

Sir Halford John Mackinder's Theories and US Geopolitical and Geostrategic Interest in Afghanistan



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Abstract: *This research paper examines the significance of Sir Halford John Mackinder's geopolitical theories in influencing current geopolitical and geostrategic aims of the United States in Afghanistan. Mackinder's Heartland Theory, has contributed a theoretical framework that facilitates comprehension of the geopolitical importance of Eurasia and its ramifications on global power dynamics. This study examines the ideas proposed by Mackinder, focusing on their fundamental principles and their relevance to Afghanistan's strategic positioning within the Heartland region. This essay aims to analyze Mackinder's notions of the World-Island, Heartland, and Rimland in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical backdrop and geopolitical factors that have shaped the United States' involvement in Afghanistan.*

Additionally, this study examines the progression of United States foreign policy in Afghanistan, spanning from the Cold War period to the present day. It establishes correlations between Mackinder's geopolitical concepts and the strategic factors that have influenced American engagement in the region. The research incorporates geopolitical aspects, including factors such as the availability of crucial resources, the maintenance of regional stability, and the strategic response to possible adversaries.

Keywords: Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Afghanistan, Great Game, US Military, Post-Withdrawal

Introduction

Following the 9/11, 2001 tragic event, the responsibility of attacking the World Trade Centre (WTC) and US defense building that is Pentagon was accepted by Al Qaeda and its adherents.¹ As a result, US Administration demanded the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to hand over Al Qaeda's leadership to America. In

case of failure to fulfill the demand, the US would be impelled to attack Afghanistan, to eliminate Al Qaeda's leadership and its adherents, for securing US interest in the region

¹Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad and the diffusion of suicide*

attack (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 2008), pp. 88-89.

and across the world.²

Contrary to this, the Taliban Government straight away refused to accept the demands of the USA and provided protective asylum to Al Qaeda's leadership instead. Consequently, the USA along with its allies invaded Afghanistan on October 07, 2001, to secure its interest by launching Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Moreover, OEF was intended to eliminate Al Qaeda's leadership as well as the Taliban regime from Afghanistan.³ Although, the said objectives were achieved by dislodging the Taliban Government. However, fighting with Taliban remnants has persisted in Afghanistan to this day. Afghanistan's and the whole region's future is uncertain as a result of the United States' intention to complete its troop departure by August 31, 2021.

The US departure from Afghanistan would not only cause anarchy, mayhem, and political instability in the country, but it would also have significant regional implications. This new phenomenon has once again emphasised Afghanistan's geo-strategic importance, attracting the attention of regional and international players.⁴ This paper will assess the geo-political and geo-strategic significance of Afghanistan by elaborating Sir Halford John Mackinder's geo-political and geo-strategic theories and then examine US invasion, occupation, and interest in this landlocked country.

Halford John Mackinder's Heartland Theory

Sir Halford John Mackinder, a famous British

geographer of his time, came up with his famous maxim highlighting the geostrategic importance of Central Asia as the pivot of the region. His maxim includes:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-island; and who rules the World-Island commands the world.⁵

For Mackinder, "past knowledge of geography provides deep insight to exactly interpret and reinterpret the present geographical scenario and, as a result, it will lead to

manipulate the emergence and growth of societal structure." Source??

In other words, the features of geography lead to manipulate the growth of a society.⁶

In 1904, Halford Mackinder presented his Theory of Pivot Area (Heartland) in which he reinterpreted geopolitical approach to international relations.⁷ For instance, he advocated replacing the old Colombian era of conquering land through sea-voyage with that of land powers and railroads. Though, the Heartland had no access to open sea, however, the movement of horsemen was possible. Moreover, the underdeveloped Heartland was also thinly populated area.⁸ He further stated that whichever state of the world controls plentiful natural resources of this pivot area, would be able to control and command by acquiring the title of an empire of the entire world.⁹ However, he did not specify a country that might be able to control the area of the pivot as he wanted to

² Chandra Chari, *Super Powers rivalry and conflict: the long shadow of the cold war on the twenty first century* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 69-70.

³ Castillo, *Guilty Party: The international community in Afghanistan*, pp. 132-133.

⁴ Saloni salil, "The Geopolitical shift in Afghanistan: Security implications for India", July 29, 2021, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/the-geopolitical-shift-in-afghanistan-security-implications-for-india/>

⁵ Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Washington D.C: National Defence University press, 1942), 106.

⁶ Halford J. Mackinder, "On the Scope and Methods of Geography," *International Affairs* 27, no 04 (October 1951), 540-541.

⁷ Pascal Venier, "The geographical pivot of history and early twentieth century culture", *The geographical Journal* 170, no. 04 (December 2004), 330-336.

⁸ Sempa, *Geopolitics: From the cold war to 21st century*, p.11.

⁹ H. J. Mackinder, "The geographical Pivot of History", *The geographical Journal* 23, no. 04 (April 1904): 421- 437.

discover the geographical realities of the time.¹⁰ Mackinder predicted that “the pivot area (Heartland) would secure the place of heart in the ensuing struggle of world powers to dominate the world owing to its geographical location”.¹¹

Similarly, he reinterpreted his theory according to the changed circumstances by producing his masterpiece on international politics i.e., *Democratic Ideals and Reality* that was published in 1919. With plenty of experience, as he remained a member of the British Parliament (1910-1922) and was also sent to Southern Russia as High Commissioner (1919-1922) for giving support to the Mensheviks revolutionaries against the Bolsheviks revolutionaries during the Russian civil war. Moreover, he had also cultivated a deep sense and interest in British geography during different phases of its history.

For instance, following his return from Russia, Halford presented his analysis of the general situation and informed the British Cabinet concerning Bolshevik Russia, which might emerge in the shape of the Russian proletariat to exploit the strategic position of the Heartland. However, he focused on the area of the Heartland throughout his discussion and, as a result, proclaimed that the British Empire would never be preserved if they failed to create balance.¹² In simple terms, he explained the strategic importance of the Heartland as it is the strongest citadel on the surface of the earth, the reservoir and centrality of natural resources to lead a huge trans-continental area.¹³

As the Second World War progressed, the

writings of Mackinder became popular among various circles of scholars during 1941-42. Moreover, at the request of the US editor of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, Halford Mackinder updated and reinterpreted his Heartland theory and thus produced an article in July 1943 “*The Round World and the Winning of the Peace*.”¹⁴ He signified and validated the importance of the Heartland, even more, than before, and equated the area of the Heartland to the territory of the Soviet Union.¹⁵ In a nutshell, his article warned the West that due to its location in the Heartland, if Soviet Russia emerged triumphant, it would be conceivable for Russia to rise to world supremacy.¹⁶ Halford Mackinder affixed much importance to the area of the Heartland owing to its central location, inaccessible to open sea, and a gigantic area including the arctic and inner drainage. It was bounded all around owing to its physical barriers protecting it essentially from outside aggression.¹⁷

Halford Mackinder skillfully expalined his theories that had to be relevant and adaptable to the geographical circumstances, demonstrating that geography is an important component in interpreting and reinterpreting history.

Nevertheless, the central point of Halford Mackinder’s theory (i.e., pivot or heartland) has provided ample grounds to be applied in the geostrategic context of a landlocked and naturally rich Afghanistan especially after the incident of September 11, 2001. Afghanistan being a landlocked, underdeveloped and thinly populated country but strategically very important in international affairs and world

¹⁰ Sempa, *Geopolitics: From the cold war to 21st century*, 12.

¹¹ Megoran, Sharapova, *Central Asia in International Relations: The Legacies of Halford Mackinder*, 01.

¹² Brain W. Blouet, “Sir Halford Mackinder as British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-192,” *The Geographical Journal* 142, No. 2 (July 1976), 228-236.

¹³ Collin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Super Power* (Kentucky: Common Wealth publishers, 1998), 10.

¹⁴ Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World: The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (London: Arktos, 2015), 39.

¹⁵ Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics of the World System* (New York: Rowman & little field publishers, 2003), 185.

¹⁶ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace”, *Foreign Affairs an American Quarterly* 21, no.4 (1943), 595- 605.

¹⁷ Debabrata Sen, *Basic Principles of Geopolitics and history: Theoretical Aspects of International Relations* (Delhi: Concept publishing company, 1975), 199.

politics.

US Policy towards Afghanistan

Currently, the location of Afghanistan had become a focus of the activities of all warring factions especially after September 11, 2001, that also triggered the USA to plunge into it and lead a war in the name of global terrorism. Moreover, the USA intended to take control of the natural resources of the region on one side and to prevent the rise of regional hegemons such as Russia, China, and Iran on the other.¹⁸ Similarly, the geo-strategic location of Afghanistan also persuaded the USA to find ways to enter Central Asia via Afghanistan. In the ensuing struggle, the USA established military bases and secured transit routes to Central Asia for the greater interest of the USA.¹⁹

The US decision to withdrawal immediately from Afghanistan has put Afghan's land into hot water that seems to become once again a pivot and combat zone between regional and world powers in near future.

The fall of the *Taliban* government in 2001 in Afghanistan persuaded USA to extend its geo-strategic interest in the region of Central Asia. For instance, the US-led NATO troops were deployed at Kabul and entrusted them with the task of securing institutions of Kabul as well as expanding the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) across the Afghan provinces. USA also assigned International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) the task to provide training to improve the capabilities of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) enabling them to fight against terrorism as well as contribute in the state building institutions of Afghanistan. To strengthen its position in Afghanistan, former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld concluded a series of agreements with Afghanistan to create peace,

stability and a process of rebuilding by the end of 2001.²⁰ For instance, USA facilitated an environment for creating a democratic culture and institution building as well as offering a structure for holding national elections in 2004 and, as a result of which, pro-US Hamid Karzai became the democratically elected president of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has also proved to be the burial ground for superpowers of different ages. The geostrategic location of Afghanistan has preoccupied the attention of many foreign invaders, investors and stake holders. They have had multidimensional and overriding geostrategic interests and thirst for controlling the region and, as a result, the region has become a battleground. To follow their respective interests, each power failed to seriously comprehend the nature of the prolonged Afghan crises. The wounds and injuries of Afghanistan grew worsened which have somehow been a nuisance to all the players concerned; however, its geostrategic location is still unique and attractive for invaders.²¹

The US intervention in Afghanistan seems not only a move to curtail the influence of Taliban but also to focus on extracting oil and gas rich resources of Central Asia via Afghanistan. USA, in consonance with the Central Asian Republics, is also willing to expose natural resources of the region to open market and thus make it possible to take control of the entire region.

As a result, Afghanistan has become the centre of gravity for all regional actors as well as international powers in order to obtain their respective geostrategic and geo-economic interests. Thus, the location of Afghanistan has attained geo-economic and geo-strategic significance in foreign policies of both regional

¹⁸Barry Buzan, "will the global war on Terrorism be the new Cold War", *The royal institute of international affairs*, no. 82 (2006), 1101-1118.

¹⁹Oktay F. Tanrisever, *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's role in regional security since 9/11*, (Netherland: IOS press, 2013), 144-146.S

²⁰Marley Buckley and Rick Fawn, *Global responses to terrorism: 9/11, Afghanistan, and beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15-17.

²¹ V. Krishnappa and ShanthieMariet D' Souza, *Saving Afghanistan*, (New Delhi: Academic foundation, 2009), 79-85.

and international powers.²²

Thus, Operation Enduring Freedom has brought the Republics of Central Asia to the forefront and US the ultimate beneficiaries of this operation. USA also succeeded in making its military and political entry into Central Asia to an extent it had never experienced before.

It seems that USA followed the principles of Halford John Mackinder in taking control of Afghanistan. USA also intends to control the Central Asian Republics via Afghanistan that would be tantamount to rule the entire region and the World Islands.

In the same connection, in November 2010, the US-led NATO signed an agreement with Afghanistan that justified its presence and geo-strategic interest for USA for staying and retaining its military bases in Afghanistan. The major reason of USA to stay in Afghanistan is to maintain *long-term cooperation and building a vigorous, long lasting partnership which completes the ISAF strategic mission and continues ahead of it.*²³

Notwithstanding, the vulnerable location of Afghanistan, both regional and international players have made Afghanistan the hunting ground for their national interests. The interest and presence of USA, Russia, Iran, India, China and Pakistan in the region as geostrategic players can best be cited in this regard.

Meanwhile, some developments from different quarters were also seen. For instance, Taliban opened their office at the behest of President Barak Obama at Doha, Qatar in January 2012 that aimed to initiate a series of talks between

USA and Taliban for the purpose of creating political stability in Afghanistan.²⁴ On the other, US President Barack Obama also proclaimed to partially withdraw US troops from Afghanistan on May 27, 2014 at the end of 2016.²⁵

While on assuming charge as president of USA in 2017, Donald Trump redesigned his strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia on August 21, 2017 declaring that “the Americans must seek an honorable and enduring victory by assaulting all the terrorist organizations including Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS), Al-Qaeda and the Taliban to seek a definitive victory”.²⁶ In January 2018, Taliban attacked Kabul in retaliation to the US policy of annihilating the income sources of Taliban especially in rural areas of Afghanistan.²⁷

By the start of 2019, in Doha, a series of talks have been held between Zalmay Khalilzad, US special envoy to Afghanistan, and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban spokesman. During these negotiations, Mullah Baradar demanded withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan; however, USA will accept their demands on conditions that Taliban will not use the Afghan land to endanger the interests of USA and will stop proliferation of ISIS in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Taliban assert that they will accept these demands only when the US pronounces a timeline to pull out their troops from Afghanistan.²⁸

Economic Interests of USA in the Region

A part from this US administration is well aware of its economic interests in the region such as the natural resources of Afghanistan.²⁹ The interest

²² Syed Waqas Haider Bukhari, Naudir Bakht, “Central Asia- Afghanistan relations under the shadows of great politics”, *IOSR Journals of Humanities and social sciences* 11, no.1 (May-June 2013): 9-17.

²³ Stephen K. Wegren, *Returns to Putin's Russia: Past imperfect, future uncertain*, (UK : Rowman & Little field publishers, 2013), 268.

²⁴ Marvin G. Weinbaum and Ahmad Khalid Majidiyar, *Afghanistan's unending war*, (Washington. D.C, Middle East Institute, 2019), 02.

²⁵ Council on Foreign relations, *The War in Afghanistan: 1999-2019*.

²⁶ “Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia,” White House, August 21, 2017, www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2017/08/21/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-and-south-asia

²⁷ Dawood Azami, “Why Afghanistan is more dangerous than ever” *BBC NEWS*, September 14, 2018.

²⁸ Sheerena Qazi, “US Taliban talks for peace in Afghanistan: what we know so far”, *Aljazeera News*, June 29, 2019.

²⁹ “Trump Eyes Afghanistan's Mineral Wealth,” *Express Tribune*, August 21, 2017,

of USA is to take control of Afghan's abundant natural resources including fuel and non-fuel, located in the north of Afghanistan estimated to be worth around one to three trillion dollars. According to Geological studies of both USA and UK, immense natural deposits have been revealed in Afghanistan in the shape of uranium, chromite, lithium, cobalt, 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements 2.2 billion tons of iron ore,³⁰ aynak copper deposits holds 5.5 metric tons and 2.3% compared to the 1.6% industry standard,³¹ gold, marble, niobium granite, and minerals. Moreover, it also possesses coal of 2,358 thousand tons,³² precious stones including lapis lazuli production estimated is 9000 kg per year, ruby is estimated 15% and emerald production is speculative but before the civil war its production was 8-10 million dollar in range.³³ It is estimated that Afghanistan has a large quantity of lithium; 3.4 billion barrels of unrefined oil; 444 billion cubic meters natural gas; and 562 million barrels liquid gas which have tremendously enhanced its economic significance.³⁴

By staying in Afghanistan, USA could get benefits to boost its economy, create employment opportunities for US citizens and provide USA a remarkable opportunity in the market for acquiring distinctive earthly minerals which have largely been in control of regional powers, such as China. This is one of the reasons, that USA has stayed in Afghanistan even after years of prolonged war and that the US knows about all the mineral wealth of

Afghanistan which may be extracted by some Western companies.³⁵

Besides, in June 2019, the US-led NATO allies signed an agreement at Brussels, ANA Trust Fund Plenary, to provide 5 billion dollars to ANDSF till 2024 for financial sustenance.³⁶

Moreover, the US-led allies consider passing through Afghanistan a southern pipeline from Central Asia bypassing Russia and Iran; however, this is only possible for the US-led allies when there is peace in Afghanistan. Only a peaceful Afghanistan can enable the West to protect their sectional interest.³⁷

US Strategy towards Regional Powers

To achieve her geo-strategic, geo-political and geo-economic interests in the region, the USA has adopted various strategies and tactics to deal with different regional powers. For instance, USA is interested to halt the consolidating relations of Afghanistan with Iran as Afghanistan has an easy access to Chabahar port from the south-west of its borders. Secondly, Iran has good ties with India, Russia and the Taliban. As a result, USA is eager to bring Iran to negotiate on US terms on the one hand and intimidated Iran with economic sanctions in 2019 on the other. Furthermore, USA has also talked to Russia to persuade Iran to stop supporting Taliban.³⁸

Similarly, USA also held talks with India urging them not to buy Iranian oil and to abandon economic ties with Iran regarding the port of Chabahar. As a result, it will not only reduce

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1487164/trump-eyes-afghanistans-mineral-wealth/>

³⁰ Ahmed Shah Katawazai, "Afghanistan's Mineral Resources are lost opportunity and a threat", *The Diplomat*, February 01, 2020.

³¹ Mohsin Amin, "The Story Behind China's long stalled mine in Afghanistan", *The Diplomat*, January 07, 2017.

³² World Data Atlas, "Afghanistan Total primary coal production", <https://knoema.com/atlas/Afghanistan/topics/Energy/Coal/Primary-coal-production>

³³ BGS Project Leader, "Minerals in Afghanistan", (Kabul: BGS), 4-5.

³⁴ Omar Joya, *Natural Resources: What strategy for Afghanistan?* (Kabul: Samuel Hall, 2013), 4.

³⁵ Mark lander and James risen, " Trumps Find Reason for the US to remain in Afghanistan: Minerals," *The New York Times*, July 25, 2017.

³⁶ "US relation with Afghanistan," *US department of State*, July 8, 2019.

³⁷ Cavanna, *Hubris, self-interest and America's failed war in Afghanistan*, 24.

³⁸ Aziz Amin Ahmadzai, "Iran's Support for the Taliban Brings it to a Crossroads with Afghanistan," *Diplomat*, May 21, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/iranssupport-for-the-taliban-brings-it-to-a-crossroads-with-afghanistan/>

Indian influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan and but also benefit China by bringing Afro-Asian countries into the economic orbit of China through the New Silk Road. It will also benefit both China and Pakistan as Gawadar will remain to be the only way to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The US strategy to dissuade India from investing in Chabahar will resultantly strongly integrate Pakistan with China as China intends to develop a naval facility in Pakistan through the Gawadar route. USA also urged India to reach an economic agreement with Afghanistan, resulting in annoying Pakistan.

To reduce Chinese influence in the region, the only alternative to USA is to persuade Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to pay back the Belt and Road Initiative (henceforth, BRI) loan to China.

The US also demanded from Pakistan to stop funding and supporting the Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan that led to endanger US interests in Afghanistan. Stable foreign relations of US-Pakistan are conditional to Pakistan's policy towards terrorist organisations. USA cautioned Pakistan in 2017 that, "our commitment is not unlimited and our support is not a blank cheque.... Our patience is not unlimited. We will keep our eyes wide open."³⁹ USA is keen to eradicate terrorist organisations from Afghanistan. In 2018, USA blamed Pakistan of supporting terrorist organisations and of deceiving the US; hence, the US discontinued its economic aid to Pakistan. On the other hand, Zamir Kabulov, Russian Special Envoy to Afghanistan, expressed that "exerting pressure on Pakistan will lead to deteriorate situation of the entire region". This led USA to take a U-turn on its strategy towards Taliban as well as

Pakistan at the end of 2018.⁴⁰

On July 22, 2019, USA expressed interest in starting multiple bilateral trade avenues and providing security aid to Pakistan and, at the same time, urging Pakistan to play role in resolving the issue of Afghanistan.⁴¹

USA is also taking initiatives to secure Russian borders with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan by using monitoring technologies, sharing intelligence, and providing training as friendly gestures. This will also stop donation to Taliban from foreign sources, local trade and extortion.⁴²

Contemporary Developments

On February 29, 2020, a direct negotiation was carried out between US government and Taliban resulting in peace agreement. As per the agreement signed by both parties respectively, there will be withdrawal of US troops by the end of 2021 from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Taliban party assured the safety of Afghan territory from all sorts of violent groups. In addition to the agreement held between Taliban and US Government, the Taliban also agreed with the Afghan Government on the condition that there will be reduction in violence on behalf of Afghan Government and US and in return the surety of further safety of Taliban controlled areas by not targeting them. In spite of the signed agreement that was held in March 2020 the result was not fruitful as there were persistent air strikes and raids and no official declaration of cease fire in the respective places.⁴³ It ultimately led to the continuation of attacks on Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and their bases. The Taliban also made territorial gains to their best interest. Furthermore, the Taliban have also carried out high-profile

³⁹Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Mark Landleraug, "Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details," New York Times, August 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/afghanistan-troops-trump.html>

⁴⁰MujibMashal and Eric Schmitt, "White House Orders Direct Taliban Talks to Jump-Start Afghan Negotiations," New York Times, July 15, 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-directnegotiations.html>

⁴¹Michael Hirsh and Lara Seligman, "How Pakistan is playing Washington again," Foreign Policy Analysis, July 24, 2019.

⁴²"US Russia Cooperation in Afghanistan," ASP, American security project.

⁴³RudraChaudhuri and Shreyas, "Dealing with the Taliban: India's strategy in Afghanistan after US withdrawal," *Carnegie India*, June 02, 2020.

attacks [across the country](#), including Kabul. Once the ceasefire was over, the Taliban immediately [resumed](#) their violent attacks on Afghan security forces and civilians both.⁴⁴

Keeping in view the above mentioned scenario, the prospects of negotiations held between the Afghan government and the Taliban was uncertain for sure. The commencement of negotiations was prey to delay and disruption solely because of the demand of the release of five thousand Taliban prisoners and then proceeding towards the actual talks. Moreover, the other reason of failed negotiation which cannot be ignored is that the Afghan government itself remained engaged in a contentious election, consequently complicating further prospects of the talk commencing in February 2020. Meanwhile during this tensed tenure of eighteen months, the [Islamic State in Khorasan](#) also had best possible opportunities to carry out violent attacks on eastern Afghan provinces including massive attacks on Kabul leading to target killing of civilians by suicidal attacks.⁴⁵

Besides, keeping some of the clauses of the agreement confidential led to the suspicion among officials of the congress of the USA, as the agreement reached was conditional, but a lack of any practical implementation carried out so far has added to further suspicion. Meanwhile the suspicion heightened as the representatives of the Afghan government were not part of the “US Taliban talks”, consequently leading observers to conclude that the US would favour the withdrawal of US army irrespective of any sort of political settlement⁴⁶ that may or may not favour Afghanistan.

Furthermore, due to the uncertainty of the presidential election in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad at the current stage is trying his best to

restrain the influence of regional powers in Afghanistan. For instance, Khalilzad visited Pakistan and during his visit, persuaded Pakistan’s army chief Qamar Bajwa to convince the Taliban leader for showing suppleness on a cease fire. Moreover, India is not happy due to Doha agreement because she thought that this agreement will pave the way for Pakistan and will Taliban to regain power in Afghanistan once again. For that reason, India desires to provide funds to leaders of Afghan militia who may be able to fight against the Taliban after the complete withdrawal of US army. Other regional powers such as Russia, China and Iran are also trying to weaken the constant peace process for their own interests.⁴⁷

Though, Joe Biden initially stated at the time of taking over charge as 46th US President that US forces would leave Afghanistan from May 01, 2021 onward, however, it seems strategically strange for an imperialist-corporate power to leave Afghanistan by providing an ample space for the other imperialist world to occupy the existing pivot of the world.⁴⁸ Thus it seems that each power’s priority is not to restore the peace process but to undermine each other’s power and influence in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Following the incident of September 11, 2001, USA planted its troops into Afghanistan and remained there to restrain pseudo-Islamic fundamentalism, however, the most important US interest behind attacking Afghanistan was to control the energy pipelines of the region in future. With the existence of pipeline projects, political instability and the presence of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan anticipate huge potentials of Afghanistan for rising conflicts in future amongst international as well as regional powers. Several powers, including international

⁴⁴ Council on foreign Relations, *War in Afghanistan relations*, August 20, 2020.

⁴⁵ Asfandiyar Mir, “what will America’s commitment to Afghanistan look like after the election?” *The Washington Post*, November 01, 2020.

⁴⁶ Clayton Thomas, “*Afghanistan: Background and US policy: In brief*,” Congressional research service, November 10, 2020, 4-6.

⁴⁷ Asfandiyar Mir, “what will America’s commitment to Afghanistan look like after the election?” *The Washington Post*, November 01, 2020.

⁴⁸ Jeff Seldin, US Troops May Miss Afghanistan withdrawal deadline, Biden Says, *Voa News.com*, March 25, 2021.

and regional, have intensively been engaged in extracting advantages of the region. These include Pakistan, independent republics of Central Asia, India, USA, Russia, China and Turkey. Following the disintegration of the former USSR in 1991, it is vividly clear now that energy resources of Afghanistan and its geo-strategic and political position would pave the way for the continuation of conflict in the shape of a new 'great game' in the region in future. This new 'great game' would possibly be fought amongst USA and regional powers. Therefore, heartland theory of Mackinder seems relevant and justifiable in application in the perspective of Afghanistan.

The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 not only meant to expel Taliban and Al-Qaida but it also had the intentions to use this strategic military platform. Keeping in view the above statement, a question immediately arises that why on one hand the US is invading while on the other having clear intentions of extending the relations by signing an agreement in February 2020 at Doha, ultimately expanding its Western political and economic influence into the very important region of Central Asia. Consequently, the confidential clauses of the signed agreement clearly draw attention towards the past history leading towards Mackinder's Heartland theory. Moreover, as in 1907 Anglo Russian Convention, Afghanistan was divided into two domains allotting the northern domain to Czar Russians and Southern domain to Great Britain respectively while the actual host remained heedless. Now relating the past to the present according to the proverb "History repeats itself" the current scenario is very much similar since in Taliban-US talks the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani was treated like the above mentioned host.

In accordance with the above mentioned context certain important questions arise in the following:

Firstly, if in case we consider that Afghanistan loses its geographical importance, then in that case why USA does not withdraw its army completely all at once in spite of leaving in intervals? Secondly, why USA is keeping certain clauses of the agreement confidential

leading to an unsolved mystery and suspicion for the rest of the world? Thirdly, if in case USA is really intending to vacate its military forces from the land of Afghanistan, then why it is signing some financial agreements with the government of Afghanistan for the upcoming future? Lastly, why the government of USA is separately signing agreements with Taliban and the government of Afghanistan respectively?

In the light of the questions above raised one can conclude that Afghanistan is the hub for all the regional powers as well as international powers due to its geographical location on the map of the world. The dictum of Mackinder's famous Heartland theory is truly applicable for the land of Afghanistan in terms of its shared borders with Iran towards west, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan towards north, with Pakistan towards south and China towards east, ultimately making it Mackinder's Heartland in the true sense.

Therefore, it is evident that USA with regard to its gains since 2001 be it economic, political and security still continues to hold its interest. If in case the situation gets worse due to resurgence of Taliban, Afghanistan would definitely turn into the terrorist safe haven again. Consequently, the instability of Afghanistan yet again will have a serious impact on regional as well as international powers.

Thus, it seems that USA followed the doctrines of Sir Halford John Mackinder in taking control of Afghanistan on one hand and it also aimed to influence and control the Central Asian States via Afghanistan with a view to rule the whole region and the World Islands. Whereas, all of a sudden withdrawal of US from Afghanistan will create a vacuum to accomplish peace building process and chaos, political instability, anarchy and civil-war like situation in the country on the other. Simultaneously, USA will keep it under surveillance the ongoing situation in Afghanistan from a distant region. Consequently, geo-strategic and geo-political significance of Afghanistan has been multiplied tremendously because it has attracted the attention of both regional and international powers.