporting solid and uncontaminated institutions, which are at the top of the political administration pyramid. The most important reason for this vulnerability is the economic development of countries such as Afghanistan, which is in an economic transition, and the social and institutional improvements do not work as planned. The unhealthy judicial institutions, one of the most critical organs in the transition phase, are not developed. The parliaments and civil institutions are weak, and the power in the country is divided not by democratic methods but by old and traditional ways (Reza, 2012). Across the country, the collection of global financial aid was the most important cause of corruption. Thus, one of the most prominent methods of corruption in the country was bribery of government officials.

According to the research of the UNOCD, the people of Afghanistan generally deal with all government affairs or government officials to speed up the procedures by presenting either bribes or gifts. The research shows that 52% of the population is exposed to this situation at least once a year (Pajhwok, 2020). As can be understood from the

above, one of the causes of political instability in Afghanistan is corruption. It is because bribery hinders economic development, the nation's trust in institutions and state organs is shaken, justice is not enforced, mafia bodies and smuggling organizations are formed, incompetent officials come to power, and mafia spreads everywhere. It creates political tension and indecision in its own right, which reveals how Afghanistan collapsed. Corruption has substantial negative consequences in almost all countries globally, especially in backward countries such as Afghanistan (Alami, 2020).

Corruption had the following consequences in Afghanistan;

- Corruption was a barrier to the country's progress and development.
- Corruption affected the government's effectiveness and credibility, endangered the country's security and stability, undermined democratic principles, hampered political and economic progress.
- Due to corruption, the appropriate allocation and distribution of resources were not done.
- Corruption eroded people's faith in the government's political will and vision, as well as their aspirations for a brighter future.

As a result, corruption has played a significant role in Afghanistan’s society in the last two decades. Corruption had negatively affected all aspects of life in Afghanistan because it destroyed the public's faith in government institutions and hampered the country's efforts to become self-sufficient. Corruption created a rift between the government and prevented the institutionalization of democracy and the establishment of administrative and governmental systems. Corruption has stopped Afghanistan from being self-sufficient and has resulted in the loss of significant resources that could have been used to alleviate the country's severe poverty rate.

2.8. Weak and Fragmented Economy

Afghanistan's economy has always been affected by the structure of its society. The social structure of Afghanistan has been preliminary and based on the tribal and traditional system, which has led to the backwardness of the country’s economy. Economically Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. After 2002, Afghanistan's economy shifted from a traditional to a centrally planned to a free-market economy.

Afghanistan has a primitive economy based on agriculture, illegal opium trade, and foreign aid. A weak and fragmented economy and lack of financial resources were variables that have played a part in guaranteeing or destabilizing peace and security in Afghanistan from the middle of the 18th.

Afghanistan has always had the potential of being a land transit route between Asia and Europe throughout history. Foreign interference, civil war, the illicit drug economy, and a lack of economic infrastructure have contributed to the country's dependency on foreign aid throughout the last four decades. Due to its economic potential, Afghanistan is a wealthy nation. The country has an abundance of natural resources such as natural gas, oil, and a variety of minerals, but there has always been insufficient infrastructure to make use of these natural resources as a result of decades of war. The government of Afghanistan's reliance on foreign money has been one of the critical causes of its collapse throughout its history. The state-building process has also gone through a history of dependence on foreign funding after the Taliban regime. Still, Afghanistan's reliance on foreign funding and foreign troops has been unprecedented in the last decades (Bizhan, 2012). One-third of Afghans live in extreme poverty, while another one-third live just over the poverty line. Drug trafficking and corruption have exacerbated the Afghan conflict while fueling the insurgency, injustice, ethnic tensions, and unhealthy political rivalries. Despite tremendous progress in the health and education sectors, unemployment remained the most prominent obstacle to economic growth and long-term development. Despite billions of dollars invested by the U.S. and the international community in Afghanistan, most Afghans still lack access to essential goods. Afghanistan's economy is based on agriculture, and only 12% of Afghanistan's land is suitable for agriculture. For this reason, animal husbandry is one of the most common occupations. Agriculture employs more than 70% of Afghanistan's population and contributes 24.6% of the country's GDP (Zawulistani, 2015).

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, despite its economy has improved dramatically since the Taliban's collapse in 2001. As of 2020, per capita income, Afghanistan ranked 217th among 228 countries with 492 dollars. The statistics showed that around 54% of the population lives below the poverty. Poverty is likely to increase considerably due to the COVID-19 crisis. According to the World Bank 2020 projection, the poverty rate might rise to 72% by 2020 due to falling wages and growing food and

other essential household good costs (World Bank, 2020). As reported in 2020, the unemployment rate was 40%, among the top 20 worst countries in the world (Khaama Press, 2021).

Decades of war and occupation, political and administrative instability have adversely affected the social and economic structure of the country. As reported by the World Bank's data, Afghanistan is among the top ten countries in the world with its high birth and death rates. Afghanistan ranks 21st in the world regarding the maternal mortality rate at birth, with 400 deaths per 100,000, twice the average of developing countries. It ranks fifth from the bottom among the world countries with a 49-year life expectancy (CSO, n.d). According to the 2020 statistics of the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), Afghanistan's most remarkable trait is its relatively young population structure. At the same time, 47.2% (15.5 million) of the population is under 15, those aged 65 and over account for only 2.8 percent. The proportion of children under the age of 15 is among the highest globally, and it is more significant than in surrounding nations. On the other side, approximately 10 million adolescents and adults are illiterate in Afghanistan. However, the country has made tremendous improvements since 2016. According to the UNESCO statistics, the literacy rate was 34.8% in 2016/17, but it has already risen to 43%.

Furthermore, the literacy rate for youngsters aged 15-24 has grown significantly, currently reaching 65%. Considering this accomplishment, Afghanistan faces significant difficulties, with many people without literacy and chances for further education. One of the main challenges could be the gender gap in society, where men have a literacy rate of 55%, and women have a rate of only 29.8% (UIL, 2020).

The weak and fragmented economy was one of the main reasons for the unstable environment in Afghanistan. For the sake of a weak economy, the central administration in the country cannot make its presence felt in every region of the country, and local powers and illegal groups filled the areas left empty by the state. Due to these local structures, the state is deprived of tax revenue, cannot operate underground resources safely, cannot ensure the security of transportation routes, and foreign investments avoid investing in the country. Agricultural economy features are observed in the country, with no industry other than a few small-scale factories left from the Soviet occupation. Although the country is rich in underground resources, it does not have the qualifications to use them. The war that lasted for many years destroyed the infrastructure, educated people fled the country,

millions of people left their homes and land, education and health services were insufficient, and the agricultural sector suffered due to the drought and other substantial factors (Jones, 2008).

A farmer with less than half a hectare of irrigable land cannot maintain his family only via agriculture, although this is the case for 65% of farmers. Agriculture is still done with primitive methods, and 70% of agricultural workers are women. Agriculture should be the leading sector in the development of Afghanistan (Qureshi, 2002). Since the food need in the country can be met at a minimum level, conflicts based on food resources can reach serious proportions. Especially in the low-income group, food prices are above the purchasing power (Weinbaum, 1980).

Years of civil war and instability make domestic and foreign investors reluctant to invest. Foreign aid to the country does not reach its target either. While the assistance received in cash should have resulted in an investment or an improvement in management level in the country, it has not happened. Military aid to provide security has transformed the land ownership and production-based elite structure into a military-based elite structure based on these military aids (Sidky, 2007). In addition to being poor in terms of income sources, the country also has problems caused by the uneven distribution of low income. While the wealthiest 25% consumes 39% of the resources, the poorest 25% consumes only 9 percent (MDG, 2010). Although the surplus value obtained from labor in Western countries has brought vitality to the economy by being transferred to the investment field, increased production and exports, and reduced unemployment. This surplus value in Afghanistan is transferred to foreign accounts, invested in immovable properties, or spent on armament.

After the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, there has been a slight improvement in the economy due to security and financial aid. Market-centered legal and commercial infrastructure was established, electricity production doubled compared to 2002, 12,000 km of the highway was built, Kabul airport was expanded and improved, private airlines started to fly (ANDS, 2014). The situation of roads in the country has been improved. Flights are made from three airports. Despite some challenges in the policy and security areas, macroeconomic values were improved. From 2009 to 2010, the country recorded a historical growth of 22.5%, the growth rate in the agricultural sector was 53%, with the help of regular rainfalls. Wheat production has doubled, and the service sector has also

grown under the leadership of public services, finance, and transportation services. The mining business has grown by 30% in the last two years. In the same period, with a 53% increase in treasury income compared to the previous year, an improvement was observed in financial performance, and the budget grew by 16%. While there was an increase of 68% in tax revenues and 48% in customs revenues, a decrease of 10% was observed in public expenditures (MDG, 2010).

After 2001, the economy witnessed a post-war recovery, and the administration embarked on a fresh round of investment. A significant portion of such money came from Western and other donors and was used to revive the infrastructure sector of the economy. It led to employment in the public sector, mainly in the security section. Furthermore, trade reopened, and a large amount of money was invested in the infrastructure sector. Beyond everything, a lot of money and attempt was put into public healthcare, education, and agriculture. Regardless of all these investments in the economy of Afghanistan, the improvement was not sufficient. The amount of money invested and spent in the sector was not proportional to all parts and cities of the country. Free trade and economic structure all over the country were not standardized. Lack of control and connection of the central government among the villages and cities led to the waste of money. Another vital factor that directed into the waste of money and insufficiency was high corruption in all aspects of the government. Taliban insurgency activities among villages and short-term economic projects were the other reasons for the lousy economy sector. These all with the high unemployment rate actuate the youth segment of the society into illegal and insurgency activities. The country's illicit economy is at least as big as the legal economy in its known size. The most important export item of the country is opium gum. Poppy farming provides financial resources to farmers and armed groups engaged in processing and smuggling. The current source of the instability in the country is considerable warlords. Because warlords hold economic power, they have political power. A few industries have survived in the country, devastated by drought and war.

2.9. Natural Resources

The curse of natural resources is a term used in economic literature to describe a situation in which countries with abundant natural resources face uneven economic development and recession. Afghanistan is blessed with incredible natural resources.

Afghanistan's natural resources are estimated at $3 trillion by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, which is 162 times the country's gross domestic product (GDP) which was $18.4 billion in 2016. It can help the country achieve economic stability and reduce its reliance on foreign aid (Shafaee, 2018). After years of extreme poverty, foreign interventions, and civil war, Afghanistan is considered one of the richest natural resources in the world. Afghanistan has many essential resources, including uranium, silver, gold, aluminum, iron, platinum, lithium, iron, chromite, and silver. The excellent qualities of Afghani turquoise, emeralds, lapis lazuli, and rubies have attracted the attention of the gems market (Sayah, 2013).

The U.S. geological survey shows that Afghanistan has the world's most considerable scarce resources in the world. These rare resources are primarily used to produce tanks, missile and anti-missile weapons, satellites, and other military communications systems. Afghanistan can be a component of a permanent resolution to the scarcity of these essential elements. According to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Afghanistan has the best soil in the world since the country has fourteen valuable elements that are not easily found in other regions. Rare elements are becoming increasingly significant in 21st-century technologies. Lithium is a rare mineral found in Afghanistan used in the production of electric cars. Smartphones, computers, laser technology, electric vehicles, spacecraft, and various advanced hydrogen weapons are highly dependent on rare elements. However, Afghanistan's geology has identified two paths; threat and opportunity. In other words, Afghanistan's mineral resources and mines are both a threat and an opportunity.

Natural resources provide opportunities in every country that aren't available through other means. For a long time, Afghanistan has been ravaged by war and bloodshed. Only stability and peace can give the nation a new face and create fresh prospects for human development and other sectors. It seems that natural resources have been a threat to the country as we look at the recent stories in the politics of Afghanistan (Mohammadi, 2021). Despite its hostile and domineering neighbors, the gift of natural resources in Afghanistan, deep ethnic divisions, lack of efficient security, and, most importantly, lack of necessary preventative measures could spark another war over natural resources. Mining is a simple mining business, but it can cause serious tensions. Natural resources have sometimes given

rise to violent conflicts over control. Areas under the supervision of criminals and insurgent networks are more vulnerable (Katawazai, 2020).

Statistics show that since 2001, illegal mining in Afghanistan has cost between $200 and $300 million per year. In this case, without immediate and appropriate measures, Afghanistan's abundant natural resources will not only be a missed chance but a danger to national security. The Taliban, warlords, and armed organizations, for example, control a large portion of Afghanistan's natural resources and revenue (Lakhani & Corboz, 2017). According to the statistics, earnings from mines in Badakhshan, which flow into the wallets of strong groups (warlords and mafia) and the Taliban, equate to all the Afghan government's reported revenues from natural resources. On the other side, natural resources are the Taliban's second most profitable source of income. The Afghan government faced a difficult challenge with the Taliban, the growing threat from ISIS-K, and the corruption's disaster. It will be impossible for the government any time soon to regain control of thousands of mines that are being mined illegally.

Many factors contributed to the country's inability to extract these substantial natural resources in past years. The instability and threat of terrorism were the first and most important reasons. Other essential issues; lack of rules and law, bureaucracy, corruption, and non-transparency of offers and contracts, mismanagement of Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, lack of statistical data regarding the existing mines across the country, absence of trained expert staff, and the shortage of a particular institute or specialized training center for research on mining issues were the main obstacles to extract the mines in the country. Apart from the statement mentioned above, it is possible to assert that basic amenities and services such as electricity, water, transportation, and the internet are incredibly rudimentary throughout Afghanistan, particularly in mining regions where basic amenities and services such as electricity, roads, and water do not exist. Another industry problem is the lack of investments to increase the added value of metals and minerals in Afghanistan, based on the problem mentioned above (Etilaatroz, 2017).

Natural resources have played a crucial role in Afghanistan's war since 2001, and debates over natural resources, rather than ideological or ethnic divides, have become a more significant element of the conflict. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Natural resources play an important role in Afghanistan's battles,

growing in size, area, and intensity (Brown & Blankenship, 2013). The following are the origins of conflict over natural resources, according to Brown and Blankenship;

1- Communities and countries compete for rare resources like fertile land and irrigation water.
2- Strong stakeholders use natural resources as a step-down tool to exercise control over others.
3- Natural resources are an illegal source of income that has built a strong war economy and continues to be severely corrupt.
4- Natural resources serve as an incentive for peacebreakers (at the local, national, and regional levels) who profit from a prolonged security vacuum.
5- Natural resources are a source of resentment (due to land grabs or environmental harm caused by mining operations), significantly when the government is tainted by corruption.

Afghanistan has been reliant on international aid for a long time. If extracted effectively, Afghanistan's sufficient raw resources can provide an adequate substitute for foreign aid and solve Afghanistan's problem of reliance on foreign support. Better management of these natural resources can lead to sustainable economic development, ultimately contributing to lasting peace in Afghanistan. There is only one way to salvage Afghanistan from its current state of insecurity and turmoil; strategically and efficiently mining its massive subsurface riches.

CHAPTER 3

REGIONAL DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

3.1. Afghanistan and Pakistan Tension

Afghanistan was the country that voted against the establishment of Pakistan in the UN, and the two country's relationships always have been challenging since then. The Durand line dispute, which was constituted by the British colonial, continued as a provenance of controversy between two countries where Pakistan regards it as its international boundary whereas Afghanistan does not. The decision of Pakistan in March 1955 to merge the four western provinces into a single government unit of West Pakistan was interrupted by Afghanistan, and former prime minister Mohammad Daoud Khan underlined his dissatisfaction which led to the rise of tension between the two countries. The next phase of the Pakistan-Afghanistan crisis was happened in 1960-1961, over the border problem. In 1963, with the help of Iran, peace was maintained until Daoud Khan became the president of Afghanistan by removing his cousin in 1973. Daoud Khan was in favor of the idea of Pashtunistan and considered the areas beyond the Durand Line to belong to Afghanistan. Daoud Khan set up an office called the Department of Tribes to help Pashtuns across the border, and this made him a powerful and dangerous figure for Pakistan (Moheb, 2012).

General Zia-ul-Haq's military coup of 1977 in Pakistan, Afghanistan's communist revolution of 1978, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 all made the Daoud Khan and Bhutto accords on Pashtunistan useless. The events in Afghanistan and Pakistan signaled the start of a new era in the two country’s ties. Kabul’s government again revived the Pashtunistan issue and declared its support for Pashtun and Baluch separatists at the border. On the other hand, Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organized various Afghan groups that had taken refuge in Pakistan under the Daoud government. General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military ruler, persuaded the U.S. intelligence service to channel all Western supplies to the Afghan Mujahideen through Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI). During the Afghan people's years of struggle against the Soviet Union and its administration, Pakistan hosted millions of Afghan refugees. At the beginning of the Afghan jihad, the “Strategic Depth” theory entered the policies of the Pakistani military.

Pakistan, which had always felt threatened by India, sought to establish a government in Afghanistan that would support Pakistan if Pakistan went to war with India one day.

Afghanistan's 10-year war against the Soviet Union and its pro-government in Kabul had weakened its governments. In contrast, Pakistan had grown closer to the West than ever before and strengthened its economic and military status with Western military and financial aid, and enhanced its position in the area as a vital ally of the West and the U.S. The Mujahedeen came to power in 1992, and the war between jihadist parties supported by Pakistan and Iran made Afghanistan even weaker and more dependent on its neighbors, including Pakistan. After the civil war, Pakistan, with the support of the Taliban, sought to form its government in Afghanistan. During the Taliban regime (1996-2001), Pakistani intelligence had the most extraordinary relationship with Kabul.

However, this remarkable Kabul-Islamabad period came to an end in September 2001 with Al-Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center (Aria, 2020). Thousands of Taliban terrorists recruited students from Pakistani schools to fight with the Taliban in Afghanistan under the "Jihad against the occupying forces" banner. Although the Taliban's defeat was a humiliation to Pakistan's strategy, it did not affect Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan. Instead, the Pakistani military has been funding and re-equipping the Taliban. The Pakistani military continued to believe that its terrorist deployment and proxy war plan would be successful. Pakistan's foreign policy weapons are the deployment of terrorist and proxy groups to further the country's strategic interests. Indeed, the 15 August 2021 seizure of Kabul and territorial control of Afghanistan by the Taliban could be noticed as the successful complete strategic depth theory of the Pakistan military.

3.1.1. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations During Karzai's Early Days

Hamid Karzai is an ethnic Pashtun from the Polpalzai tribe, one of Afghanistan's Pashtun tribes. He was a member of the Nejat Front in the 1980s, and after the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was founded, he became the head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Office of the President of the Provisional Government in Peshawar. After the Taliban's formation, Karzai began to support them and eventually became the Taliban's permanent representative in the UN. However, he did not go to this duty and claimed the Taliban for his father's killing. He started supporting King Zahir Shah and became a potential opposer to the Taliban. As a part of the Bonn Agreement in 2001,

Karzai became the chairman of the interim government in Afghanistan (Hamid Karzai's Biography, 2012).

Karzai's first official reaction since establishing his interim government was at the opening ceremony of the International Press Center at the Ministry of Information and Culture in Kabul in 2003. Hamid Karzai blamed Pakistan for the rise of insecurity in Afghanistan. Following Hamid Karzai's reaction against Pakistan, many angry youths attacked the Pakistani embassy and smashed all embassy equipment and windows in Kabul. After this action, the country's relationships became worse, and the situation forced Karzai to apologize to Pakistan after angry youth actions officially. Following the incident, Kabul's authorities continued to condemn Pakistan harshly. Jawed Ludin, a spokesperson of the government, initially said in 2005 that crucial Taliban commanders live in Pakistan (Shafaee, 2014).

Karzai, after his six months chair of the interim administration, has been elected as the President of the "Afghan Transition Administration" by Grand Assembly (Loya Jirga) for 18 months, under the Bonn Agreement (Shafaie, 2014a). Karzai's main goal during this time was to promote a strong central government and gain support from all of the country's political groups. The Afghanistan Constitution was passed after 22 days of discussion by the Constitutional Commission, and the country's name changed to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. (Ehler et al., 2007). Pakistan gained strength almost as soon as the Karzai administration took office. In 2003, the Taliban resumed their assaults and increased their terrorist activities.

The U.S. envoy in Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for Afghanistan's instability on April 20, 2003. It made it clear that the Taliban, backed by Pakistan's military, had recovered power and stepped up their activities across the country. In the same year, Pakistani military troops opened fire across the border on Afghan soldiers, resulting in a deterioration in relations between the two countries. As a response, Karzai announced on July 7, 2003, that Afghan military forces would respond. Meanwhile, a group of protesters assaulted the Pakistan embassy in Kabul. Hamid Karzai stated that Pakistan's attack was cowardly and hostile (Grare, 2006). Nonetheless, throughout the transition government period, ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained tight but unremarkable.

3.1.2. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations During Hamid Karzai's First Presidency

Karzai was elected as the president of Afghanistan on October 9, 2004, with the first democratic election of Afghan history. He received 55,4% of the votes, despite fraud during the election. Karzai's promises were the disarming of the militia, eradicating the drug production/trade, fighting against poverty and unemployment, carrying out new reforms, and rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure. Following it, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney promised that the U.S. would continue to help Afghanistan. In a country where the Taliban was still active, tribal leaders could still retain their authority. The major contributors to the country's violence were these groups, which got their financial resources from the drug trade (DW, 2004). Karzai attempted to include Mujahideen and other groups in his government to solidify his power.

On the other hand, at the beginning of 2005, open military combat was phased out on specific targets. But on the other side, the number of suicide bombers has increased in the country. Pakistan was accused by Afghanistan and the U.S. of being disinterested in combating terrorism and sheltering Taliban insurgents. (Shafaie, 2014b). In March 2005, Karzai visited Pakistan, and the situation became even tenser. In July, the Afghan authorities detained several Pakistanis in connection with an alleged suicide attack against the U.S. ambassador. As a result, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan had intensified. On February 17, 2006, President Karzai paid an official visit to Pakistan after U.S. President George W. Bush's intervention as a mediator between the two countries. During his visit to Pakistan, he provided the Pakistani authorities a list of 150 persons living in Pakistan who were involved in the assaults in Afghanistan and demanded that they be apprehended and handed over to the Afghan government. On the other hand, Pakistani officials did not consider Karzai's list significant.

As the relationship between the two countries deteriorated, Musharraf visited Kabul on September 6, 2006, and referred to Afghanistan as a friendly, brotherly country. On the other hand, Pakistanis are not only assisting the Taliban but also attempting to construct a border security fence (Faramarz, 2021). Afghanistan and Pakistani leaders met at the UN offices on September 28, 2006, and both countries blamed each other for Afghanistan's poor situation. Karzai stated that the terrorist groups in Pakistan must be destroyed and called for the dissolution of organizations that recruit and train terrorists and accused the Taliban of attacking Afghan and Western targets (Safi, 2008). Karzai slammed Pakistan

with harsh words during his visit to Kandahar, claiming that Pakistan was hindering Afghanistan's reconstruction because it intended to make Afghanistan enslaved (Walsh, 2008). During the Musharraf era, the relationship between the two countries was constantly changing. It would quickly go from warm to cold and vice versa. After the Afghanistan-Pakistan-NATO summit in Kabul at the end of 2006, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-NATO Military and Intelligence Cooperation Office was established. However, this office did not affect the relations of both countries (Lobjakas, 2007). The countries engaged in a military battle on May 3, 2007, at the border. Afghanistan suffered the loss of seven civilians and six militaries, and both governments held each other responsible for the tension. Afghanistan lodged a formal complaint to the international community over the occurrence.

Bush, Karzai, and Musharraf met in Kabul on August 9, 2007, under the "Regional Safety Meeting" banner. Karzai pleaded for Pakistan's and other party's full cooperation in dealing with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. It was his initiative that brought the Taliban to the negotiating table. Furthermore, he anticipated improving relations between Pakistan and the U.S. However, this did not occur, and both leaders departed the conference with mutual enmity (RFERL, 2007). Asif Ali Zardari, the late Benazir Bhutto's husband, was elected President of Pakistan on September 7, 2008. Ali Zardari stressed during his celebration that the fight against terror was his primary priority, which necessitated collaboration with Afghanistan. After the ties warmed up, Barack Obama declared Afghanistan-Pakistan unified. The main objective was to utterly eliminate the Taliban and other radical groups (Çevik, 2013).

3.1.3. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations During Hamid Karzai's Second Presidency

After a long delay in announcing the results attributed to electoral fraud claimed by Abdullah Abdullah, Hamid Karzai was elected president of Afghanistan for the second time on November 19, 2009. Participation in the 2009 elections went from 70% to 30%, and the ballot entirely reflected ethnicities. Karzai's reactions against Afghan civilian casualties due to the U.S. bombings further severed the relationships between the two countries. The U.S. demanded that he would not repeat the corruption in the first term and strengthen state authority (McHugh, 2015, p. 1- 16). Karzai's performance improved in his

second term and intended to solidify his position. He also persuaded the Taliban to join his administration in negotiating peace.

On the other hand, the Taliban refused to negotiate with Karzai's government. Despite this, Karzai was successful in bringing certain Taliban commanders to Kabul. (Garfield, 2014). NATO and Afghan forces launched a ferocious counter-offensive against the Taliban in 2010. Meanwhile, the CIA and ISI have apprehended Molla Baradar, the Taliban's second most senior figure. Besides this, Molla Salam, another important Taliban official, has been captured in Pakistan. The U.S. also killed many Taliban members with missile attacks (DW, 2010). Karzai visited Pakistan on July 10, 2010, encouraging them to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table. (Spanta, 2017).

The U.S. verified the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on May 2, 2011. Pakistani officials had previously declared that Laden was not in Pakistan. Despite widespread anticipation that the U.S. would blame Pakistan, the U.S. praised Pakistan for its assistance (Tolonews, 2012). On September 20, 2011, Afghan ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated in Kabul (Andishmand, 2007). On November 26, 2011, 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed due to a NATO airstrike.

According to Pakistani scholars, this was a deliberate strike. Through diplomacy and dialogue, the U.S. could not persuade Pakistan to bring the Taliban to the bargaining table. Therefore, the U.S. attempted to enforce its agenda by force. On the other hand, Pakistan responded angrily to the strike, asking that the border between the two nations is closed and that the CIA abandon the Shamsi Airbase in Pakistan. Pakistan was a vital logistical route for the U.S. military. On February 16, 2012, Hamid Karzai conducted an official visit to Islamabad to attend the two-day Trilateral Summit involving Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. According to Karzai, allowing NATO’s soldiers' equipment to be sent back to Afghanistan via Pakistani lines would help both nations. Karzai, who urged Pakistan to encourage contact and communication with the Taliban, also stated that no compromise in peace negotiations with the Taliban could be made until Pakistan exerts pressure and offers to advise the Taliban. During this tour, Pakistani authorities and Afghanistan officials agreed on security collaboration between the two countries intelligence units at the strategic level, cooperation between local commanders at the border, the struggle against separatism, and transferring Afghan military students to Pakistan. It expressed its demands

in a strategic draft agreement that addressed transit cooperation and the adoption of coordinated views at conferences and international assemblies.

The struggle against the Taliban in Pakistan and the demolition of Taliban safe houses were not mentioned in this draft. In addition, Prime Minister of Pakistan Yusuf Reza Gilani expressed his condolences for the killing of Rabbani, stating that strengthening the relations between the two countries is Pakistan's fixed foreign policy (Spanta, 2017). The new atmosphere in Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban regime, the Afghan government and people have called for brotherly and friendly relations with their neighbors, particularly Pakistan. As a neighbor and brother country was expected that Pakistan would try to avoid supporting extremists in border areas and, alongside the international community, assist the Afghan government and people in rebuilding and keeping the peace and security process. Unfortunately, we did not see it, and these risks and weaknesses have aggravated the situation in Afghanistan for more than a decade.

Opportunities and problems abound in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. Both countries are equally political and economic standing, which presents opportunities. Terrorism is a common concern, and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS and the Taliban will harm both countries. Meanwhile, Pakistan is facing international criticism for being a pro-extremist regime in the region and Afghanistan. The Afghan government's unwillingness to acknowledge the Durand Line as the official boundary between the two nations, whether it is or is not, would severely influence their future ties. Serious counter-terrorism operations on both sides of the Durand Line will cast a shadow over the future of relations between the two nations, creating a mist of mistrust and refusing to cooperate. Other variables that will have a detrimental influence on the future of Pakistan-Afghanistan ties include India's position as a friend of Afghanistan and Pakistan's displeasure with India's positive presence in Afghanistan (Akhzrati, 2019).

In conclusion, Afghanistan's ties with Pakistan have seen numerous ups and downs since the fall of the Taliban’s regime in 2001. These relations have been particularly troubled by armed opposition on both sides of the Durand Line. The Afghanistan government has always condemned Pakistan for its double policy, accusing it of fuelling instability. Pakistan's foreign policy with Afghanistan has remained consistent over this time, while Kabul's rulers have seen numerous ups and downs in their foreign policy, sometimes indicating friendliness and sometimes hatred. During Karzai’s 13-year

presidency, he pursued different policies toward Pakistan during his rule, sometimes called Pakistan to war, once considered himself a defender of this country. At the end of his government, Karzai has repeatedly declared that Pakistan is the source of Afghanistan's troubles and instability.

3.1.4. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations During the National Unity Government (Ashraf Ghani)

The National Unity Government (NUG) resulted from an agreement signed by the U.S. mediation between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah after both were proclaimed victorious in the 2014 presidential election. The influential followers of Abdullah vowed to create a "parallel administration" after rejecting the Independent Election Commission's (ICE) preliminary results on July 7, which handed Ghani 56.4% of the vote and Abdullah 43.6% (International Crisis Group, 2017). After an internationally supervised audit ruled that he had received the most votes, Ashraf Ghani became president per the NUG agreement on September 21, 2014. Abdullah Abdullah was appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO), which is not defined in the constitution. The CEO exercises special executive powers that have been assigned to him by the presidential proclamation (Jalali, 2015).

The National Unity Government had adopted a conciliatory approach toward Pakistan shortly after taking office to secure Pakistan's cooperation in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table. In the long run, to help the Afghanistan economy by acting as a "main intersection" between South and Central Asian economy. Since its serious resurgence in 2005-06, the Taliban-led insurgency has been the leading cause of instability in Afghanistan. As instability increased from year to year, the military defeat of the Taliban was no longer a viable goal. President Ghani's approach was based on the same premise that guided Karzai's policy. Pakistan is the obstacle, and Afghanistan would not stabilize unless Pakistan's attitude changes. Unlike Karzai, however, Ghani has consistently said that the primary problem is an "unclaimed state of warfare" between Afghanistan and Pakistan, rather than the Taliban terrorist group. He saw the Taliban as a sign, not the source of the problem. Unlike Karzai, who tried to humiliate and push Pakistan into collaboration, Ghani has attempted to encourage Pakistan to be a part of the solution by clearly handling its concerns about Afghanistan in a way that protects both

nation's priorities. For starters, he postponed the execution of the strategic cooperation agreement with India. He opted against purchasing heavy weaponry from India, as Hamid Karzai asked during his final months in power.

President Ashraf Ghani promised Pakistan to continue cooperation in exchange for assistance in bringing the Taliban conflict to an end. For instance, he pursued tight connections with Pakistan's security services. Besides this, Ghani made some steps to assuage Pakistani fears about cross-border terrorism and secured commercial arrangements with Pakistan that were expected to increase bilateral trade between the two countries from $1.6 billion to $5 billion by 2017 (Sial, 2016). By enabling the Taliban and its linked Haqqani network to operate freely from shelters on Pakistani soil, Pakistan has made a massive contribution to the instability in Afghanistan (Yusuf & Smith, 2015). It was a significant divergence from his predecessor, Hamid Karzai. Like the majority of Afghans, Karzai held a strong mistrust of Pakistan.

During this phase, bilateral visits between Pakistan and Afghanistan rose to unprecedented levels in the past 15 years due to Afghanistan's bold move to leave India. This peaceful period in Afghan-Pakistan ties did not endure long. The fragile Afghan government-Taliban peace process “quickly disintegrated” when Molla Omar's death was announced. It destroyed any chance of peace in Afghanistan, and it also marked the beginning of the second phase of Afghan-Pakistan relations during Ghani's administration, which continues to this day. A new and terrible wave of lethal strikes in Afghanistan has entered this stage, including Kabul Airport and the Afghan Parliament. “Pakistan is in a constant unannounced war with Afghanistan,” said Ashraf Ghani, who added, “The main issue for Afghanistan is not the Taliban or Al-Qaeda, but state-to-state ties with Pakistan.” As a result of Pakistan's retaliation to these claims, significant confrontations between the two border security forces resumed.

In the next stage of Afghan-Pakistan relationships, there was a widening crack between the two countries as mistrust and dissatisfaction deepened. Following an examination of Ghani's Indo-Pak strategy, a trade-off-trend between Afghanistan's relations with India and Pakistan emerged. It began with deciding on a policy of reconciliation with Pakistan and eventual isolation from India. It then shifted 360 degrees, with India's relations becoming better and warmer and Pakistan's poorer and nastier (Sethi,

2020). As a result, when we look at Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan throughout the previous five decades, we may draw certain conclusions (Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2015).

- Pakistan has utilized Afghanistan to acquire political and economic advantages in its foreign policy with other countries. Pakistan exploited Afghanistan as a platform for U.S. foreign policy and confrontation with the Soviet Union in the 1980s.
- At the same time, Pakistan uses Afghanistan as a strategic depth in its struggle with India as it strengthened its influence in its domestic affairs.
- Pakistan utilized Afghanistan as a power vacuum to drain the energy of its extremism to strengthen national identity and manage radical groups.
- In the current situation, Pakistan appears to have pursued a dual policy of "draining the energy of radicalism" and "joint struggle" in cooperation with Afghanistan and China, following the proliferation of radical group leadership and their awareness of the Pakistani government's mercenary policies, as well as the expansion of the Pakistani government's ability to use these groups as tools.

3.2. India-Pakistan Contest in Afghanistan

Even though India does not have a common border with any of the countries in the region, it is a country that has geographical proximity and historical ties with Central Asia. Central Asia, which was closed to the outside world during the Cold War years, has been open to India due to the rapprochement between India and the Soviet Union since its independence. India's interest in the Central Asian region is not only for historical and cultural reasons but also a region of great strategic importance for India. Because of its closeness to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China (Ehsas, 2019).

For many years, Afghanistan has been a source of contention for major global and regional powers. Foreign-sponsored battles, proxy warfare, and the equipping of militant and allied organizations have all done tremendous damage to Afghanistan's stability and sovereignty. The competition between India and Pakistan is one of the most crucial of these. The animosity between India and Pakistan dates back to long before the war in Afghanistan. It is rooted in the conflicting and hostile views between the two neighboring countries at the end of British rule in South Asia.

The exterior dimension of Afghanistan's war is as essential as the country's internal or even more violent provocations, especially if neighboring action threatens the hope of complete Afghan reconciliation. Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan have distinct aims in mind, and they utilize wildly different tactics to achieve their objectives. Pakistan employs armed groups like the Taliban as strategic proxy troops, whereas India depends primarily on soft power to influence Afghans. Pakistan is the most important regional actor in Afghanistan due to these policies. However, India, which falls behind Pakistan in this competition, is still committed to maintaining the present government in Kabul. India and Pakistan are wary of each other's intentions and capabilities. However, Pakistan's perspective of India's involvement in Afghanistan is significantly distorted and exaggerated. India attempted to achieve its objectives by retaining influence through financial aid and soft policy (Shadow of India-Pak Rivalry, 2016).

Afghanistan is a crucial player in India's regional rivalry with Pakistan. The two nations, which have a long-standing border dispute over Kashmir, have had turbulent ties since Pakistan's inception in 1947 and have long been concerned about each other's influence in Afghanistan. While Pakistan wants to limit Indian influence in Afghanistan through rebel organizations, India has adopted a soft approach since 2001, pioneering Afghanistan's growth and control of Pakistan through culture and politics. On the other hand, Pakistan has religious institutions that educate thousands of Afghan youngsters. These Islamist militias have established a strategic depth for Islamabad's influence in Afghanistan. The present Afghan conflict is underpinned by comparable regional rivalries between India and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, the U.S. and Russia, and other actors (Paikan, 2020).

India's objectives in Afghanistan are to develop a stable democratic government, oppose Pakistani influence, and prevent Islamabad-backed militant organizations from utilizing Afghan territory as a base for terrorist actions, therefore endangering India's interests. India's primary source of influence in Afghanistan is through soft power instruments. Since the Taliban regime's demise in 2001, New Delhi has donated $3 billion in economic aid to Afghanistan to help develop its infrastructure and human resources. The Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (previously known as the Salma Dam) in Herat province, the Kabul National Parliament building, and the installation of trade routes (Chabahar port through Iran) to bypass Pakistan were significant Indian projects in

Afghanistan. Furthermore, India's soft power in Afghanistan has included development assistance in health, agriculture, education, water management, housing, sports, and tourism. Relations between India and Afghanistan were at an all-time low under the Taliban government. Afghanistan became a training ground for Pakistani-backed militias to undertake guerrilla warfare in the Indian-controlled Kashmir area during the Taliban regime (Shadow of India-Pak Rivalry, 2016).

Pakistan's history with Afghanistan demonstrates that it has always been apprehensive about being besieged by Afghanistan. Since the 1970s, Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan have been essentially the same, maintain a balance of power in Kabul that favors Islamabad's interests while diminishing India's involvement. Many scholars contend that this policy demonstrates Pakistan's military's desire to create "strategic depth" in Afghanistan. At the core of Islamabad's calculations is a long-held worry that with Kabul's collaboration, India exploits Afghan territory to undermine Pakistan's territorial integrity, notably by fomenting discontent among Pashtun and Baluch populations (Constantino, 2020).

Finally, as long as India and Pakistan's rivalry erupts regularly, the odds of decreasing tensions between the two countries in Afghanistan would remain limited. There is no solution for these problems, and the odds of Kashmir returning to normalcy are nearly nil unless something drastic happens. India has made it clear to Pakistan that it intends to handle the decades-long Kashmir conflict on its terms. On the other hand, Pakistan would never tolerate such a challenge to its national identity and seek ways to destabilize India. In other words, Afghanistan remained a competitive field dependent on the main drivers of the India-Pakistan war, which does not appear to be dying down.

3.3. Iran-Saudi Arabia Competition for Regional Dominance

For decades, Iran and Saudi Arabia have battled for regional power and influence. On certain occasions, the competition between the two countries has been violent. The situation in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen results from the two country's rivalry. Both governments have been accused of backing religious radicals in the region, although their interests in the area are obviously in conflict. Afghanistan is strategically important for Iran because it shares a long border with the country and cultural, linguistic,

and historical similarities. Iran also hosts hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees who fled the country during the Soviet conquest of Afghanistan and the subsequent civil war.

On top of that, what distinguishes Afghanistan from Iran is the issue of drug trafficking and the border security risks posed by Afghanistan to Iran (Milani, 2006, p. 236). Iran is concerned about the deteriorating security situation in its surrounding countries, allowing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other Sunni religious extremists to extend their operations. On the other hand, Iran also started to fund and support extremist groups like the Taliban in recent years in Afghanistan to enhance its sphere of influence. While investigating Iran's objectives in Afghanistan, these developments are significant to be mentioned;

I. Iran has been continued to support the Hazara Shiite minority groups and other Persian speakers to keep its goal and influence in Afghanistan. On the other side, Iran's political and military assistance for Afghan factions has always been impacted by Iran's cultural and religious links to the Afghan people. One of the most important aims of Iran is the exportation of the ideology of Shi'ism and revolution in the country.
II. Strategic considerations shape Iranian policies in Afghanistan. Despite opposite ideological views and its longstanding animosity against the Taliban, the Iran leadership continued to support the organization. This activity is driven by the hostility between Iran and the U.S.
III. Proxy pressure is another Iran’s tool that is used against the Afghan Government:

- Iran also utilizes its Taliban to pressure Afghanistan over bilateral disagreements that have so far evaded diplomatic settlement.
- Another cause of the bilateral problem is the Helmand water issue which goes back to the 1870s agreement. Iran claims more water flow than was agreed in the 1973 accord between the two countries.
- The problem of drugs is another cause of contention between Iran and Afghanistan along their 600-mile border.
- Afghan refugees in Iran are the third cause of the problem between Iran and Afghanistan.

The issues mentioned above were crucial for the shape of both country's relationships since 2001 (Nader & Laha, 2011, pp. 3-13). In general, Iran's government has followed a contradictory strategy regarding Afghanistan in recent years. Saudi Arabia's ties with Afghanistan go back to the 1980s when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Saudi government and charity groups backed by wealthy Saudi sheiks gave financial help to the Afghan Mujahideen for their benefit. Saudi Arabia was the second country to recognize the Taliban administration and reopen its embassy in Kabul under the Taliban reign. Over the last 20 years, the multinational military presence led by the U.S. in Afghanistan has regularly accused Saudi Arabia of promoting religious and Islamic extremism in Afghanistan. Riyadh intends to utilize Kabul as a political instrument in regional political negotiations and security cooperation between the U.S. and Iran. Evidence shows that Saudi Arabia mainly provided financial and political support to Sunni extremist groups, unlike Iran, which predominantly supports the Shiites. The following initiatives might be cited while examining Saudi Arabia's goals in Afghanistan;

- One of the most significant of Saudi Arabia’s goals in Afghanistan is the spread of cultural and theological influence with a Wahhabi perspective. In this sense, a new era of Saudi influence in Afghanistan began with the country's attempts to create the country's largest university in Nangarhar province. Indeed, Saudi Arabia actively promotes extremism, Salafism, and the development of Wahhabism in both the academic and military sectors of the country.
- Another objective of Saudi Arabia is to increase its influence in Afghanistan, boost its regional dominance, and challenge Iran's influence.
- Yet another goal of Saudi Arabia's efforts to increase its influx in Afghanistan is to build economic links and investment in many industries, including the country's mines (Waqari, 2018). In recent years, Saudi Arabia has used economic power to increase its presence in various countries, including Afghanistan.

The unfavorable ties between the two countries had an impact on Afghanistan. During the Taliban regime, the Saudi was one of the Taliban’s most ardent supporters. Saudi Arabia provided the most significant financial aid to the Taliban. Iran considered Saudi Arabia's support for the Taliban as a source of instability. As a result, Iran also provided help to the Mujahideen who fought against the Taliban. During the Afghan civil war and the Taliban’s regime, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan supported the Taliban. On the

other hand, Iran, India, Russia, and Central Asian countries provided financial aid to the Northern Alliance.

In actuality, the Afghan civil war, particularly the battle between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban, has been essentially a proxy war between countries with competing interests in Afghanistan. Iran and Saudi Arabia were unquestionably the most significant of these countries. As a result, Afghanistan has historically been the victim of antagonistic ties between the two countries. Without Saudi Arabia's financial backing and particular country's logistical and technical assistance, the Taliban would not have been able to conquer more than 90% of Afghanistan in such a short period. However, history demonstrated that becoming engaged in the Iran-Saudi dispute has resulted in nothing but disaster and devastation for Afghanistan (Qaderi, 2016).

The presence of Iran and Saudi Arabia on the Afghanistan war fronts was felt from the 1980s until the Taliban government collapsed. After the fall of the Taliban regime, the rivalry between Iran and Arabia has turned into a kind of secret struggle in Afghanistan. Namely, both countries have tried to penetrate and use the groups and movements in Afghanistan in different ways. With the settlement of U.S. soldiers and NATO forces in Afghanistan after 2001, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia did not end. The U.S., the worst enemy of Iran and a friend of Saudi Arabia, has been the most prominent and most influential power in all affairs of Afghanistan. Fear of the U.S. pushed Iran and Saudi Arabia to secretly execute the power games and power struggle in Afghanistan. It is worrying that the battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have two different understandings of Islam in Iraq and Syria, will also take place in Afghanistan (Iran-Suadi Proxy, 2016). Afghanistan has never been an area of Sunni and Shiite conflict, despite disturbing events and numerous wars in the last 40 years. After King Salman of Saudi Arabia, the country followed a more active policy in Central Asia, especially trying to limit Iran's sphere of influence in the region (Bruno, 2008).

Iran and Saudi Arabia compete for influence in Afghanistan via Sunnis and Shiites ethnic groups. However, Sunnis and Shiites have lived in peace and tranquility in Afghanistan for years. For Afghanistan, there is a danger of turning into the scene of ideological war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The reason for this is both religious and political. Looking at the other regions where Iran and Saudi Arabia are struggling, Tehran and Riyadh are not very new to look at the groups they control in Afghanistan as their

human resources. These two countries did the same in Iraq and Syria. Afghanistan has always had a special position in Iranian politics due to the shared cultural and civilized values with Iran and the common border of thousands of kilometers. Therefore, Afghanistan's political and security changes will have special importance for Iran. It seems that this country will remain one of the influential parties in shaping the events in Afghanistan (Proxy, 2016).

According to some journalists, the new administration of Afghanistan continued its good relations with Saudi Arabia and its strategic relationship with Iran. With the leadership of Ashraf Ghani in 2014, when the National Unity Government came to power, relations between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia improved. On the other side, Afghanistan is also pursuing good relations with its Western neighbor. Iran has always supported the "new era in Afghanistan" in its foreign policy in recent years. However, Iran also expressed its concern over international forces and the security agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan. Iran has played a profound role in the last thirty years in Afghanistan despite all this.

Finally, the conflict in Islamic countries could be a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The competition and a proxy war between the two countries are entirely responsible for the rise of fundamentalism and political Islam and violence in Islamic countries. The breakdown of diplomatic relations between the two nations will escalate bloodshed in the region's weaker countries. As a result, the reflection of rivalry between Iran-Saudi Arabia directly affects the politics and security situation of Afghanistan. However, Iran's and Pakistan's rivalry over Afghanistan don't directly impact because both countries share common hesitation with regards to the Baluch people who live on the border of these countries. Whatever the rivalry, it has had a terrible impact on the Islamic world.

3.4. The Role and Interests of Central Asian Countries in Afghanistan

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan are all part of Central Asia countries. Three of the five nations have a long and open border with Afghanistan, and the area shares ethnic, cultural, historical, political, and linguistic links with its southern neighbor. Stream of insurgencies and illegal drugs connect them as well. These countries were all members of the USSR from 1922 to 1991 and won their

independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Since then, Tajikistan (1,357 km), Turkmenistan (744 km), and Uzbekistan (144 km) have shared more than 2,000 kilometers of border with Afghanistan's eight northern and western provinces (Gussarova, 2017).

Afghanistan serves as a vital transit corridor for products flowing from Central Asia to the South Asian countries and vice versa. It is also a gateway to Central Asia's energy-rich resources, connecting them to critical worldwide markets. As a result, Afghanistan plays a significant role in commerce, exploitation of diverse energy deposits and other mining, water resources, and the development of regional transportation. Afghanistan is the quickest path for massive energy resources from Central Asia to South and East Asian economies.

Simultaneously, Afghanistan is prosperous with enormous energy and other resources that may significantly contribute to the region's economic development and progress. However, Afghanistan's challenge is a lack of transit and transportation facilities, which the government cannot handle on its own. It must develop its land and aviation transportation systems in collaboration with the region's countries. For the reasons indicated, long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan are in the interests of the region's countries. The development of insecurity and terrorism and cultivation and drug trafficking by Afghanistan and Pakistan is undesirable to these countries and their neighbors. Finally, it should be stated that the rise of extremism and bloodshed in Afghanistan jeopardizes the stability and prosperity of the region's countries. Extremism and terrorism have become a significant danger to the region's and the world's peace and security. As a result, the only full collaboration of regional and supra-regional powers and Afghanistan's neighborhood remove terrorism from Afghanistan and the region (Future of Afghanistan, 2013).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Tajikistan joined the U.S.-led coalition and allowed its airspace and facilities by the coalition forces. In response, the U.S. lifted economic sanctions and began providing military and humanitarian aid to the country. Economic cooperation between the two countries has developed in recent years, especially in energy and trade. Tajikistan is the second most significant actor in Central Asia-Afghanistan commerce, and electricity is the core of the economic partnership between the two countries. Besides energy exports, the two countries are building small-scale economic relations. Tajikistan hopes that stability in Afghanistan may offer the opportunity to export its electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India through Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-

1000) Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan (TUTAP) electricity transmission projects. Afghanistan and Tajikistan signed a cooperation agreement in 2006 stipulating that Afghanistan would receive 300 megawatts of electricity. Dushanbe considers these projects, which will help Tajikistan increase its security, as very important for the development and stability of Afghanistan (Kuchins et al., 2015).

Kazakhstan does not have a border with Afghanistan but sees itself as a key economic partner of Afghanistan. Therefore, it is less vulnerable to security threats from Afghanistan than other Central Asian countries (Kassenova, 2014, pp.3-27). Despite establishing diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan in February 1992, Kazakhstan launched its diplomatic mission in Kabul in 2002. Since then, Kazakhstan has taken an active stance on the stabilization of Afghanistan. Astana allowed its airbases for U.S. operations in Afghanistan only in emergencies. President Karzai visited Kazakhstan in April 2004 and discussed crucial issues in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. Kazakhstan is the only country that has aided projects for the country's renovation, which includes water supply, infrastructure development, and the distribution of cement and building materials. Kazakhstan positioned itself as a prominent player in Afghanistan's wheat market when shipments began to take off in 2002.

Kazakhstan now supplies roughly 20% of Afghan flour imports, and during the years when Pakistan banned cereal exports, Kazakhstan became Afghanistan's primary wheat supplier. The commercial and economic cooperation between the two countries, which set an agenda for economic cooperation, has been strengthened. It included Kazakhstan's plans to explore and extract mineral resources in Afghanistan and establish a railway line (Kukeeva, 2013). In 2016, the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan reached 489.4 million dollars. The Kazakh-Afghan Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on trade and economic cooperation played an essential role in developing bilateral trade between countries. In addition, Astana provided humanitarian and financial aid to Afghanistan, like grain and other foodstuffs, and allocated $50 million university scholarships to 1000 Afghan students for 2010-2020 (Kassenova, 2014, pp.3-27).

Uzbekistan is Afghanistan's most important Central Asian commercial partner, despite having only 144 kilometers of the border. In Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is a crucial player in energy and transportation. According to the statistics, Afghanistan has received 1.2 billion kWh of electricity annually from Uzbekistan. In transportation, Between

Hairatan and Mazar-e-Sharif, the Uzbek national railway corporation, Uzbekistan Temir Yollari, built 75 kilometers of train lines. This track has been in use since mid-2011, with a national monthly transit capacity of 30-40 thousand tons (Laruelle et al., 2013). Tashkent restored the Hairatan Bridge, which is named "Friendship Bridge" on the Uzbekistan and Afghanistan border in 2002, which functioned as a significant transit route for Soviet Union forces. Tashkent is particularly concerned about the activities of the Islamic Movement Uzbekistan (IMU) and its determination to turn Uzbekistan into an Islamic Caliphate (Kassenova, 2014, pp.3-27). The movement is active in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. One of its leaders, Juma Namangani, was killed in Kunduz in November 2001 while commanding Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. Uzbekistan sees an opportunity in Afghanistan to play a role in regional diplomacy. In November 2008, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan signed an agreement envisaging the construction of a railway line from Termez in Uzbekistan to the northern provinces of Afghanistan and Herat. The railway will proceed from Mashhad to the Iranian border, connecting to a built branch line. This line will connect the Central Asian and Iranian railway networks and provide access to the Central Asians to the Persian Gulf (Kukeeva, 2013).

Kyrgyzstan has no border with Afghanistan, but the control of the Tajikistan border is weak and affects Afghanistan's security dynamics. A few thousand Kyrgyzs live in Afghanistan, and a few (a few hundred) Afghans live in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan was the last Central Asian country to send an ambassador to Kabul on 21 June 2013. Upon this, Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmai Rasoul and the ambassador of Kyrgyzstan emphasized that the two countries would continue to actively develop bilateral cooperation (Bleuer & Kazemi, 2014). In addition, former President Bakiev launched the "Bishkek Initiative," which envisions a high-level activity in Afghanistan and includes establishing a permanent platform for negotiations on Afghanistan among various political groups (Tadjbakhsh, 2011). The essential economic connection of Kyrgyzstan with Afghanistan is the CASA-1000 electricity project, where the country aims to export its excess electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan via Tajikistan (Bleuer & Kazemi, 2014).

Turkmenistan shares a 744 km border with Afghanistan and is interested in stabilizing Afghanistan. Although Turkmenistan openly supported the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks, it did not allow the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) forces to use its territory for operations or logistics.

Turkmenistan offered to establish a dialogue with Afghanistan on its territory without any preconditions. During the Istanbul meeting, Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashed Meredov reiterated the government's intention to participate in peacebuilding efforts by proposing an international forum that brings together all the disputed parties (Speech of President Berdimuhamedow at the 65th UN General Assembly Meeting, New York, 2010). Turkmenistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan aims to complete the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline (Kukeeva, 2013). In the 1990s, Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian country that refused to officially recognize the Taliban as a threat and attempted to establish commercial ties with the Taliban, insistently emphasizing its neutrality in the 1990s (Kassenova, 2014, pp.3-27). Turkmenistan hopes its reconstruction efforts will provide a new market for gas exports to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan. Electricity has also been an important element in trade between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Ashgabat exports electricity to Afghanistan in two ways, Faryab, Jawzjan, and Sar-e Pol via Imamnazar and Herat via Serhetabat. On 13 December 2015, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan signed a protocol on electrical energy. According to this document, the parties agreed to send Turkmen electricity to Pakistan via Afghanistan. In addition, work has been initiated on the construction of the Atamyrat-Imamnazar-Aqina railway, a part of the Asian international railway corridor, as of November 2016.

For the Central Asian countries, Afghanistan represents both a threat and an opportunity. The Central Asian republics are concerned about drug and arms trafficking and Islamic militant activities that could threaten their security as they share a 2,246-kilometer border with Afghanistan. The Taliban and ISIS-K feel threatened as they move north and west to win Afghanistan's regions close to the Central Asian borders (Katzman, 2017). However, some security problems stem from the region's political and socio-economic conditions, such as oppression, marginalization, corruption, and unemployment (Tadjbakhsh, 2011).

Central Asian governments play a role in the transition of drugs, and therefore Martha Olcott calls them 'narcotic states' (Olcott, 2002). A stable Afghanistan is thought to provide the Central Asian people with a natural gas pipeline, electricity, and trade routes to South Asia, which would increase their autonomy against Russia and China. Central Asians support the possibility of Afghanistan as a trade and transit corridor given its

strategic location between these countries and South Asia. Similarly, these countries are critical for the stability of Afghanistan and the success of the New Silk Road (Katzman, 2017). It has been seen that these countries are willing to participate in regional economic strategies that would help them export energy and raw materials to South Asia and achieve autonomy against Russia. Afghanistan and five Central Asian countries manage their ties on a bilateral basis, with no involvement from their neighbors.

Afghanistan's commerce volume cannot be compared to Pakistan's or Iran's. Nonetheless, in terms of electrical supply, transportation, and food security, certain Central Asian nations have been significant players in Afghanistan’s politics since 2001. Additionally, all countries follow similar strategies: a defensive strategy centered on conventional security, a rising awareness of soft security threats, and an endeavor to modify each state's geostrategic posture.

CHAPTER 4

INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

4.1. Afghanistan Before September 11

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which forms a crossroad between the Caucasus, Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, has had different names. The country was known as Ariana, Khorasan, and Afghanistan since 1747 (Ghobar, 2012, p. 33). Afghanistan is a significant country in terms of its geostrategic and geographical location. Although the country is geographically located in South Asia, it is culturally close to Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan are situated in the north of the country. There is Pakistan in the East and South, Iran in the West, and China in the Northeast. In addition to being a key country in geoeconomics, Afghanistan is also located in a very influential position in geostrategic terms, attracting the attention of global and regional powers. The country, which was an important gateway point for the USSR to reach the warm seas in terms of geostrategy, did not lose its importance after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to China, which emerged as an essential power against the U.S. after the dissolution of the USSR, Iran, which was established with the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and had constant disputes with the U.S., has borders with Afghanistan, contributing to the geostrategic importance of the country (Hassan, 2009).

Afghanistan has been subjected to the intervention of expansionist forces with its underground and aboveground riches. The country's importance is not only because it has these resources but also because it is the only gateway between Central Asia and South Asia. In a bipolar world where the Cold War continued, the country has become one of the conflict zones of the great powers, which is an indicator of the high geostrategic importance of the country. In addition to nuclear powers such as Russia, India, and Pakistan, Afghanistan is very important in its proximity to countries that struggle for influence in the region, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

On the one hand, it plays the role of a bridge in transferring energy resources from the Caspian Sea to the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, it acts as an essential wall that

prevents Russia from spreading to the South. In other words, since Afghanistan is an important country in transferring energy resources of Central Asia to the world and extracting and sharing natural resources within itself, it has been the victim of the power games played by the great powers. The USSR and its successor, the Russian Federation, which lost the country to the west at the end of the 20th century, still do not seem to give up the old landing policy on the warm seas (Chauhan, 2020).

Afghanistan, which gained its independence from Britain in 1919, has been occupied by many empires and states throughout history. Afghanistan, which the USSR settled in the recent past, was assisted by Western powers against the USSR between 1979 and 1989. However, once the Soviet Union withdrew from the country in 1989, the country descended into civil war due to being left alone for ten years. Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the nation descended into civil war due to the disagreement between the Mujahideen and the communist-backed government. The main reason for the country's abandonment by the U.S. was the change of decision-making in U.S. policy. To be more precise, Afghanistan was removed from the world agenda during the Clinton period.

The Taliban insurgent groups, directly funded by Pakistan, assumed control of the country in 1996. Until 2001, the Taliban regime-controlled 90% of the country and regulated it according to Sharia law. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were among the countries that formally recognized the Taliban authority (Sasaoğlu, 2014). However, when terrorist attacks occurred in the U.S. in 2001, NATO allies joined the battle against terrorism with the U.S. The U.S. held Al-Qaeda accountable for the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and demanded the Taliban to deliver over Al-Qaeda's leader Osama Bin Laden, but the Taliban refused. Afterward, the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan and eliminated the Taliban regime (Thomas, 2019).

The U.S., which had arisen in the international arena as the world's superpower following the Cold War, was subjected to terrorist operations in 2001, and its status as the world's only superpower was shaken. At the same time, the new terrorist acts that have arisen as a result of globalization are no longer a problem that any one country can solve on its own. As a result, this act was seen as an assault on one of NATO's member countries under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, and the battle against terrorism began under the

leadership of the U.S. This attack on the U.S. has altered the path of global politics and international relations (Tertrais, 2016).

4.2. Afghanistan's Security Environment Following September 11

The 9/11 attacks were a series of suicide assaults carried out by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization in the U.S. on September 11, 2001. 19 Al-Qaeda affiliated militants hijacked four planes and carried out suicide assaults on U.S. targets on these attacks. Two aircraft attacked the World Trade Center twin towers in New York City, a third plane struck the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and the fourth flight crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. During the 9/11 terrorist attacks, about 3,000 individuals were killed and were the most significant armed attack on U.S. soil. Following these assaults, the U.S. launched its so-called "War on Terror," which included attacks on Afghanistan (History, 2010).

September 11th marks the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the U.S.; assaults that permanently impacted the U.S. and the globe, as well as much of human life. The new world order was constructed, including new counter-terrorism strategies in the security arena. After these attacks, all country's security strategies, particularly the U.S., changed. Since then, countries have spent a lot of money on their national security. Thenceforth, conventional weapons and chemical weapons and vehicles, people, and suspicious objects have been considered a threat to terrorist operations. In the aftermath of 9/11, the number of crimes conducted in the U.S. and other Western countries under cover of Islamophobia increased. During this time, the media began to utilize terminologies like "Islamic terrorism" and "Islamic extremism." Twenty years ago, the U.S. established a large military and political presence in Afghanistan to combat international terrorism and utilize its hegemonic capacities to open the country to the rest of the world. After the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, this presence, which could be defined as "liberal interventionism" and the repression of "irresponsible governance," began and ended on August 31, 2021, after many ups and downs (AA, 2020).

Before 9/11, Afghanistan was characterized by isolation, backwardness, and a lack of connection to world progress. Taliban doctrine has ruled the country for five years. Afghanistan has become a ruin deprived of any indications of civilization and modernity after four years of inter-party conflict in the 1990s. The Taliban Islamic Emirate was a

backward and authoritarian state that struggled with innovation and modernization and could not comprehend the world around it. In this period, which is called the black and white period, other colors did not have the opportunity to appear. The country's various ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, and women were suppressed. Still, terrorist and fundamentalist Islamic groups worldwide were hosted as the preferred color of governance in Afghanistan, with Al-Qaeda being the most prominent and dangerous one (Yousefzada, 2021).

After the 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan attracted the world's attention once more. On the one hand, the Islamic Emirate was plagued by bloodshed and devastation. On the other hand, the Afghan people were showered with love and construction. The international community, led by the U.S., sought to compensate for this forgetfulness through "liberal interventionism," in which they decided to overthrow the Taliban's authoritarian regime and irresponsible rule and replace it with a stable democracy that serves as a model for political and economic modernization in all Third World and Middle Eastern countries. The Taliban regime quickly disintegrated due to this, interim and transitional administrations were formed with a democratic approach to address the political vacuum and crisis, state-building and related institutions were created, and the army and national police were established as guardians and defenders of the new order.

The new constitution was written and ratified in a civil and contemporary manner. General elections brought the administration and the elected government to power. In the new system's framework, freedom of expression and human rights and the abolition of discrimination were viable slogans in all forms and symbols. However, twenty years of democracy and republic were blighted by discrimination, corruption, and lawlessness that frustrated the people. However, in such a system, politics and economics worked for hand in hand to rebuild Afghanistan's physical and semantic structure and nurture a large generation of young men and women who received a university education, worked in modern and civic institutions, and became informed with the values protected by the constitution (Yousefzada, 2021).

Today Afghanistan has disintegrated due to a vast and sometimes ambiguous agreement. Unfortunately, Ashraf Ghani brought the country to its knees, and the international community was saddled with the burden of a peace treaty negotiated in the absence of the Afghan people and disregarding common goals between the Afghan

government and NATO members. They had to leave Afghanistan. The Taliban has risen to prominence as an isolated and abandoned Afghanistan symbol. The army and national police have vanished, and the modern government structure has crumbled, leaving monopolistic power, rising poverty, unemployment, violence, and terror in its wake. The future of Afghanistan, however, will be decided by the interaction of these three elements in order of importance (Yousefzada, 2021);

The first force is the educated and middle-class generation, aware of the challenges of tradition and modernity and the significant strategic games in Afghanistan. It can positively impact domestic and international currents concerning the country's future with the help of this awareness. Of course, the Taliban have not changed, as seen by the announcement of their monopoly cabinet. Still, even under the shadow of the Taliban government, the transformed body of Afghan society may provide the push for reform and opening up in the country's political space.

The second force is the West and the U.S., the most significant influence defining Afghanistan's destiny twenty years ago. It has become the second most crucial component in the country's future. The least they can expect from them is a lack of recognition for the Taliban's monopoly government or pressure on the group to reform its behavior and governance, not to mention the Afghan people, because in the current situation, if the Taliban does not sacrifice the people, poverty and unemployment will befall them (Yousefzada, 2021). The third force is the Taliban and their Islamic Emirate, a “sad reality” that suffered a severe loss and humiliation from the world two decades ago and now dominates Afghanistan. Although reduced to ashes, it has fires of hope and constructiveness at its heart.

4.2.1. Global War on Terror (U.S.’s New Doctrine)

Al-Qaeda, which means “the Base,” “the Foundation,” is a militant Sunni Islamist multinational network of Islamic extremists and Salafist jihadists. It was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam, and several other Arab volunteers during the Soviet-Afghan War (Mashregh, 2014). These militants (International Militants) were sent to Afghanistan from all corners of the world to fight against the Soviet Union forces with the financial and logistical support of the Western and Arab countries, regardless of language, race, and nationality. In 1980; together with the founders of Al-Qaeda, Abdullah

Yusuf Azzam, Arab fundamentalists such as Osama bin-Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the Muslims brothers of Egypt, the extremists of the Saudi state and the exterminators of the Pakistani state, have laid the foundations of jihad organizations in the marshes on the border of Afghanistan-Pakistan. This organization has opened branches in more than 50 countries worldwide in a short time since its first day of the establishment (Mahmoudi, 2019).

Like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda is an armed organization established within religious and sharia ideologies. Western states, especially the U.S., provided material, logistical and military support to extremist Muslims against Soviet communists in the Cold War period within the framework of their containment policy and used these groups for political and strategic goals. In fact, during the Cold War, Muslims and the religion of Islam were used as a tool against the Soviet Union by the U.S. (Sitez, 2010). Other dimensions of the political background of the Al-Qaeda organization were established by the Khomeini revolution in Iran in 1979 and by Saudi Arabia and other Arab allied states against the extremist Shia state. Ayatollah Khomeini criticized the USSR for being involved in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Ayatollah Shariatmadari, one of the leaders of the prominent Shiite sect, openly encouraged and supported the resistance of the militants of Afghanistan against the forces of the Soviet Union and the pro-communist government of Afghanistan (Rubinstein, 2014, p. 603).

Most Sunni Muslim Arab countries, especially the Saudi family, do not view the Persian world as a Muslim country. Both countries have always carried out opposite policies and propaganda in the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia's radical Wahhabi and Salafi beliefs and Iran's radical Shiite beliefs have created severe problems. These problems are within the borders of both countries, but other Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have been sacrificed from these ideologies.

The primary source that caused the strengthening and emergence of the Al-Qaeda organization was the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, which supported Afghan militants against the forces of the USSR. One of them was economic and military support, the other was religion, and the third was the use of geography; all of those led to the emergence of religious extremist organizations (Shafiee & Idouzaei, 2013, p. 104- 107). According to Heywood, in addition to the economic and military support, another primary source of regional and international terrorism was feeding on radical religious ideology. As a result,

Al-Qaeda is seen as a concept rather than a group. It was the first organization, and its cell network is so disorganized that it is thought to be a form of jihad without a leader (Heywood, 2011, p. 288). The emergence of international terrorist organizations attributed to the desire to reach goals indirectly by supporting the proxy wars, a desire held by both the eastern and western blocs. These blocs were the superpowers during the Cold War and they usually armed and directed some groups against their opponents in civil wars. Various shortcomings of U.S. foreign policy in this period, such as seeing all regional conflicts through the eyes of the East versus the West, seeking endless revenge after the Vietnam defeat, and supporting any anti-communist group anywhere in the world, led to the emergence of radical groups. The almost 10-year Soviet-Afghan war was very costly for the USSR. After a seriously weakening war, the Soviet army was eventually forced to retreat. During this war period, the insurgents were reinforced with weapons and equipment on a large scale from all sides, especially from the U.S. side. Moreover, after the Soviet withdrawal, these weapon stores remained in the hands of Afghan Mujahideen and caused the civil war in Afghanistan. Together with the arsenals in the hands of the militants (Mujahideen) who fought against the Soviets, they created a severe threat to regional and then world security (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2013- 2014).

Before moving on to the activities and thoughts of Al-Qaeda, it is necessary to know that Osama bin Laden was the founder and first leader of the organization. Osama bin Laden, a citizen of Saudi Arabia, was born in 1957 and was a sheik from a very wealthy Saudi family. The father of Osama bin Laden was known as the owner of one of the biggest companies in the construction sector and one of the contractors who signed big construction projects (Polat, 2006). Osama bin Laden started his undergraduate education at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, was educated by the Egyptian and Palestinian teachers affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood at the university, and had the opportunity to meet with their members. When he was a university student, the Palestinian leader of Hamas, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, became Osama's teacher. Hamas is an organization that rivals the Palestine Liberation Organization, which consists of leftist groups. Likewise, Sayyid Qutb's brother Mohammad Qutb, who was executed by the Egyptian state in 1996 for some political activities, is also known as the teacher of Osama bin Laden (Azadi, 2021).

Osama bin Laden himself was one of the volunteers who participated in the jihad. The Afghan Mujahids and the Afghanistan-Soviet Union conflict were on the international media's agenda, whereas Osama bin Laden's undergraduate career was finishing. With the initiative of the U.S. and Pakistan, extreme Islamists from all over the world were brought to Pakistan and sent to Afghanistan to support the Afghan Mujahideen against the USSR army. The Saudi Kings also decided that such a situation was entirely in their best interest, as both the Wahhabism would rise and get rid of their radicals (Polat, 2006). There is no exact date when Osama bin Laden first went to Pakistan and met with Afghan Mujahideen leaders. However, he visited Pakistan for the first time officially in 1981 after graduating from the economics and public administration department from King Abdul Aziz University in JeddahOsama bin Laden. Like other militants, he completed training in militant camps established in Pakistan participated in clashes with other fighters against the Soviets. Later, in 1988, Osama bin Laden, like Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, opened an office in Peshawar province under Bait-ul Ansar (Ansar house). Osama Bin-Laden continued all his activities and assistance through this office (Mashregh, 2014).

The Geneva Treaty of 1988 brought an end to the Soviet-Afghan conflict. The Soviet exit generated excitement among national and international radicals. Fighters from Arab nations believed that the Islamic community had succeeded against the communist world. International militants have made a lot of money and garnered a lot of attention as a result of nearly 10-year fights against the Soviets. The Afghanistan-Soviet Union conflict has been recognized as a vast source of wealth for them, both spiritually and financially. Guerrilla warfare had become a career for these militants, and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, the jihadist leader, took advantage of the situation and commanded jihad against Israel and the Jews. Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was killed in an assassination attack in Peshawar province with his two sons on 24 November 1989.

After Abdullah Yusuf Azzam's death, the command and powers of all international militants were transferred to Osama bin Laden (Afshar, 2012). Osama bin Laden managed to unite all Arab militants under one flag and combine both groups, making them a single and influential organization and named the organization Al-Qaeda. The word Al-Qaeda comes from the name Osama bin Laden gave to the military camp of Afghan and Arab militants in the Jaji region of Afghanistan years ago. Under Osama bin Laden's command, Warriors received orders from this camp during the battle against the Soviets. Osama Bin

Laden gave the newly formed organization the name of the base to honor the fight he waged against Communists in Afghanistan (Coll, 2005).

Al-Qaeda terrorist organization was established in 1988 in Peshawar, Pakistan. The Al-Qaeda word comes from the Arabic language and literature, which means basic and essential. The primary purpose of Al-Qaeda for its founders was established on "Japhat-ul Jihad-ul Duvaliye Zed-il Yahud Val-Salibiin" (World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders). Al-Qaeda was established in 1988 with the sole purpose of supporting the militants fighting against the Soviet Union in logistics and equipment issues. Still, after the Soviet Union was defeated, this organization started to spread its activities in the international arena after Afghanistan began to expand its activities in Kashmir, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, and other African countries (Gunaratna & Nielsen, 2008, p.777- 782).

4.2.2. The Aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom: UN and NATO Missions

The day after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City, U.S. President George W. Bush called the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to duty, stating, "Does the United Nations (UN) perform its mission or will it be disabled?" On the same day, the UNSC enacted Resolution 1368. In this resolution of the UNSC, the terrorist acts of September 11 were harshly condemned, and it was proclaimed that this action posed a threat to world peace and security (Acet & Doğan, 2017). In keeping with this determination, it has asked all states to act together to discover and hold accountable actions against the terrorist attacks, organizers, aiders, and their followers.

In light of this, the UNSC's resolution 1269 on combating and increasing cooperation against international terrorism, which took effect in 1999, called for the international community to step up and double efforts to combat and prevent terrorist acts. Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides the right to self-defense, is equally relevant in this case. Four alternative perspectives were made to take safeguards and respond to the assaults. The following are some of these viewpoints; The first was a passive anti-war reaction, in which no military force is going to be used. The second was the UN legislative method, which mandated that suspects be tried before an international court. However, because it could not respond to a terrorist assault, the viewpoint did not attract many sympathizers worldwide. Third, the military believed that the reaction should be left to the troops and that military power should be used solely. This viewpoint, however, did not have

widespread support, as the deployment of disproportionate force might result in other attacks. The restricted means-ends approach was the fourth point of view. It appeared to be proper if accepted by the general population (Acet & Doğan, 2017). However, they were concerned that Jihadist voices would increase if soldiers were used excessively. However, while these negotiations took place, the U.S. and UK began a regular movement in Afghanistan on October 8, 2001, asserting their right to self-defense as a justification. In general, the legal basis for the U.S. and coalition force engagement in Afghanistan was the right to self-defense.

It's worth remembering that the UN's principal goal, formed in 1945 to keep the world at peace and avoid wars, is to defend international security and stability. Article 2 of the UN highlighted the peaceful resolution of global tensions and disputes, and the fourth paragraph of the same article stated that states refrain from using military force against or posing a threat to another state's territorial integrity or political independence in international relations (UN, 1945, p.3). When the justifications for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan are considered in the context of the New World Order, the following assertions emerge: In the U.S.'s objective of containment of Iran, Russia, and China, Afghanistan's geographical location is critical. With the rise of the Taliban and establishing a Sunni buffer zone in Iran's east, a scenario has arisen that intersects with the U.S. strategic objectives. The Taliban's backing for Al-Qaeda and their sponsorship of the terrorist group in Afghanistan changed U.S.'s war strategy and resulted in the deployment of a pressure campaign (Azami, 2017).

Another reason is that Afghanistan plays a significant role in delivering Central Asia's abundant natural gas and oil resources to the international market, which has advanced U.S. policies in the area. The Caspian Sea's goal of transporting oil and natural gas from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the international markets via the Indian Ocean is an essential aspect of the U.S. intermediate and long-term strategic plans in Afghanistan. Since 1997, the U.S. long-term strategy toward Central Asia has shifted. In this regard, it is feasible to say the following; democratization and normalization of the Central Asian countries bring energy resources out of Russian control and provide support for U.S. companies in Central Asia. The U.S.'s involvement in Afghanistan goes back to before September 11, U.S. was one of the leading factors that pushed Afghanistan to the lap of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). By interfering in Afghanistan after the Twin

Towers attack, the U.S. sought to reduce its reliance on Middle Eastern oil by building an energy pipeline from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean in Central Asia. When the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan is viewed through geoeconomics, it affects Afghanistan's surrounding nations just as it does the U.S. (Andishmand, 2005). The U.S. involvement in Afghanistan was considered a direct threat to Central Asian countries and Russia, Iran, and China from a geopolitical position. The security and instability difficulties in Afghanistan and the intervention of external forces are caused by the country's subsurface riches and wealth. In addition to subsurface resources, Afghanistan holds 30% of the world's uranium and lithium deposits. These riches have made Afghanistan the target of foreign powers rather than advantageous to Afghanistan. The geographical location of Afghanistan has also caused this country to be subjected to the intervention of foreign powers (Seren, 2017).

The U.S. military forces intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. The sign of the Bonn Agreement in 2001 and the installation of an interim administration headed by Hamid Karzai was a turning point to the future of Afghanistan. In 2001, the UN Security Council (UNSC) called for a “central role” for the United Nations. It constituted Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to establish a transitional administration and invite member states to send peacekeeping forces to promote stability, security, and aid delivery to Afghanistan. The UNSC in 2001 established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to maintain security in Afghanistan. In June 2002, Hamid Karzai, the chairman of the interim administration, was selected as the head of Afghanistan’s transitional government (Seren & Ozer, 2012, p. 145). In November 2002, the U.S. military created a civil affairs framework to coordinate redevelopment with the UN and non-governmental organizations to expand the authority of the Kabul government, these so-called PRTs or (Provincial Reconstruction Teams).

The Afghan Transitional Government and the participating countries decided at the Bonn Conference in 2001 to restructure the ANA (Afghan National Army) and the ISAF and establish an ethnically balanced army consisting of over 70,000 volunteers. Under this Decısıon, the ANA's job description was as follows; installing security for the central government, facilitating the operation of the constitutionally mandated political processes, replacing all other armed forces in the country as divided groups, fighting terrorism, and cooperating with coalition forces and the ISAF. The above-mentioned structural actions of

the ISAF, PRT, and ANA were critical tasks carried out by NATO in building security in Afghanistan. These activities were provided through UN contribution within the scope of the disarmament demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program. The Northern Alliance, warlords, and Afghan former military forces were identified as the DDR program's target groups, and the process was named "Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program (ANBP)." The DDR program launched under Japan's supervision during 2003-2006 as part of the ANBP, intended to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate 100,000 soldiers back into the system. Although it was claimed that the DDR program in Afghanistan was booming, especially in the first two months, the fact that most of the soldiers or militia forces were disarmed could not be reintegrated into the society and led to the failure of the program (Seren & Ozer, 2012, pp. 147-152).

In 2003, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took control of international security forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, expanding NATO/ISAF's role across the country. It was NATO's first operational commitment outside of Europe. ISAF troops grew accordingly, from 5,000 to around 65,000 troops from 51 NATO and other partner nations. In October 2004, the first presidential elections occurred in the history of Afghanistan, and President Karzai became the first democratically elected head of the government (ISAF Mission, 2021).

In September 2005, more than six million Afghans voted for the Wolesi Jirga (Council of People), the Meshrano Jirga (Council of Elders), and local councils considered the most democratic elections ever in Afghanistan history. In 2008 U.S. military forces had started the operation of airstrikes procedures. In 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama announced plans to send 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan. Obama reaffirms his campaign statements that Afghanistan is the more critical U.S. front against terrorist groups. In December 2009, President Obama announced sending an additional 30,000 forces to Afghanistan on top of the 68,000 in place. For the first time, Obama specifies the time frame for the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and sets July 2011 as the beginning of the withdrawal of troops. In November 2010, the NATO member countries signed an agreement to transition full responsibility of Afghanistan's security to Afghan forces.

In May 2011, Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was killed by U.S. military forces in Pakistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai reiterated that the international forces should

focus their military operation across the border in Pakistan. In March 2012, the Taliban canceled peace talks with the U.S. and enhanced U.S.-Afghan tensions. In June 2013, the Taliban announced to resume peace talks with the U.S. in Qatar. In 2014, the Obama administration announced U.S. troop withdrawal, and in the first phase of the plan were the 9,800 U.S. troops to remain in Afghanistan. In September 2014, Ashraf Ghani and his opponents Abdullah Abdullah agreed to establish the National Unity Government (NUG) signed a power-sharing agreement (CFR, 2014).

NATO led the UN-mandated ISAF from August 2003 to December 2014 to allow the Afghan government to exercise its authority throughout the country and build the capacity of Afghan national security forces, including in the fight against international terrorism. ISAF was NATO's most challenging and most extended mission during 2003-2011, with more than 130,000 thousand troops from 51 NATO members and other nations. The transition for the security responsibility to Afgan national forces started in 2011, and the ISAF operation was completed in 2014. By the end of 2014, PRTs had been phased out, and their functions were handed over to Afghan authorities. In January 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to train, provide advice and assistance activities to the security-related ministries and work closely with different elements of the Afghan army, police, and air forces. At the 2016 NATO Summit, Allies decided to strengthen and enhance the partnership with RSM through political dialogue and practical cooperation (Afghnaistan & NATO, 2021).

As soon as Donald Trump was elected president of the U.S., he addressed his plans for Afghanistan policy. The Trump decisions about withdrawal were based on "conditions on the ground" rather than arbitrary timelines. In January 2018, the Trump administration cut off security assistance worth billions of dollars to Pakistan for what Trump called its "lies and deceit" in supporting Taliban militants. On the other side, according to Afghanistan and American scholars, the U.S. troop's withdrawal would encourage the Taliban, which had gotten what they wanted long ago and would provide a vast battlefield advantage for them. Even it would demoralize the Afghan government and Afghan security forces. Some Afghans were fearful that the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces amid Russia, China, Pakistan, India, and Iran control over the Taliban, exist of Islamic State, the Taliban violence, and the Afghan's government weakness would lead the country's into another civil war. In another report, some analysts believed that the

drawdown of the troops was a sign of efforts to find a negotiated settlement with the Taliban to end the war in Afghanistan. The Afghan government had welcomed the U.S.-Taliban talks. Still, recently, the Afghan government has expressed dissatisfaction over not being in direct negotiations with the Taliban in the United Arab Emirates on 19 December 2018 (Alikozai & Habibzada, 2018).

The drawdown of U.S. troops from Afghanistan may be the U.S.'s new strategy to comply with some political credit for the Taliban. Afghan analysts were believed the decision made by the U.S. could be a psychological war to put pressure on the Afghan government and Afghan people to show more flexibility in terms of negotiation with the Taliban. As a result, the U.S. war in Afghanistan and spending a staggering $1,6 trillion on Afghanistan for its reconstruction would not be easy for the U.S. to leave Afghanistan. The Trump decision was a psychological war to accept little credibility to the Taliban's want and pressure Ashraf Ghani's government to show flexibility toward the Taliban's negotiations (Khawaja, 2018).

Finally, the Trump administration made a deal with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020, in which the U.S. committed to withdrawing all troops by May 2021, in exchange for the Taliban accepting to some conditions, such as no operations on the U.S. and coalition forces. According to the deal, the U.S. would reduce its soldiers from 13,000 to 8,600 over the next three to four months, with the remaining U.S. forces leaving in 14 months, or by May 1, 2021. The Taliban were required to make several undertakings to avoid terrorism, including the abandonment of Al-Qaeda and a commitment not to use Afghan land to plot attacks against the U.S. or its allies. The deal obliged the Taliban to stop attacking the U.S. and coalition soldiers, but it didn't involve them to remove Al-Qaeda or stop attacking Afghan forces.

The Doha agreement brought enormous prestige or status to the Taliban, enhanced the Taliban's hand and their powers over Afghanistan government, and resulted in a regaining power of the Taliban in the country (Doha Agreement, 2020). Following a temporary resumption on January 5, 2021, "intra-Afghan peace" negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban had been challenging to advance, and the two parties had not met since the Biden administration declared that the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban peace deal would be reconsidered. While the Afghan government's delegation waited for the Doha negotiations to resume, Taliban members traveled across the region, campaigning

and collecting support from leaders in Iran, Russia, China, and Pakistan. Although since the ratification of the Trump government's February 2020 accord, many on both sides of the Atlantic had criticized it, not least because it ignores the Afghan government, women, and civil society. Over the last year, many Afghan and foreign analysts had become increasingly convinced that the arrangement was heavily biased in favor of the Taliban. Many people had applauded the Biden president's decision to revisit the pact. The Afghan people, leaders, and nations engaged were losing faith in the Doha process. The deal was one-sided, did not reflect most Afghan's interests, and required rigorous review before being modified. Since the deal's signing, violence had grown, adding to the Afghan people's discontent. As violence swept the nation, people had lost hope in the process (Azizi, 2021).

U.S. President Joe Biden, 18 months later, announced that the U.S. military operation would end on August 31, 2021. President Joe Biden had tried to distract guilt for the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan by referring to a deal reached in Doha, Qatar. He claimed that it obligated him to remove U.S. forces, creating the foundation for the country's current state of disarray (Miller & Madhani, 2021). On the other side, things didn’t go what was estimated. On August 6, 2021, Taliban fighters captured their first provincial capital, and by August 15, they were at Kabul's gates. Thousands of civilians were forced to evacuate their homes due to their rapid progress, with many landing in Kabul and others fleeing to neighboring countries. In Kabul, anarchy reigned as President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, and many of his fellow Afghans attempted to do the same.

The Afghan security forces had wholly crumbled despite 20 years of foreign aid, billions of dollars in investment, a comprehensive training program, and U.S. air support (The Visual Team Journalism, 2021). As the Taliban takeover over Kabul on 15 August, U.S. and NATO troops began to withdraw after a lightning offensive in May. As the chaos and frightening broke out on the tarmac as people tried to rush and besiege the Kabul airport, a member of Islam State of Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) suicide bomber attacked U.S. evacuation attempts at Kabul's international airport in late August. The bomb, which killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. military personnel, was one of the country's bloodiest days in years (Associated Press in Kabul, 2021).

Not only did the anachronistic administration of the Taliban move Afghanistan away from the modern world, but the international world also began to recognize Afghanistan as

a haven for global terrorist organizations. In response to terrorist strikes against U.S. targets on September 11, 2001, the U.S. and the UK started Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against the Taliban-led Afghanistan. This operation, which aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime and stop Afghanistan from being a base of global terrorism, has become a genuinely multinational intervention with UN resolutions and the international consensus reached in the Bonn Agreement.

The ISAF operation, which aims to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan, had undergone many changes and transformations over time, especially its name, but it is still ongoing. Although hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars were spent on its success alongside tens of thousands of soldiers and civilian labor, it did not achieve its military or civilian goals. Twenty years after the beginning of the intervention, Afghanistan is still a country far from safe with a collapsed Afghan administration, and the Afghan people are still living in poverty. Even worse, the Taliban, which continued its terrorist activities, took control of the country in August 2021. The Islamic Terrorist group, ISIS-K, which has declared its existence before, has increased its terrorist activities and conducted various operations in all parts of Afghanistan. As a result, control of the country by the Taliban located Afghanistan on a new line of instability and social crisis.

4.2.3. Taliban's Second-Term

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, established after the Taliban regime, formed a state structure shared between the Islamist Parties, local commanders, former militia groups, and representatives of the diaspora who lived abroad. All of them have played significant roles in the country's recent history. The next phase in Afghanistan's history would be a period of power conflicts among these various groups. At the same time, the Taliban, on the other side, has quickly restructured, and an armed battle against the established state began. This framework, which has become increasingly fragile on political, economic, and social levels, has persisted today. After 2001, the international community, particularly the U.S., took steps to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan. Still, it became clear that these objectives would not be accomplished. Following the Taliban's defeat, Hamid Karzai was elected as the interim government's leader during the Bonn Agreement in Germany. Afghanistan's new constitution was passed by Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) in 2003. In 2004, presidential elections were conducted in Afghanistan,

and Hamid Karzai was elected president for a five-year term under the country's constitution (Seren, 2021).

A year later, the government had parliamentary elections, and these moves were hailed as significant advancements in the republic and democracy. Despite this, the country's intended economic and political stability as a peaceful and safe environment never occurred. On the one hand, Afghanistan's ethnic-based power struggle damaged the newly formed authority's legitimacy. On the other side, the re-emergence of the Taliban, who had been inactive in the early years, exacerbated the domestic problems (Shahzad, 2011, pp.28-30). In addition, a new constitution was drafted and approved, resulting in many parliamentary and presidential elections. Still, the changes, which were implemented amid widespread corruption, failed to bring Afghans closer together.

Many factors have contributed to the failure of the new state and international communities efforts in Afghanistan. The main crucial factor that led to the re-emergence of the Taliban after 2001 was the failure of the nation-building process, which has many reasons to consider. The aim of "nation-building" in Afghanistan was to create a "single Afghanistan" by gathering ethnic tribes ruled by warlords across the country under one roof; within the scope of "nation-building," it was aimed to strengthen the influence of the central government by spreading it all over the country. The nation-state building process started with Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which was organized to overthrow the current Taliban regime and destroy the Al-Qaeda network.

According to Merve Seren's article, the nation-state-building activities and efforts had a concrete connection with the Bonn Conference in December 2001 (Seren, 2021). The parameters in question that undermine the actions and activities of "nation-state-building" in Afghanistan are as follows; ethnic, religious, linguistic and inter-communal tensions, high crime rates in cities, lack of political ethics, destroyed infrastructure, weakening and collapsed economy, high corruption, violation of the rule of law, warfare between government troops and armed rebels, no border control, limited authority confined to the capital of cities only, fear among citizens due to lack of security, exist of high non-state actors, weakened and destroyed institutions, the absence of a properly functioning public service, discrimination and bribery, inequality of opportunity in the economy, destructive bribes and wasteful construction projects for distribution to privileged groups, low GDP and high inflation rates, the loss of legitimacy of the state and the search for autonomy of

different groups, the seizure of authority by sub-state actors, parcellation of territory by warlords, exist of tribal leaders, and anarchic mentality in society were all factors led to the failure of nation-state-building process. On the other side, the problem of efficiency and functionality of the UN and NATO, weakness of Afghanistan's self-defense capacity, and misconfiguration of political composition were different dynamics and concepts that paved the way for the defeat of the nation-building process in 2001 (Seren, 2021).

The Taliban were forced to abandon the Kabul administration and retreat from the political scene due to OEF and subsequently reduced their active region as their military capabilities weakened. Despite the Taliban's early attacks on U.S.-led coalition troops being severe and deadly, NATO and partner nations were armed with superior equipment. It got exhausted and weak as a consequence of the forces, particularly the air bombardment, and began the recuperation process by returning to the Kandahar and Pakistani lines (Seren, 2021). However, the Taliban's rehabilitation process took less time than projected because of a combination of internal and external factors that allowed the Taliban to reactivate after 2006. The Taliban adopted a successful strategy by exploiting the aforementioned conditions; Twenty years of effort and work by the Afghan government and the U.S., the UN, and NATO have been worthless. The player's attitudes have molded the Taliban's winning strategy in response to cyclical changes and internal and external dynamics. In this perspective, the circumstances and events that enabled the Taliban to adopt their winning strategy divided into four categories (Seren, 2021);

I. The U.S.-led coalition forces stayed more than was necessary
II. The Taliban's empowerment resulted from coalitions force's mistakes, especially from the U.S. side. Like using hard power for an extended period, civilian casualties resulting from U.S. and NATO drone airstrikes, and putting the strategy of “winning hearts and minds” too late into the process.
III. The third issue is the Taliban’s “war strategy” and the ongoing “proxy war” in Afghanistan.
IV. The fourth issue is Afghanistan's historical legacy which there has always been a lack of centralized authority. Even when the U.S. and foreign coalition troops had the most strong and active engagement, the Kabul administration was generally able to establish a limited control in the big cities.

However, as discussed in earlier sections, the country's “geopolitical” and “geostrategic” location considerably influences why the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan after a 20-year occupation. The U.S. nation-state-building effort, in many aspects, did not correspond to Afghanistan's reality, and it had a terrible impact on the country's socio-political structure. Finally, the Taliban's successful implementation of a winning plan that used all of these factors in their favor gave a chance for the country to return to Taliban control (Seren, 2021, pp. 16-34). In conclusion, between 2001 and 2021, the UN and NATO's longest and most comprehensive nation-state-building project, backed by coalition troops, particularly the U.S., miserably failed in Afghanistan. Finally, all measures and efforts, particularly “security sector reform” in the name of achieving nation-state-building, peace, security, and stability, failed. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), with 350,000 (supposed) soldiers, suffered a massive defeat against 75,000 Taliban fighters (Seren, 2021).

The defeat not only resulted in a military loss, but it also resulted in the deaths or injuries of many civilians and soldiers. While 2500 U.S. soldiers and more than 4,000 contracted civilian personnel lost their lives in Afghanistan, 69,000 defense and security forces, 47,000 civilians, and 51,000 combatants from the insurgent side lost their lives as well (Seren, 2021, p. 27). Some other factors and dynamics that led to the re-emergence of the Taliban into power were a monopoly government. The Afghan state's power was primarily restricted to Kabul and a few towns, and other institutions and organizations were in charge of different regions and cities in Afghanistan. Moreover, the provision of many public services, including security, was carried out by PRT and other NGOs, established in provinces and were military entities of foreign countries. Although billions of dollars were invested into Afghanistan during this time, security, stability, and economic progress fell well short of expectations (Mcnerney, 2006, p. 33).

The Taliban fighters, who lost power against the economic and military assistance of the U.S. and the resistance of the Northern Alliance, at first fled to their secure areas. These areas were their villages and Pakistan's madrasas to which they have withdrawn. While the U.S. eliminated the Taliban regime, it also pushed Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to flee the country and seek refuge in Pakistan (Gunaratna & Nielsen, 2008). With the rise of suicide bombers in the border regions with Pakistan in 2005, the situation became catastrophic. The pillars of the system, which had only recently been implemented,

began to be undermined (Swanson, 2013, p. 20). Taliban fighters, who have been trying to get stronger again, have increased their activities since 2006. They have started to create obstacles to Afghan forces and foreign soldiers to control the situation.

The Taliban's growing power and operations, which began in the south and east of the country before moving to other areas, maybe explained by Pakistan supporting the group. Pakistan sided with the U.S. in the "war on terror," which began in 2001, although this does not indicate that Pakistan is the Taliban's enemy. During the Afghanistan intervention, Pakistan let the U.S. troops use its air, water, and land territories, but it also played a crucial part in the Taliban's sanctuary, retraining, and retransfer. Furthermore, the Taliban maintained a direct line of communication with Pakistan's intelligence services and received protection in various ways, including shelter and weapons. As a result, Pakistan continues to regard the Taliban as an ally and has not given up on its goal of dominating Afghanistan, which dates back to the jihad period (Schofield, 2011). Initially, the Taliban emerged in the south, particularly in and around Kandahar province, as they had previously. Due to a lack of economic growth, this region grew reliant on the illegal drug and opium trade. This situation provided the Taliban with an enormous flow of money by imposing taxes and ensuring the security of illicit trade.

The facts that the situation in Afghanistan has become a stalemate and that neither the state nor the Taliban would be able to achieve stability are due to many reasons. The Taliban's ability to resist the Afghan forces and NATO soldiers was based on the loss of popular support of the Afghanistan state and the haven provided to the Taliban by Pakistan. Once the Taliban regime was overthrown, the U.S. government was not very interested in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. She was engaged in other essential processes, such as the invasion of Iraq. For this reason, the number of U.S. troops could only reach a significant number of years after the intervention in Afghanistan. In this period, especially in the south of Afghanistan, the resistance against both the central state and foreign forces had grown stronger.

On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of Afghan law enforcement forces, who were not subjected to a long-term and effective strategy both in terms of training and weapons and equipment, could not reach the level of holding their own. In addition, the centralized state shared by many power centers had been weakened by corruption and incompetent governance. At the same time, U.S. calls to end Pakistan's aid to the Taliban

were inconclusive, and Pakistan continued its intervention in Afghanistan by maintaining its protection from the Taliban. In this way, the U.S. and NATO countries, which failed to restructure Afghanistan and ensure peace and stability, started to withdraw from Afghanistan by reducing their presence as of 2011. It became apparent that the military solution was not possible in the Afghanistan issue. The U.S. and NATO started negotiations with the Taliban during this period, searching for a political solution, but the effort was inconclusive (Collins, 2011).

4.3. Russia's New Afghanistan Policy

Afghanistan and Russia's relationship date back to the nineteenth century. Afghanistan was situated in "The Great Game" between the Russian Empire and Britain Empire, which lasted from 1840 to 1907. Following the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, the Soviet Union was the first to establish diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, and the two countries signed a Friendship Treaty on February 28, 1921. After World War II, the Soviet Union and the Kingdom of Afghanistan maintained a close relationship, where the country provided significant help and development to Afghanistan. In 1958, the Afghan government signed an arms agreement with the Soviet Union to modernize its army with Soviet weaponry for oil extraction rights in northern Afghanistan. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 in support of the Afghan government and withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. In the ten years of conflict, more than 2,5 million Afghans and roughly 15,000 Soviet forces were killed, according to the estimates. The Afghan government, which the Soviet Union had sponsored, fell apart in 1992.

The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union brought suffering and destruction and the formation of a political vacuum in the country's politics, resulting in a civil war and the rise of the Taliban insurgencies. Russia maintained to back the Northern Alliance after the Taliban gained power in Kabul in 1996, and was profoundly concerned about claims of Taliban supporting the Chechen rebels, and worried that the Taliban was providing safe havens for terrorist groups operating in Russia and Central Asia, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Janse, 2021). The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan's political scene and the rise to power from 1996 to 2001 posed significant challenges for Afghanistan, Russia, and its sphere of influence, as well as growing concerns for the West. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan became a significant geopolitical

competition between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire. This rivalry persisted in the second half of the twentieth century between Russia and the U.S.

Finally, 9/11 operations, which resulted in a U.S.-led global coalition military intervention of Afghanistan, marked the beginning of a new chapter in the East-West relations in Afghanistan. Since 2003, Russia has recognized the Taliban as a "Terrorist" organization and affiliated with the group, though its extent of assistance is uncertain. Russia, which actively supported the U.S.'s 9/11 operations in Afghanistan, saw it as a pivotal chance to deepen its ties with the West. This concern led Russia to support the Taliban opposition in Afghanistan. After the 2001 intervention of the U.S. and its allies, Russia sided with the U.S. with all its intelligence and support capabilities to assist in its military operations in Afghanistan. The importance of defeating the Taliban to the Russians was so great that it allowed the U.S. to establish military bases in its private spheres in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

On the other hand, growing U.S. dominance in Central Asia and doubts about the future of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which have reached a point where Uzbekistan's decision to provide the U.S. a base might jeopardize Russia's interests, have brought Russia to a stalemate in defining Afghanistan strategy (Fischer & Stanzel, 2021). Although specific contrasts, such as NATO's expansion to the east and the eruption of color revolutions in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the most critical indication of Russia's foreign policy during this time were its collaboration with the West to defeat the Taliban militants. Since 2001, Russia has been a moderate supporter of Afghanistan's post-Taliban administrations and assists the U.S. and NATO, particularly logistical assistance.

From 2009 to 2015, fuel and logistics were sent to Afghanistan through Russia. The reopening of Russian and Central Asian airspace to U.S. and NATO military planes also occurred, resulting in a substantial number of ISAF equipment and personnel being deployed to Afghanistan via this route. Not only did this collaboration not weaken the Taliban, but it also brought a new chapter in Russia's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan, as the Taliban gained increasing control over more significant portions of the country. The Taliban's gains in various districts of Afghanistan and the central government's incapacity to stop them might be regarded elements in Russia's shifting strategy in Afghanistan. Russia has been in official contact with the Taliban since 2015. The apparent disclosure of Russia-Taliban cooperation in 2015 is intimately connected to

the other major occurrences. The Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea, the growth of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and the deployment of Russian soldiers to Syria to combat ISIS and terrorist groups were all events that exacerbated Russia's disputes with the West and resulted in harsh economic sanctions by the U.S. and Europe.

However, the shift in Russia's approach towards Afghanistan, particularly during the 2016-2020 Taliban negotiations, became increasingly evident. Since 2016, Russia has simultaneously put two formal and informal dialogue frameworks on Afghanistan on its agenda. In the formal part, Russia had made trilateral talks with China and the U.S., quadrilateral talks with China, Pakistan, and the U.S. The six side negotiations with China, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and the 6+2 talks include Afghanistan's neighbors plus Russia and the U.S., and additional talks designed and implemented to include all Central Asian countries. At the same time, Russia's inter-Afghan discussions were one of its most important initiatives, and the November 2018 meeting with Taliban leaders was regarded as a pivotal point. After the U.S. intervention of Afghanistan in 2001, Russia followed different Afghanistan policies. There are several reasons behind Russia's policy in Afghanistan, including the following;

a) The first reason could be concerns from ISIS's security dangers in Central Asia and Russia due to its rise in Afghanistan.
b) The second reason could be that as instability in Afghanistan grew, the U.S. began peace talks with the Taliban in Doha in 2018, intending to reduce the number of soldiers from the country.
c) The third reason could be that the U.S. consulted with China and Pakistan and then disregarded Russia in the peace negotiations, implying that Russia is not even recognized as a regional power.

There are four strategic reasons why Russia has collaborated with the Taliban;

- Firstly, by forming links with the Taliban, Moscow warns the West not to overlook Moscow's national and international objectives as part of the Afghan agenda.
- Second, Russia aims to increase barriers to U.S. and NATO’s interests in the region by backing the Taliban. Russia also seeks to expand its influence beyond Central Asia, involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East.

- Third, Russia sees the Islamic State in Afghanistan and the Middle East as dangerous. ISIS-K gained territory in Afghanistan in 2014, which the Kremlin believes will spread, particularly to the north of Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia.
- Fourth, the drug trade in Afghanistan poses a threat to Russia. Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's narcotics, most of which are manufactured in Taliban-controlled areas.

What is happening in Afghanistan, according to Moscow, has both direct and indirect security implications for the country (Wahdat Yar, 2017). Extremist and radical thoughts and behaviors, U.S. and NATO existence, anti-Russian ideas among the Afghan people and elites, the failure of the state-building process, and the production and processing of narcotics in Afghanistan's internal environment pose severe threats for Russia's interests and security (Khoshayand, 2021). Russia's policy in Afghanistan includes the following tactics to counter those threats;

- The first aim is to increase its political, economic, and security presence.
- The second purpose is to defend against anti-security waves aimed at combating terrorism in Afghanistan and limiting the spread of extremism to the Central Asian countries.
- The third aim is to expand economic activities, including in the energy sector
- The final aim is to improve security indicators around Russia's borders and close surroundings.

Afghanistan's neighbors have been closely following developments in the country, which has been at war with foreign occupation and civil warfare for more than four decades. Insecurity, extremism, drug production and trafficking, and illegal immigration alongside the presence of U.S. and NATO forces, all countries have intensified sensitivity to the events in Afghanistan. Although Russian collaboration with the coalition and U.S. troops was widespread in the first ten years of the 21st century due to the security priority, its geopolitical competition with the U.S. grew even more crucial in the second decade of 21 century, particularly in 2015. Furthermore, Russia believed that, beyond the outward efforts of the U.S. and coalition forces, there were plans to destabilize the country around Afghanistan with the growth of the Taliban and the presence of ISIS-K in Afghanistan. In this sense, as a nation that has long affected and influenced developments in Afghanistan,

Russiaas attempted to play an active part in shaping those developments in the face of unilateral action by a competing power, notably the U.S. and NATO (Jokar, 2021).

4.4. China's New Engagement Approach

The starting point of the historical relations between the two countries dates back to the seventh century. According to some historical documents, Chinese leader Swan Zheng visited the Bamyan valley and glorified two enormous Buddha statues; The identical statues that the Taliban destroyed in 2001. Afghanistan's commercial importance to China has grown, and Afghanistan has therefore become the Silk Road's most vital center for millennia. Despite their parallel fights against colonial powers in the 18th and 19th centuries, both countries maintained relationships and supported each other (Balkhi & Sultani, 2014). Afghanistan appointed Muhammad Sharif Khan as its first consul to China after China dispatched a delegation to Kabul. On March 5, 1944, Afghanistan signed a Friendship Agreement with China after appointing Habibullah Khan Tarzi as charge d'affaires in 1933 (Fiehash, 2004, p. 80).

Afghanistan recognized the People's Republic of China, which was established on October 1, 1949, extended diplomatic relationships to the level of the embassy in 1955, and voted for China's restoration in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), from which it had previously been removed (Balkhi & Sultani, 2014). Due to Afghanistan's proximity to the Soviet Union and the Soviet invasion of the country, ties between the two countries deteriorated. China, which sharply opposed and condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, has recalled its ambassador from Kabul in reaction to Afghanistan's reduced ties with China and has backed the Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against the government. The Taliban period has been called the isolation period in Afghanistan's history in terms of foreign relations. It was because only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE had diplomatic ties with Afghanistan.

China severed ties with Afghanistan when the Taliban leadership supported Uyghur Muslims. In 2000, China dispatched an ambassador to Kabul to repair relations with the Taliban regime, and the Chinese envoy was the first foreign envoy to meet Taliban leader Molla Omar. China has also been in contact with the Taliban administration through Pakistan and even supported Pakistan's backing for the Taliban at the United Nations. Following the September 11 attacks, Afghanistan pursued a policy of building diplomatic,

commercial, economic, and cultural ties with its neighbors and other countries to end the isolation period as quickly as possible. One of these states was its neighbor China. Following China's recognition of the new administration in Afghanistan in December 2001, Hamid Karzai, the president of the Provisional Government, urged China's assistance for Afghanistan's redevelopment during an official visit to China. On February 6, 2002, China reopened its embassy in Kabul, and in October 2002, Ambassador Sun Yuxi was appointed as ambassador to Kabul, followed by Qiamuddin Rai Barlas as ambassador to Beijing (Fiehash, 2004, p. 80).

After the September 11 attacks, China provided economic assistance to Afghanistan rather than political support, and bilateral ties improved. To put it another way, China did not pay much attention to Afghanistan's political situation after the Taliban administration fell apart; instead, it continued to view Afghanistan from the perspective of Pakistan. As can be seen from this, Pakistan is a country that can harm Afghanistan's ties with countries like the U.S. and China. On the other hand, Afghanistan may use good diplomacy and foreign policy to win China's support and put pressure on Pakistan. It is because both states are victims of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and extremism (Balkhi & Sultani, 2014).

In keeping with China's economic and commercial views of Afghanistan, the country has spent billions of dollars in energy and subsurface resources, in addition to the financial support it has provided for the country's growth and reorganization following the September 11 terrorist attacks. China signed an agreement with Afghanistan to invest more than five billion dollars in Afghanistan's Mes Aynak copper mine. Furthermore, China became the first foreign country to get the right to explore and extract oil and natural gas deposits in the provinces of Sar-e Pol and Faryab after signing a deal with Afghanistan in December 2011 (BBC, 2011).

China was anxious about the U.S.'s long-term engagement in Afghanistan, its primary political and economic opponent. The reason for this was that the U.S.'s continued presence in Afghanistan under the pretext of combating terrorism poses a security risk, causes an increase in incidents in the Xinjiang region, and obstructs the development and growth of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Balkhi & Sultani, 2014). As a result, the pressure that China exerts on Afghanistan as a result of its security concerns over the presence of the U.S. and NATO would undoubtedly damage U.S.-Afghan ties. Afghanistan requires China's help and support to secure economic development and

foreign capital flow, combat terrorism, fight Pakistan, and profit from underground riches. On the other hand, the cooperation of China and the U.S. for the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and the redevelopment and restructuring of Afghanistan positively affect the relations. An excellent example of this is U.S. President Barack Obama's demand to work together to ensure security, stability, and peace in Afghanistan during his visit to Beijing. Given that China is a major and prominent power not just in the region but also globally, its relations and interest with other countries impact Afghanistan's stability, security, and development.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Afghanistan is strategically placed in Central Asia and South Asia at a crossroads of geopolitics and geostrategic importance. On the one hand, it is near to global powers such as Russia; on the other side, it shares borders with nations like China, which has emerged as a significant and rising player in recent years, and fast-emerging countries like Pakistan, Iran, and India. Because of its location, Afghanistan has been repeatedly occupied by great powers such as Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and other sovereign powers. Afghanistan, which had been ruled by a variety of kingdoms and superpowers throughout history, breathed a sigh of relief until the Soviet invasion in 1979, following Great Britain's recognition of the country's independence in 1919.

The Soviet invasion not only regressed the country's situation economically and politically but also made Afghanistan a war-torn country and led it to a meeting point for radical terrorist groups. During its ten-year invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union received no support from everyone except a small group of people and the Afghan central authority. On the other hand, the Afghan Mujahideenreated military formations to combat the Soviet Union (Seren, 2021). The U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan provided weapons and financial aid to the Afghan Mujahideen during the Soviet invasion. Thereupon, the Geneva Agreement of 1988, which was signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union, and the U.S., marked the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan (Gilani, 2021). The Soviets withdrew, but their backing for the Najibullah government remained. However, there was no atmosphere of peace, and the civil war continued as each party of Afghan Mujahideen fought against one other and failed to reach an agreement on how to form a government. While the situation remained unchanged, the Taliban, a Sunni Islamist group dominated by Pashtun ethnicities, gained control of the state in 1996 (Seren, 2021).

The September 11 attacks were a turning point in the security policy of the U.S. and caused changes in the security perception of the whole world. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, Afghanistan, which was administrated in a different line from the modern nation-state structure, took on the image of a country that supported terrorism in this period and became the target of both the U.S. and other Western nations. Following the terrorist

attacks, the U.S. claimed that the founder of Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden was in Afghanistan and requested the Taliban to hand over the Al-Qaeda leader, but the Taliban refused. In 2001, the U.S. recognized the Taliban as a terrorist group, and U.S. military forces intervened in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime (Thomas, 2021).

Thus, Afghanistan's new era has begun, struggling with the civil war and foreign interventions that lasted for nearly thirty years. The sign of the Bonn Agreement in 2001 and the formation of an interim authority led by Hamid Karzai was a pivotal event in Afghanistan's heritage. In 2001, the UNSC started Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan to establish temporary governance and encourage member nations to deploy peacekeeping forces to support stability and assistance supply in Afghanistan. The UNSC created the ISAF in 2001 to ensure security in the country. In 2003, NATO took command of the ISAF in Afghanistan to enhance NATO/ISAF's presence throughout the country. During the 2004-05 years, Afghanistan held its first presidential and other councils elections which were considered the most democratic elections ever in Afghanistan history. Between 2003 and 2011, the number of coalition forces increased from 5,000 to more than 100,000 soldiers (ISAF Mission, 2021).

In July 2011, Obama set a deadline for the pullout of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. NATO member countries made an accord in November 2010 to hand over complete security responsibility to the Afghan forces. In 2012, the Taliban called off peace talks with the U.S., but later, in June 2013, the Taliban announced that negotiations with the U.S. would resume in Qatar. In September 2014, Ashraf Ghani and his opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, decided to form the Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) and signed a power-sharing deal (Jalali, 2015). NATO's Resolute Support Mission (RSM) was established in January 2015 to train, advise, and support Afghan security forces and institutions. The RSM focuses on providing education, guidance, and support to security-related ministries and collaborates closely with the Afghan army, police, and air forces. In August 2017, President Trump announced his Afghanistan approach, emphasizing that force levels and tactics would be determined by realities on the ground (Afghanistan and NATO, 2021).

The Trump administration made a deal with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020. The U.S. committed to withdrawing all troops by May 2021 in exchange for the Taliban accepting several conditions, such as no operations on the U.S. and coalition

forces. The Doha agreement brought enormous prestige and status to the Taliban and enhanced the Taliban's hand and power over the Afghanistan government, which resulted in a re-empowerment of the group (Doha Agreement, 2020).

According to U.S. President Joe Biden, the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan would end on August 31, 2021. On the other hand, things did not turn out as it was planned. Taliban militants took control of their first provincial capital on August 6, 2021, and by August 15, they were at Kabul's gates. As a result of their quick progress, tens of thousands of people were forced to escape from their homes, with many arriving in Kabul and others moving to neighboring countries. Anarchy raged in Kabul as President Ashraf Ghani, and many of his fellow Afghans rushed to flee the country. Despite twenty years of foreign aid, billions of dollars in investment, a sophisticated training program, and U.S. air support, Afghanistan's security forces have entirely collapsed. In late August, an ISIS-K suicide bomber targeted U.S. evacuation operations at Kabul international airport, causing chaos and fear on the field as civilians tried to swarm and besiege the airport. The blast, which killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. military soldiers, was one of the country's most deadly attacks in recent years (Associated Press in Kabul, 2021).

5.1. Analysis of Internal and External Dynamics of Conflict in Afghanistan

Table 1. The framework of analysis

Afghanistan's Conflict (2001- 2021)	Dynamics (Actors and Factors)
Internal Dynamics of Ongoing Conflict	• The geostrategic and geopolitical location of Afghanistan • State system • Role of ethnicity and tribalism • Taliban • Drug trafficking • Corruption • Weak and fragmented economy • Natural resources
Regional Dynamics of Conflict	• Afghanistan and Pakistan tension ▪ Hamid Karzai period (2001-2014) ▪ Ashraf Ghani period (2014-2021) • India-Pakistan contest in Afghanistan • Iran-Saudi Arabia competition for regional dominance • The role and interest of Central Asian countries in Afghanistan
International Dynamics of Conflict	• Afghanistan before September 11 • Afghanistan's security environment following September 11 ▪ The global war on terror ▪ The aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom: UN and NATO mission ▪ Taliban's second-term • Russia's new Afghanistan policy • China's new engagement approach

Afghanistan occupies a strategic location in Asia's heart. The country is positioned between the region's three economic, cultural, and geopolitical zones. South Asia lies to the south and east of the country, Central Asia is to the north, and the Middle East is located through Iran to the country's west. Mohammad Iqbal Lahori refers to Afghanistan as the "heart of Asia" in a poem, emphasizing its significance. He addressed the unpredictability of Afghanistan's future in a remark he wrote in his private journal in 1910 (Afghanistan Heart Asia, 2011). The poem is as follows;

Asia is a body of water and clay,

Of which the Afghan nation forms the heart.

The whole of Asia is corrupt,
If the heart is corrupt,
Its decline is the decline of Asia;
Its rise is the rise of Asia,
The body is free only as long as the heart is free,
The heart dies with hatred but lives with faith.

The stability, peace, and security in Afghanistan are directly related to Asia. Instability, insecurity, and conflict in Afghanistan destabilize the whole region. As stated in the poem, a healthy heart means a healthy body, and an ailing heart means an ailing body. First and foremost, the internal dynamics of Afghanistan's ongoing conflict have played a critical role since 2001. Like many others throughout the world, the war in Afghanistan demonstrates the diversity of state and non-state actors and the intersectionality of their objectives. As illustrated in the study, the Afghan war is more than merely a terrorist, extremist, or battle between ethnic groups. The war in Afghanistan results from many causes, including strategic, proxy, nationalist, economic, religious, ethnicity, drug, and criminal issues.

The unending war in Afghanistan, particularly in the previous 50 years, was not merely the result of one or two variables or players. However, other factors led to the country's continued involvement in the conflict. This study examined the dynamics of continuous war in Afghanistan as a set of dynamics and players and the west failure since 2001. It discussed the evolution and ramifications of internal and external dynamics that influence the continuance of the conflict and the role of regional and global power struggle in Afghanistan.

Besides these reasons of conflict, the study also took a look at regional causes of the ongoing war in Afghanistan, how the regional countries saw Afghanistan as a strategic depth of their policy, and what elements and factors they use to influence and affect Afghanistan's internal affairs. The study also considered the implications of how Afghanistan has become a battleground for foreign powers such as the U.S., Russia, and China. Moreover, Pakistan, Iran, and other countries use insurgent groups such as the Taliban to proceed their interest in Afghanistan.

To better understand the topic, it is necessary to look at it from a different point of view. Factors such as Afghanistan's geostrategic and geopolitical location, state system, the role of ethnicity and tribalism, Taliban, drug trafficking, corruption, weak and fragmented economy, natural resources, and other critical features have been thoroughly examined. The battle in Afghanistan was started in the first place by geopolitical circumstances, specifically the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the opposition, the U.S., and Mujahideen. Afghanistan has been one of the major actors in the "Old/New Great Game," where regional and global powers compete for dominance. Afghanistan was titled the "Graveyard of Empires" because of its geostrategic and geopolitical location. Major countries from Alexander the Great to the U.S. tried to engage, conquer, and rule. The U.S. and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers, independently representing the Capitalist and Socialist blocs, picked Afghanistan as a battlefield for a violent regional conflict. The country's dispute got increasingly convoluted over time, attracting many new local, regional, and international parties with shared interests and goals (Seren, 2021, p. 9).

State System was another reason for the unending war, particularly in the last two decades. The rule of law and constitutions have only existed on paper, failing to be implemented in practice. Furthermore, the state's system breakdown was caused by ethnicization of politics, corruption, and other critical issues, which resulted in a rapid collapse under the presidency of Ashraf Ghani in August 2021. Afghanistan's society experienced a period where tribal fanaticism, ethnicization of politics, and traditional politics governed the state system. Thus, this situation created a power gap between rural and central governments. On the other side, a result of long-running conflicts and failure of the nation-building process led to the defeat of the formation of a democratic government.

Afghanistan owns multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual characteristics. The foundation of Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durani in 1747 established a historic and tricky tie between the Pashtun authority and other ethnic groups of Afghanistan. However, the politics of ethnic issues in Afghanistan can be traced back to the 1880s and 1900s, when Amir Abdul Rahman Khan established a central authority based on ethnic divides. Ethnicity and tribe are seen as the foundation and supporters of political power in Afghanistan. Tribal norms have been used to establish the legitimacy of Afghan ruler governments, especially the role of tribe elders in Jirga (traditional assembly of leaders) cannot be overstated.

The traces of ethnicity can be seen in Afghanistan's politics, especially after 2001. The inclusion of ethnic group names in the Afghanistan constitution and national anthem being in the Pashto language and the establishment of ministry to deal with ethnic and tribal issues indicates their crucial role in the official politics of the country. A large part of the Afghan people is still governed on a tribal basis. As a result, ethnicity is one of the most significant roadblocks to Afghanistan's growth. In Afghanistan, ethnicity and a set of facts duplicate each other. Factors such as neighboring countries interference, the Afghan people's traditional perception and performance in elections, pessimism about youth and reliance on traditional elites, the lack of alternative ethnic ideas to mobilize the people, the abuse of political elites and ethnic parties to gain their support, and the central government's weakness.

In the last three decades of Afghanistan's history, the Taliban insurgent groups have been the fundamental cause of instability and conflict. In 1992, the Taliban group was founded in the south of Afghanistan for the first time. The Taliban group expanded from 30 students in October 1994 to a powerful military force of 12,000 individuals in two months under the leadership of Molla Omar. The Taliban groups declared victory and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan after taking Kabul in 1992. Between 1996 and 2001, only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE recognized Taliban authority in Afghanistan (Salahshoor, 2020). The Taliban governed over 90% of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, when the U.S. intervened on September 11, 2001. The main offender was Al-Qaeda, and the U.S. attacked and overthrew the Taliban, attributed to the existence of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban never went away and continued to gain territory every day.

The country's "geopolitical" and "geostrategic" position, as addressed in previous parts, has a significant impact on the reasons why the Taliban reclaimed control of Afghanistan after a 20-year occupation. The U.S. nation-state-building effort, in many aspects, did not correspond to Afghanistan's reality, and it had a terrible impact on the country's socio-political structure. Finally, the Taliban's successful implementation of a winning plan that used all of these factors in their favor gave a chance for the country to return to Taliban control (Seren, 2021, pp. 16-34). In conclusion, between 2001 and 2021, the UN and NATO's longest and most comprehensive nation-state-building project, backed by coalition troops, particularly the U.S., miserably failed in Afghanistan. Finally, all

measures and efforts, particularly “security sector reform” in the name of achieving nation-state-building, peace, security, and stability, failed (Seren, 2021).

In addition to the dynamics mentioned above, other significant dynamics also played a part in the country's conflict. One of the challenges that led to the illegal economy and generated numerous barriers to the construction of economic infrastructure was drug production. According to the statistics, more than 80% of the morphine and heroin produced and trafficked worldwide are made in Afghanistan. Drug production was one of Afghanistan's most important conflict dynamics, especially before and after 2001. Drug manufacturing has been linked to Taliban factions that generate most of their money from narcotics.

Corruption has played a significant role in Afghanistan society. In this regard, Afghanistan has been named among the top three most corrupted countries globally every year for the past two decades. Corruption had a severe impact on every element of life in Afghanistan since it eroded public trust in government institutions and impeded the country's efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Corruption has caused a gap between the government and the people and hampered the institutionalization of democracy and the development of administrative and governmental processes. Afghanistan's ability to be self-sufficient has been affected by corruption, which has resulted in the loss of extensive resources that might have been utilized to reduce the country's terrible poverty rate.

One of the critical causes of Afghanistan's chaotic environment was the country's poor and divided economy. This condition resulted in an economy that was weak and fragmented. Due to the country's poor economy, the central government could not make its presence felt in every region. Local authorities and criminal groups filled the regions left vacant by the government. The lack of a stable economy and a high unemployment rate pushed the youth to engage in illegal and insurgent activities, even though the illicit economy in the nation was at least as large as the legal sector. As Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer of opium, the presence of warlords has led to poppy planting, which has supplied financial resources not just to farmers but also to armed organizations involved in the processing and smuggling of the drug.

Natural resources have played a crucial role in Afghanistan's war since 2001, and debates over natural resources, rather than ideological or ethnic divides, have become a

greater element of the conflict. Afghanistan has the world's largest scarce resources essential to producing tanks, missiles, and other military weapons. Despite its hostile and domineering neighbors, the gift of natural resources in Afghanistan, deep ethnic divisions, lack of efficient administrative, security, and, most importantly, lack of necessary preventative measures led to the ongoing war over natural resources. As a result, Afghanistan's vast natural resources, if properly exploited, can serve as a viable replacement for international aid and relieve Afghanistan's problem of dependency on outside assistance.

Subsequently, since 2001, regional actors are the second variable discussed in the study that has played an important role in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has served as a strategic depth for rival regional countries for the last five decades. Multiple proxy battles have centered on Afghanistan, including the Pakistan-India rivalry and the Iran-Saudi Arabia contest for regional domination. On the other hand, the role and interest of Central Asian countries and the U.S.-Russia and China policy approach towards Afghanistan continued the war. Furthermore, the country has become a battleground for various international and regional terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K, primarily motivated by ideas and fighting against the Afghan government and its foreign backers. Additionally, criminal organizations such as drug organized crime and illegal militias are driven from turmoil and uncertainty and take advantage of governmental institution weaknesses.

Pakistan has been the leading regional player in Afghanistan's politics in five decades. In its foreign policy dealings with other nations, Pakistan has used Afghanistan as a weapon to gain political and economic gains. During the 1980s, Pakistan used Afghanistan as a platform for U.S. foreign policy and conflict with the Soviet Union. Pakistan took advantage of the power vacuum created by Afghanistan to channel the energy of its extremism into strengthening national identity and managing extremist groups. Pakistan has been the primary donor and supporter of the Taliban as a proxy instrument for gaining strategic depth and continuing her hostile war in Afghanistan with India.

In India's regional competition with Pakistan, Afghanistan is a key participant. The two countries have had tumultuous relations since Pakistan's formation in 1947 and have long been concerned about each other's influence in Afghanistan. Both countries have a

long-standing border dispute over Kashmir. While Pakistan intends to use rebel organizations to prevent Indian influence in Afghanistan, India has used a more positive approach since 2001, pioneering Afghanistan's rise and controlling Pakistan via culture and politics. On the other side, Thousands of Afghan youngsters were educated by religious organizations in Pakistan, and these Islamist militias have expanded Islamabad's strategic influence in Afghanistan.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are the other two countries that play a crucial role in Afghanistan's politics. Iran and Saudi Arabia have fought for regional dominance and influence in Afghanistan for decades. At times, the rivalry between the two countries has been violent. From the 1980s until the Taliban administration fell apart, Iran and Saudi Arabia were present on the Afghan war fronts. The competition between Iran and Arabia has transformed into a type of hidden battle in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban administration in 2001. Namely, both countries have tried to penetrate and use the groups and movements in Afghanistan in different ways. For instance, both countries tried to compete for influence in Afghanistan via Sunnis and Shiites ethnic groups. Aside from that, humanitarian aid and trade are other elements that both countries have used to interfere in Afghanistan's domestic affairs.

In the context of regional players, the Central Asian countries have been other important actors in the politics of Afghanistan since 2001. For the Central Asian countries, Afghanistan represents both a threat and an opportunity. As a source of opportunity, Afghanistan is an important transit point for products flowing from South Asia to North Asia and vice versa. It also serves as a gateway to Central Asia's energy-rich resources, allowing these countries to connect to vital global markets. As a result, Afghanistan plays an important role in trade, various energy reserves, other minerals, water resources, and regional transportation development. The Central Asian countries see Terrorism, radicalism, and drug trafficking as the sources of threats in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and five Central Asian countries manage their ties on a bilateral basis, with no involvement from their neighbors. Additionally, all countries follow similar strategies; a defensive strategy centered on conventional security, a rising awareness of soft security threats, and an endeavor to modify each state's geostrategic posture.

In the last part of the study, the international dynamics of the conflict have been examined. From Alexander the Great till today, Afghanistan has played an essential role in

world affairs. It has a strategic position as one of the world's most resource-rich countries, and this location has fueled regional and global power invasions, occupations, and interventions throughout history. Afghanistan has gained the label of “bridge country” between Central and South Asia due to its geographical location.

The attitude of global powers such as the U.S., Russia, and China toward each other in the region, particularly in Asia, has directly influenced Afghanistan's situation and stability. The U.S.-Russia competition on various global and regional issues has resulted in significant strains in Washington-Moscow relations, particularly in recent years. In Afghanistan, the competition between U.S. and Russia has raised the potential of a “new big game” in the region.

The first step in understanding U.S.-Russian ties in Afghanistan is to consider the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The U.S. provided financial and military assistance to the Mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet forces. Similarly, it forced the Soviets to leave Afghanistan. Following the U.S.-led intervention of Afghanistan in 2001, which was claimed on counter-terrorism, Russia agreed to assist the transportation of logistics, and a military base in Central Asia was also handed over to the U.S. Russia agreed with the presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to counterterrorism because of the threat posed by Taliban and Al-Qaeda and radical groups in Central Asia; like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Chechen and Uyghur fighters, it sought to eliminate the threat from its so-called “near abroad” area. As time passed and Washington failed to fulfill its claimed goals of eliminating terrorists in Afghanistan, the Russians concluded that the U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan had failed to produce the desired outcomes.

Since the signing of the Kabul-Washington Security Cooperation Agreement, Russia's dissatisfaction with the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan has grown. In reality, Russia regarded the prolonged presence of NATO and U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, as well as the consequences of that presence, as a danger to its borders, and considered that Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which are among Moscow's security regions, share a common border. It became vital to keep an eye on U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. The tensions between the U.S. and Russia, directly and indirectly, influence Afghanistan's conditions. During the previous two decades, the Taliban and ISIS terrorist organizations' concerns were the initial rises of tensions between the two superpowers. While supporting the Taliban's repression after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan,

Russia attempted to contact the Taliban to persuade them to remove terrorists from northern Afghanistan near Central Asian countries.

By strengthening connections with the Taliban, Moscow intended to utilize the organization against other terrorist groups, such as ISIS, by establishing a significant role in Afghan politics and using the Taliban as a negotiating tool against the U.S. on a variety of issues, like preventing it from advancing toward the Central Asian region and the Caucasus. Indeed, with the growth of ISIS in the Middle East and the proclamation of ISIS-K's, Russia became more sensitive to Afghanistan's condition and security and felt threatened. The situation arises when Russia accuses the U.S. of assisting ISIS is relocating its fighters outside of Russia, a charge that Washington rejects. When tensions between Russia and the U.S. rise, the countries can use the groups they support in Afghanistan as proxies to put more significant pressure on each other and further their objectives (Mahmoudi, 2018).

In recent years, China has been a primary foreign policy goal for the U.S. China's expanding military and economic strength concerns the U.S. government, which is closely following China's growing presence and influence in various areas, particularly the Middle East. China has been concerned by the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan after 9/11. On the one hand, Beijing viewed the U.S. forces as a serious strategic threat. On the other hand, China believed that the security provided by the U.S. in Afghanistan had benefited it, particularly limiting the growth and expansion of anti-China terrorist groups.

China's overall perspective on the U.S. operation in Afghanistan was complicated. On the negative side, China viewed the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to establish a foothold in the continent's core, which could be used to contain China in the future. The fight against the Taliban was regarded by Beijing as an “irresponsible” U.S. endeavor to destabilize the area. The September 11 attacks, which led to the U.S. war in Afghanistan, intensified extremism in the region. According to the Chinese, it directly impacted instability in China's Uyghur region of Xinjiang. On the positive side, China saw the post-9/11 U.S. conflicts as the biggest chance for the country since the end of the Cold War. It was also looked at as a “strategic opportunity window” that provided Beijing a decade to solidify its dominance. At the same time, Washington was preoccupied with Afghanistan and Iraq, spending billions of dollars (Mehdi, 2020).

After the U.S., China has been one of the most important partners in Afghanistan's rehabilitation and investment in numerous industries. Due to security concerns in Afghanistan, particularly from the Uyghurs, a radical minority, China has worked closely with the Afghan government in different periods. It all highlights the importance of Afghanistan's position in China's foreign policy, from providing $350 million per year to proclaiming willingness to train the Afghan military in all areas. China also has been an active player in the Afghan dialogue process and has always supported Afghan peace and stability. In global meetings on the issue of peace in Afghanistan, the country has always been engaged (Noori, 2020).

5.2. Conclusion

In conclusion, Afghanistan’s unending war is associated with several internal and external dynamics, which led to the failure of many global powers throughout history. The recent U.S. defeat and its withdrawal from Afghanistan show a clear example of how Afghanistan's geography is difficult to be controlled. In the last two decades, many internal and external elements fueled the ongoing war in Afghanistan. But, the Taliban, drug trafficking, corruption, failed nation-building, and the existence of several regional and global powers’ interests was among the leading factors of the conflict. As stated in this study, the events of “invasions,” “rebellion,” and “execution” left their imprints on Afghanistan's political history. On the other hand, “nationalism,” “sectarianism,” and “tribalism” were the three primary unresolved issues coming from the country's historical legacy.

As a result, the ethnic focus of the Taliban, which was developed on the “Pakhtunwali” heritage, should not be overlooked in this process of the Taliban's revival. However, as described in the earlier sections, the country's “geopolitical” and “geostrategic” situation has a considerable influence on why the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan after a twenty-year occupation. While this influence directly impacts local and national dynamics, it also gave regional and non-regional global players a chance to directly or indirectly engage in Afghanistan. As a result, the geopolitical situation significantly impacts Afghanistan's political standing.

Geopolitics is not alone the leading cause for Afghanistan's failed nation-state project. But, political developments in the 19th and 20th centuries have directly influenced

how the country is shaped. While the Taliban's fight against the U.S. had its historical roots in the war against Great Britain, the conflict against the Soviet invasion and the regional and global power struggle that nourished the war was experienced throughout the Taliban's war. Furthermore, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime and eliminate the Al-Qaeda organization and their nation-state-building efforts; in many aspects, it did not correspond to Afghanistan's reality. It had a disastrous impact on the country's country's socio-political structure. Finally, the Taliban's successful implementation of a winning plan that used all of these factors in their favor gave a chance for the country to return to Taliban control.

Although this study covers the dynamics of conflict in Afghanistan from a broader perspective, its significant reference period is from 2001 (the year the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan) until the end of 2021 (the year the U.S. exits Afghanistan). The violence that erupted with the U.S. withdrawal paved the way for the insurgent group like the Taliban to come to power, turn Afghanistan into more instability and humanitarian crisis, and settle the country a heaven of terrorist groups such as ISIS-K and other terrorist groups.

5.3. Policy Recommendation

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power in 2021, following the fall of Ashraf Ghani's government, would have drastically different implications. Firstly, it would boost China and Russia's influence in Afghanistan and undermine the West's heated battle with Moscow and Beijing. Moscow and Beijing are looking to create a foothold in Afghanistan to avoid falling behind the U.S. in geopolitical rivalry and establish more control over Islamist and Taliban groups. The Taliban's growth in Afghanistan would shift the balance in favor of Russia and China, reducing the West's influence. The events in Afghanistan are likely to significantly influence the current world order, particularly in the Eurasian area.

On the other hand, Pakistan would gain from the current situation, but India would lose its influence. This time, Russia and China would use an aggressive and oppressive strategy rather than a defensive one. After the Cold War, China and Russia have been deeply involved in several issues that the West finds unacceptable. Although Afghanistan is a priority in Russia and China's foreign policies, it is not a priority yet. But Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era would be a war between the U.S., Russia, and China.

What is happening and will happen in Afghanistan, on the other hand, might have a wide range of ramifications. The developments in Afghanistan are expected to bolster Pakistan's position, as it already collaborates closely with China and benefits from its economic potential. The government's fall in Kabul would make India feel more insecure since it perceives it as a significant setback to its strategic interests. On the other side, the U.S. and its allies' efforts would increase negotiation on the nuclear deal with Iran. For Russia, the defeat of the U.S. in Afghanistan signifies not just a decline in the capabilities of its principal foreign rival but also a shift in the geopolitical position.

Furthermore, it's crucial for Russia to understand how the U.S.. withdrawal from Eurasia would influence Turkey's stance. Ankara may re-establish relations with NATO partners if China and Russia enhance their dominance over the common neighborhood. On August 15, 2021, the fall of Kabul's government was a milestone moment in history because it signaled the end of the U.S. efforts to influence world affairs. Even though such efforts will continue under different ideological slogans, the U.S. has long abandoned efforts to construct a global order under U.S. leadership. In truth, we are experiencing yet another shift in the power balance that now determines the character of international relations (Afghanistan Situation, 2021).

Afghanistan's future and stability depend highly on domestic, international, regional actors and factors. In the first place, Afghanistan's people need to institutionalize nation-building to legitimize democracy in the state. The institutionalization of nation-building led to powerful political, economic, and cultural institutions. Therefore ensuring democracy, peace, and security and eliminating corruption depends on expanding the power and capacity of the state, as the state is a means of exercising power and sovereignty. The second main element to bring peace and stability in the country is the international and regional players' policies towards Afghanistan. It requires important and cooperative initiatives from its neighbors and international actors.

However, Afghanistan neighbors' intentions and deeds have not always been as productive as they may be. Their actions are still classified as malicious interference. U.S., Russia, China, India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and maybe most importantly, Pakistan appear to have hidden agendas designed to promote their interests at the price of Afghanistan, if necessary. The uncertainty caused by Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation, which is increasingly moving across the country, prompts considerable alarm. Increased criticism

and a spirit of “wait and see” both inside and outside Afghanistan make it even more difficult for the Afghans and international community to generate the required forward momentum. Afghanistan is still at a difficult period. While it is difficult to find a neighbor who does not want peace and stability inside Afghanistan, each neighbor has a particular perspective of what this peace and stability should entail. Afghanistan's growth, prosperity, and security will be inextricably linked to domestic reasons and the actions and strategy of its neighbors and global powers, for better or worse.

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