



RESEARCH PAPER

Afghanistan at the Center of the New Great Game: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the concept of the "New Great Game" with reference to Afghanistan according to the theory of realism in order to understand the motivations and actions of regional and global powers involved in the country. The paper employs case study approach to evaluate the old "Great Game" and its ongoing version in the Afghanistan. The article argues that Afghanistan is the hub of the "New Great Game" as many actors try to further their agendas in the region and Pakistan will most likely be impacted by the actions of outside actors as it has a large stake in what happens in Afghanistan. The paper utilizes theory of realism, analysis of key events and actors in Afghanistan's recent history, as well as their implications for the region in general. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics of the New Great Game for regional stability and international security.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Geopolitics, Pakistan, Realism, New Great Game, Regional Powers

Introduction

Afghanistan has long been a battleground for rival nations due to its strategic location at the intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. A new Great Game involving China, Russia, Iran, and India is emerging as American and NATO forces leave Afghanistan in 2021. Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbor, is also a significant player in this new Great Game because of its proximity to Afghanistan and historical significance to the country's current political evolution. This paper investigates the effects on Pakistan of Afghanistan's major role in the new Great Game.

The Great Game, both ancient and contemporary, refers to the struggle for power and influence in Central Asia and the surrounding areas between great powers. The nineteenth century saw the historic Great Game between the British and Russian Empires (Hopkirk, 1992) for greater share of influence in the region, whilst the contemporary Great Game features powerful nations like the United States, China, and Russia (Koolae & Zarei, 2021). Due to its strategic location as a bridge connecting Central Asian states with the rest of the region, Afghanistan has played a significant role in the Great Game (Hopkirk, 1992). The importance of Afghanistan in the this Great Game has become prominent thanks to its huge mineral and natural resources (Muzaffar, Nawab, & Yaseen, 2021; Kugelman, 2019). The battle for power has resulted in decades of violence and instability in Afghanistan. A great book for comprehending the historical backdrop of the Great Game and its role in defining the history of the area is Peter Hopkirk's *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (Hopkirk, 1992). The book sheds light on the complex geopolitical events of the past, including power struggles between empires and the role that Afghanistan played in these conflicts. In the context of contemporary international power politics, Hopkirk's

book also offers a framework for assessing the current meaning of the Great Game (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen, 2019; Koolae & Zarei, 2021).

We may make sense of the region's current power dynamics and their effects on Central Asian people and nations by comprehending the historical importance of the Great Game. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 sparked a conflict that lasted ten years. The American-led coalition invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and stayed there for two decades in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks on the US. China, Russia, Iran, and India are all interested in Afghanistan for geopolitical and economic reasons. The current geopolitical struggle for influence and dominance in Central Asia and its bordering regions is referred to as the "New Great Game." The phrase was coined in the late 1990s after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the rise of new global powers (Johnson, 2013). As noted earlier, the term "Great Game" refers to the historical conflict between the British and Russian empires over control of Central Asia in the nineteenth century (Hopkirk, 1992). For scholars and analysts interested in Central Asia and global geopolitics, "the New Great Game" is a subject that is worthy of attention and investigation.

The "New Great Game" in Central Asia focuses on the current geopolitical rivalry between great powers over access to critical resources and commercial possibilities (Rashid, 2013). According to Pakistani writer and author Ahmed Rashid, the new Great Game reflects a new period of imperialism with more competition among world powers such as China and India that act more aggressively in the area (Rashid, 2013). According to Olcott (2012), the "New Great Game" is built on some variables, including economic interest, geo-economics imperatives, and security concerns. The author contends that the rivalry, which will have a detrimental effect on regional stability and global security, may last for some time. According to Professor Rajan Menon, the lack of clear rules and norms in the new great game contributes to instability and confusion within the region. He makes the argument that new rules and institutions capable of mitigating conflict and fostering cooperation in the region should be established by both global powers with a view to jointly working on them (Menon, 2014). According to Alexander Cooley, the role of not only government actors but also other foreign players in defining Central Asia's geopolitical landscape is crucial. He sees the "New Great Game" as being characterized by a complex web of tacit networks and by curly hair in the red dress with the bows on the stage between the twins with freckles, transmissible relationships, which are difficult to govern or monitor. For that reason, he calls on more attention to be given to the role of transnational companies and others who are not states in shaping the dynamics of a new great game (Cooley, 2012).

Overall, scholars studying Central Asia and the world's geopolitics paid a considerable amount of attention to this New Great Game. The diverse drivers of the new Great Game, its implications for regional stability and international security, as well as the importance of considering the role that non-state actors have played in shaping game dynamics, are reflected in scholar's views such as Rashid, Olcott, Menon or Cooley. Some global powers, notably the United States, China, Russia, and Iran, are contending for access to natural resources, important ports, and influence over neighboring countries in the region (Koolae & Zarei 2021). Because of its strategic location and abundant natural resources, particularly minerals and rare earth elements, Afghanistan has played an important role in the New Great Game (Kugelman, 2019). In Afghanistan, the competition for influence has resulted in recurrent conflicts and instability. Pakistan and Afghanistan share a complex and often contentious relationship, with Pakistan historically supporting various Afghan factions to exert influence in the region. This support includes support for the Taliban, the group that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. However, Afghanistan's instability has also had serious consequences for Pakistan, including the influx of millions of Afghan refugees and the rise of terrorist groups at the border.

Completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will provide Pakistan with an opportunity to strengthen its economic ties with Afghanistan. CPEC is a vast network

of roads, railroads, and pipelines through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, linking Gwadar Port in southern Pakistan with Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwestern China. The corridor could provide a much-needed boost to Pakistan's economy and help facilitate trade with Afghanistan, which currently relies on Pakistan for access to global markets. Despite these possibilities, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain fragile as Afghanistan could become a haven for terrorists and pose a grave security threat to Pakistan. The Taliban's recent return to power further complicates this relationship, raising concerns about their treatment of minorities and women, as well as the group's potential to harbor terrorist organizations. Moreover, Pakistan's already strained relations with key powers in the region, such as India and Iran, could complicate efforts to increase its influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's longtime rival India has provided economic and military support to the Afghan government in an attempt to align the country to its interests. Iran's growing influence in the region has also created tensions in Pakistan. In sum, Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is complex and presents both opportunities and challenges for the country. Although the signing of the CPEC could strengthen economic ties between the two countries, instability and the potential for terrorism in Afghanistan remain major concerns for Pakistan. Strained relations with key actors in the region can also complicate efforts to influence Afghanistan.

Literature Review

A review of the selected literature reveals a variety of viewpoints on the idea of a new great game in Central Asia. According to Ehteshami (2019), Iran faces opportunities and challenges in the new Great Game. He urges a more proactive strategy for regional cooperation and integration. According to Kassymbekova (2020), depending on the strategies and policies of the actors, the New Great Game can be seen as a chance for geopolitical competition or regional integration. Focusing on China's economic diplomacy in Central Asia, Li and Xu (2021) offer viewpoints on the New Great Game and the idea of "globalization 2.0." They contend that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China could be crucial in fostering regional economic integration and collaboration. According to Yonamine (2020), who examines the strategic alliance between China and Russia in the context of the New Great Game, it has significant ramifications for the balance of power in Central Asia. Ercan (2022) also examines Turkey's participation in the New Great Game and its efforts to exert influence in Central Asia. The authors contend that economic interests and a desire to become a regional power are the driving forces behind Turkey's foreign policy in the area.

The literature review highlights the New Great Game's complexity and diversity, as well as its implications for local and international geopolitics. This literature sheds light on the ongoing geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia and how it affects domestic and global dynamics. They look at a variety of viewpoints, including economic interests, security concerns, regional integration, and global power dynamics, on the motivators, challenges, and opportunities of the New Great Game. They also reveals how various players, including China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran, influenced the nature of the New Great game. Political science, international relations, and security studies are a few academic fields that have shown interest in the developing Great Game in Afghanistan. With a focus on the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, academics have investigated the regional and worldwide consequences of the Great Game in Afghanistan. Numerous scholars have studied the historical and modern elements that have influenced Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. According to Hussain and Khan (2015), historical, political, and security factors have caused mutual mistrust and hostility to exist in the two nations' relations. They contend that Pakistan's support for the Taliban and other militant groups in Afghanistan out of its security concerns has strained relations between the two nations. Other scholars have concentrated on Pakistan's ties to the Taliban and its participation in the peace process in Afghanistan. According to Ahmed (2019), Pakistan's historical ties to the Taliban and strategic location give it a significant role to play in the peace process in Afghanistan or the purpose of

facilitating a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. He suggests that Pakistan can use its clout to persuade the Taliban to come to the negotiating table.

The literature has also discussed the regional and global ramifications of the Great Game in Afghanistan. According to Trenin (2017), regional powers like China, Russia, and India are involved in a larger struggle for influence in Central Asia that includes the Great Game in Afghanistan. He claims that the departure of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan has left a power vacuum that various regional powers are attempting to fill. To analyze the implications of the evolving Great Game in Afghanistan for Pakistan, realism theory has been used here as a framework. According to realism, governments make decisions based on their own self-interest and a desire for security and dominance. In order to comprehend the new Great Game in Afghanistan, realism also emphasizes how power dynamics shape international relations. According to Sajjad and Zaman (2019), Pakistan is a significant player in the Afghan Great Game because of its strategic location and historical ties to the Taliban. They believe that in order to safeguard its interests, Pakistan is likely to pursue a balancing strategy that involves maintaining contact with both the Taliban and the Afghan government. The three main categories of the literature on the Afghan Great Game are historical analysis, regional and global dimensions, and implications for the neighboring countries.

The British and Russian empires fought for dominance over Central Asia in the 19th century, which is when the Great Game in Afghanistan first began. Many academics have examined this historical context's influence on the modern Great Game. Barthorp (2002), for instance, provides a thorough historical account of the Great Game and its effects on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Adeb and Shabbir (2018) investigate how historical and cultural ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan have influenced the current dynamics of the region. The consequences of Afghanistan's "Great Game" extend beyond the country's borders. Many academics have studied the regional and international aspects of the Great Game, including the role of superpowers like the United States, China, and Russia as well as their objectives in Afghanistan. For instance, Rubin (2020) contends that over time, America's strategic interests in Afghanistan have changed from combating terrorism to containing China and Russia's influence in the area. Similarly to this, Ghani and Bhatia (2020) investigate the regional ramifications of the Great Game, taking into account the significance of nearby nations like Iran, Pakistan, and India. For neighboring nations like Pakistan, Iran, and India, the Great Game in Afghanistan has significant ramifications. Researchers have examined how the Great Game affected these nations, taking into account their strategic objectives economic opportunities, and worries about security. Mahmood and Ahmed (2018), for instance, look at Pakistan's strategic objectives in Afghanistan and its initiatives to advance peace and stability there. In a similar vein, Azad and Siddiqui (2018) investigate the economic opportunities and difficulties brought on by the Great Game in Afghanistan for Pakistan.

Although the conflict between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia is frequently mentioned when discussing the Great Game of Afghanistan, the phrase has recently acquired new significance. It alludes to the struggle for power in Afghanistan. Afghanistan continues to be a nation of significant strategic importance, making its stability crucial for local as well as global security and peace. Thus, the literature about the Great Game emphasizes how important it is to comprehend the intricate dynamics in Afghanistan. The fantastic game will also have an impact on Afghanistan's neighbors, such as Pakistan, India, Iran, and China. As previously mentioned, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is complicated and multifaceted, with opportunities for economic cooperation as well as difficulties related to security and terrorism. Regarding Afghanistan, both India and Iran possess strategic interests that might put them at odds with Pakistan and one another. At the same time, the big game may become even more complicated as a result of China's expanding economic and political influence in the area, particularly through the CPEC. Afghanistan continues to be a nation of significant strategic importance, making its stability crucial for both local and

international peace and security. Thus, the literature on the Great Game emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend the intricate dynamics in Afghanistan. The game will also have an impact on Afghanistan's neighbors, including Pakistan, India, Iran, and China.

As noted earlier, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is complicated and multifaceted, with opportunities for economic cooperation as well as difficulties related to security and terrorism. With regard to Afghanistan, both India and Iran have stakes that might put them at odds with Pakistan and one another. Meanwhile, the game may become more complex as a result of China's expanding political and economic dominance in the area, particularly through the CPEC. There is no doubt that games will continue to influence Afghanistan's future as it progresses toward stability and development. The literature highlights the need for a thorough and nuanced approach to understanding the Great Game in Afghanistan and offers insightful information about the complicated and interconnected factors influencing the future of the region. To facilitate talks between Pakistan and Teheran-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which ultimately resulted in a peace agreement in 2021, the Afghan Taliban government has been instrumental. The Taliban's influence over the TTP, which has long sought refuge in Afghanistan, has aided in bringing militant groups to the negotiating table (Sahi, 2021). Pakistan and the TTP acknowledge the Taliban's contribution to the peace process. Shah Mahmud Qureshi, the former foreign minister of Pakistan, publicly appreciated the role of Taliban in bringing their TTP ally to the negotiating table and facilitating a peace agreement (Bokhari, 2021). A representative of the TTP stated that "the Taliban played a key role in the success of the peace process" (AFP) in recognizing the Taliban's role in facilitating talks. The Taliban's involvement in the peace process, however, was not without dispute. According to some experts, a peace agreement may ultimately harm counterterrorism efforts in the region because the Taliban could use their links with the TTP to fortify their position in Afghanistan. (Hussain, 2021). Nevertheless, the Taliban were crucial in assisting Pakistan and the TTP talk to each other.

A peace accord is a step in the right direction for the region's peace and protection. The Taliban in Pakistan (TTP) and the Taliban in Afghanistan have a complex and diverse relationship. Despite the Afghan Taliban's denial of direct command or influence over the TTP, some academics think the group still has a sizable influence on the TTP's decisions. For instance, Hassan Abbas (2018) claimed that the Afghan Taliban used to play an integral part in assisting and guiding TTP's operations in Pakistan. Similarly, Michael Kugelman notes in his report for the U.S. Institute for Peace that even though the Afghan Taliban have no direct influence over her TTP, they do possess wide ideological and strategic influence (Kugelman, 2019). However, other researchers are less convinced that the Afghan Taliban have had any effect on the TTP. Muhammad Amir Rana argues in a 2019 article for the International Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies that while the Afghan Taliban may have once given the TTP some support, the two organizations are fundamentally different, having divergent goals and viewpoints, and it is highly unlikely that the Afghan Taliban would incite war with Pakistan at the cost of endangering their objectives in Afghanistan (Rana, 2019). The extent of the Afghan Taliban's influence on his TTP is a subject of debate among scholars in that some contend that the organization is crucial in influencing TTP behavior, while others contest this assertion (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Afzal, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: The Realistic Approach

Realist theory offers an appropriate structure for examining the effects of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan's evolving Great Game. According to realism, governments make decisions based on their self-interest and a desire for security and power (Mearsheimer, 2019). A key component of understanding the New Great Game in Afghanistan is how power dynamics shape international relations. Realism offers a helpful framework for comprehending the power dynamics at work in Afghanistan's new great game. Other regional powers like China, Russia, and Iran are attempting to increase their influence in the

region as the US has withdrawn its troops and the Taliban has taken control of the nation (Marszal, 2021).

According to realism, states seek to maximize their power in part to attain their self-interest. China, Russia, and Iran might see the US departure from Afghanistan as a chance to pursue and fulfill their respective strategic goals. Afghanistan's mineral wealth and potential as a key location for China's BRI, for example, could attract China's interest (Wang, 2019). Iran may view Afghanistan as a way to project its power in the region and to counter that of Saudi Arabia's, while Russia may seek to establish its foothold in Central Asia and oppose NATO's presence there (Ryzhkova & Anikina, 2021).

Additionally, realism emphasizes the significance of military might in interstate relations. A Taliban-controlled Afghanistan could provide terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda or the militant Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) a base to operate in the vicinity. Other nations may view this as a threat and respond by using force to stop the spread of terrorism (Biddle, 2019). Alliances and the distribution of power are significant factors in international relations, according to realism. In order to increase their impact in Afghanistan, regional powers may form alliances or try to balance power among themselves. For instance, Iran may look to form alliances with Shia groups in the region to counter Sunni influence, or Russia and China may team up to oppose American influence in the region (Dorrnsoro, 2017).

Realism helps to explain how various factors, such as alliances, state interests, and military prowess, influence international relations. A realistic perspective can facilitate a better understanding of the motives behind the actions of the various actors involved as the situation in Afghanistan continues to change. The emphasis on power and self-interest in realism can be particularly useful in evaluating the actions of states and other actors in the region, though other theoretical frameworks may offer insights into various aspects of the conflict. In the end, a realistic viewpoint on the new Great Game in Afghanistan can aid analysts and policymakers in making more informed choices about how to handle this difficult and complex situation. By considering the realities of power politics and the objectives of the various participants, long-term sustainable and efficient solutions might be achieved.

Results and Discussion

Realistic thinking offers a helpful framework for comprehending the dominant structure at work in Afghanistan's new great game. It points out how collaborations, balance of power, and military strength play important roles in determining how international relations develop. Various regional and international powers playing the new great game in Afghanistan are attempting to increase their presence there. The United States, Russia, China, Iran, India, and Pakistan are the major participants. Pakistan's geopolitical location and past connections to Afghanistan have an impact on its strategic interests in that country. In order to balance out India's expanding influence in the area, Pakistan wants to maintain its influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's "support" for Taliban has played a significant role in determining the course of the Afghan conflict. It is believed that the Taliban have received protection and support from Pakistan, enabling them to carry out their violent uprising against the Afghan government. With the influx of refugees, the spread of terrorism and the disruption to commerce and economic activity, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has had a significant impact on Pakistan. Pakistan faces opportunities as well as challenges as a result of the current Great Game in Afghanistan. On the one hand, improved regional links and trade ties might be advantageous for Pakistan. On the other, Pakistan needs to be careful about possible security risks and the chance of getting involved in regional power struggles. To negotiate Afghanistan's new Great Game's challenging geopolitical landscape, Pakistan must take a nuanced and pragmatic stance that strikes a balance between its strategic objectives and regional cooperation and stability.

The article emphasizes that Pakistan's role in the "New Great Game" is significant because of its geographical proximity to Afghanistan and its shared racial, cultural, and historical past with the country. As Afghanistan's instability directly affects Pakistan's security and economic stability, maintaining a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in Pakistan's strategic interest. Pakistan is in an unstable situation as a result of its earlier support of the Taliban regime in the 1990s; however, it is now viewed as a key player in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and assisting in the brokering of a peace agreement in Afghanistan. Pakistan should, therefore, approach Afghanistan in a pragmatic way, taking into account its political, economic, and security interests into account. Instead of taking unilateral steps that might destabilize Afghanistan, Pakistan should cooperate with regional and international actors to advance a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Pakistan should cooperate with all parties involved in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, to facilitate a negotiated peace that protects the rights of all Afghans, particularly women, and minorities.

Secondly, Pakistan must maintain its economic involvement with Afghanistan, particularly in the areas of commerce, transport, and energy. Opening new border crossings, putting the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) into effect, and getting Afghanistan linked with the CPEC are just a few of the steps Pakistan has already taken in this direction. These kinds of initiatives could contribute to the creation of fresh commercial possibilities in Afghanistan and Pakistan and contribute to the economic development of the region as a whole. Pakistan should also concentrate on fostering closer diplomatic ties with significant international and regional players like the United States, China, Russia, Iran, and India to forge strategic alliances in the changing geopolitical surroundings of the area. It has to make sure that our rights are upheld. To encourage regional stability and cooperation, Pakistan should take a proactive role in regional fora like the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In sum, this article emphasizes the necessity for Pakistan to approach Afghanistan with pragmatism and nuance, based on an understanding of its strategic interests and larger regional and global dynamics. To ensure a tranquil and stable Afghanistan, Pakistan has a significant role to play. This is beneficial for all countries in the region, not only for Pakistan. To promote economic cooperation and safeguard its strategic interests, Pakistan should continue to cooperate and work with all Afghan factions and stakeholders and to establish and maintain stronger diplomatic ties.

According to the results of this study, Afghanistan is still a key player in the New Great Game because of its advantageous geographical location and wealth of natural resources. The study emphasized how regional and international power plays have further complicated the Afghan situation and how the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of American-led NATO troops increased tensions. Additionally, the research demonstrated that the theory of realism is a more suitable to comprehend Afghanistan's complex political environment.

Balance of power, security, and national interest are among the main theoretical building blocks of realism. The study made clear that regional powers like China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran are approaching the situation in Afghanistan with more pragmatic thinking. It also highlighted that Pakistan, which is dealing with many security and economic challenges, is the nation most impacted by the situation in Afghanistan. As a result, Pakistan needs to be more proactive in addressing any threat that might emanate from the situation in Afghanistan. The study recommends that Pakistan should focus on economic development to lessen the effects of the situation in Afghanistan and employ its diplomatic clout to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The study also discovered that states participating in the New Great Games heavily rely on the insights of realism to guide their foreign policies. The situation of Afghanistan demonstrates the range of strategies that nations have employed to increase their interest in the area, which includes military operations, economic aid, and alliances. Pakistan, which

borders Afghanistan, is likely to experience some effects as a result of current events in this region. The peace and security of Pakistan are, however, extremely related to the state of Afghanistan, and Pakistan must take an active part in the region. Pakistan must also keep communicating with regional and international actors to encourage a peaceful resolution of the conflict to lessen the effects of the current situation. To deal with ripple effect of the Afghan crisis for Pakistan, it also needs to take up necessary security measures, strengthening its military or hard power capabilities. In order to promote regional integration and stability, the study also urges Pakistan to investigate the economic opportunities in Afghanistan and to encourage trade and connectivity.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this article demonstrates the complexity of the evolving Great Game in Afghanistan and its effects on Pakistan. A realistic perspective offers a helpful foundation for comprehending the power dynamics at work and the part that self-interest plays in influencing international affairs. Military power, alliances, and balancing power will all be crucial aspects to take into account as regional nations seek to increase their influence in the region. To maintain its security and interests, Pakistan must carefully manage its relations with Afghanistan and other regional nations.

Furthermore, it's critical to acknowledge the crucial role of the Taliban in influencing and shaping the behavior of the TTP. According to the literature, the Afghan Taliban provided the TTP fighters with sanctuary in their country as well as financial support. The Taliban in Afghanistan have also assisted facilitating peace talks and negotiations between the TTP and the Pakistani government. The Afghan Taliban and the TTP, however, have some problems in their mutual relationship, and there have reportedly been tensions and clashes between the two. Overall, it is likely that the developing Great Game in Afghanistan and its effects on Pakistan will continue to be the subject of intellectual and political discussion for years to come. It will be crucial for scholars and decision-makers to stay up to date on the newest events and comprehend how regional and global powers have shaped the conflict as the situation in Afghanistan continues to unfold. Furthermore, it would be crucial for Pakistan to retain a strategic and nuanced stance in its dealings with Afghan and other regional actors to protect its security and interests. To address common security challenges and advance regional stability, the article points to a need for more cooperation and communication among regional powers. Regional forums like the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the SCO offer crucial platforms for such cooperation. Working in concert, regional powers can safeguard their security and interests while fostering a more stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan and the greater region.

Recommendations

Many suggestions can be made for tackling the intricate issues surrounding Afghanistan and its effects on Pakistan based on the study's results and analysis. The following recommendations reflect the interests of all significant players, the Afghan government, of the "New Great Game," centered on Afghanistan:

- i. **STRONGER REGIONAL COOPERATION:** To advance regional stability and economic growth, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other regional players should cooperate more closely.
- ii. **BALANCING RELATIONS WITH GREAT POWERS:** In order to avoid being embroiled in the great power politics, Afghanistan and Pakistan should carefully balance their relations with the major powers, namely China, Russia, and the United States.

- iii. **PROMOTING PEACE AND STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN:** Pakistan should keep up its good contributions to the peace process in Afghanistan, and use its influence there to bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan.
- iv. **ADDRESSING CROSS-BORDER SECURITY CONCERNS:** By enhancing intelligence sharing and coordinating border control, Afghanistan and Pakistan should strive to address cross-border security issues like terrorism and smuggling.
- v. **ADOPTING A REALIST APPROACH:** Pakistan and Afghanistan should adopt a pragmatic strategy that appreciates the significance of balancing conflicting interests and avoiding being caught on the side of a single state in order to cope with the regional problems successfully.

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