

Geopolitical Rivalries and Afghanistan's Open-Ended War. China Extends its Influence to the Detriment of America

Shifting Geopolitical Reality in Afghanistan: Threat to US Hegemony? Part II

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Global Research, January 29, 2018

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

Violent geopolitical rivalries between imperialist and hegemonist powers over Afghanistan's natural resources, trade and transit routes, and geostrategic location have dramatically intensified. Despite sixteen years of heavy-handed US presence to establish its hegemony in Afghanistan and beyond, influence of regional powers like Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and India is growing.

The Perpetual War

Sixteen years into the longest war in its history, the US is aggressively flexing its muscles to assert and maintain its hegemony in Afghanistan and the region. This new development, however, does not stem from Donald Trump's so-called Afghan strategy. The aggressive posture on the part of the US is partially a reaction to its humiliating defeat in Syria - and one should add Iraq - at the hands of Russia and Iran (with China in the background). Trump's strategy generated some hysteria among the chattering class as being qualitatively distinct from its predecessors in that it commits the US to an open-ended war.

The fact of the matter is that ever since its official [launch](#) on October 7, 2001, the US war in Afghanistan has been an open-ended war. Its endgame depends on US's hegemonist goals in the region. In other words, the US is pursuing a strategy of perpetual war in Afghanistan irrespective of which president holds office.

Under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), the US maintains [nine military bases](#) at strategic locations across Afghanistan including those bordering Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics. The Afghan airspace is controlled by the US for all practical and strategic purposes. The latter, thus, enjoys a unique geopolitical lead to project power beyond Afghanistan. The infrastructure allows the US to [deploy](#) up to 100,000 troops in two to four weeks.

In the grand geopolitical chessboard of Afghanistan, the US is left with the military option only which it pursues, at this stage, through a combination of terrorist proxies, drone attacks and Special Forces operations. It has locked itself in at a geopolitical space surrounded by hostile regional powers like Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan.

More recently, by elevating IS presence in Afghanistan and its level of threat to US enemies such as Russia, China, and Iran, the US is elevating the justification for its own military

options intended to go beyond Afghan strategic geography. The US is essentially playing a destabilizing role in the region as it aims at establishing world-tyranny. Its strategy revolves around the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine which aims at preventing the emergence of a regional or global power that could challenge US's sole hegemonic status.

However, US's attempt at establishing its hegemony in Afghanistan and beyond is being challenged by a de facto strategic alliance involving Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan. In other words, the US-NATO coalition is facing a formidable enemy - three of which are nuclear powers - determined to contain US's hegemonist ambitions in the region. China and Russia are at the forefront of shaping this new geopolitical reality.

The Harmonious Hegemony

China's ambitious One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative that aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe surpasses trade and economic interests and shifts the geopolitical dynamics on a global scale. Its immediate implications are already felt in South and Central Asia - where its ultimate success depends - with Afghanistan as the geopolitical heartland.

As part of OBOR, the over \$50-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) subproject became [operational](#) on November 13, 2016 when the first batch of Chinese cargo was transported to Gwadar port in insurgency-ridden southern Baluchistan province for onward maritime shipment to markets in Africa and West Asia. China has built a naval base in Gwadar overseeing the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean with a second one [reportedly](#) in the making exclusively for military purposes. Gwadar runs deep in China's strategic nerves both in peacetime but especially in wartime which could see blockade of Chinese naval access to the Pacific. Given Pakistan's overdependence on China, CPEC is believed to cement China's clout to influence political and military decisions in that country.

China has further consolidated its strategic footprint in the Indian Ocean by [taking over](#) the strategic Hambantota port in Sri Lanka on a 99-year lease contract with 70% stake in exchange for reducing \$1.1 billion of the country's overall 8\$ billion debt to China. China's \$38 billion worth of [investments](#) in Bangladesh may likely result in breaking up the geopolitical stalemate over the construction of a deep seaport in Sonadia island following [pressures](#) exerted by the US, India and Japan on Bangladesh forcing it to abandon the project. China was [outmaneuvered](#) over Sonadia by Japan's counterproposal to construct the Matarbari deep seaport 25km from Sonadia. That may now be changing as Sino-Bangladeshi relationship has been elevated to the strategic level.

All this is happening to the dismay of the US and India - and Japan - who see China's growing influence as a direct threat to their hegemony over shipping corridors in the Indian Ocean. In anti-Chinese jargon, increasing Chinese presence in and around the Indian Ocean is called The String of Pearls which the trio sees as a Chinese containment strategy. China maintains that its naval presence is to protect its sea lines of communication (SLOCs) - critical among them the South China Sea - that connect Chinese mainland to foreign sources of energy in the Middle East and Africa and build a ["harmonious ocean"](#). China, in other words, is all about harmonious hegemony.

It is in Afghanistan that the tectonic geopolitical shift is played out in all its ugly forms and manifestations. China seems to be the main winner in post-US occupation Afghanistan having secured lucrative deals to exploit natural resources.



Mes Aynak overview (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

After allegedly paying a \$30 million [bribe](#) to the Afghan Minister of Mines, the state-run China Metallurgical Group Corporation (CMGC) secured the contract for Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar province, one of the largest copper reserves in the world and a 5000-year-old archaeological site, in November 2007. The company managed to acquire the 30-year lease contract against competitors from Russia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. China will invest \$3 billion in Mes Aynak which is valued at more than \$90 billion.

The contract contains two important clauses: (1) construction of a coal-fired power plant for mining purposes (with environmental consequences) and (2) construction of a freight carrying train line connecting West China to Mes Aynak through Tajikistan to be further extended to Quetta in Pakistan.



Source: [agenda.ge](#)

At the first trilateral dialogue between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Beijing on December 26, 2017, Afghanistan [agreed](#) to join CPEC despite prior hesitation at the behest of India which opposes CPEC, among other reasons, as it passes through the strategically located Pakistan-occupied Kashmir region of Gilgit-Baltistan which borders the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan to the north, the Xinjiang region of China to the east and northeast, and the Indian-occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir to the southeast. As part of China's New Silk Road project, Afghanistan also favors construction of a network of roads and railway lines linking it to the Caspian Sea, Mediterranean Sea and eventually to Europe through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor involving Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was [signed](#) in November 2017 to this effect.

In December 2011, Afghanistan [signed](#) its first international oil exploration contract with China National Petroleum Corporation. China, with an investment of \$3 billion, won the 25-year contract for the exploration and exploitation of oil in Amu Darya region of northern

Afghanistan (Sar-i-Pul and Faryab provinces). It is estimated that the Amu Darya Basin between Tajikistan and Afghanistan contains more than 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil. China's local partner in the project is "Watan Group" of companies related to Hamid Karzai whose decision to refrain from signing the "Bilateral Security Agreement" with the United States may well be connected to these Chinese investments. It is also estimated that other reserves in Balkh and Jawzjan Northern provinces contain 3.5 billion barrels of crude oil. The contract for the latter reserve was [awarded](#) in 2013 to an international consortium including Dragon Oil from the UAE, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) and their local Ghazanfar Group from Afghanistan.

The Sino-Afghan Special Railway Transportation that connects China, through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with northern Afghanistan (Hairatan port), a vital segment of the One Belt, One Road initiative, was [inaugurated](#) as the first-ever freight train line between the two countries in September 2016. The railway link was a [joint](#) project of China's Qin Geng Industrial Co. Ltd and the local Watan Group. However, the link is yet to become fully operational due to India-leaning Uzbekistan's refusal to allow direct export of Afghan goods through its territory to China.

In January 2017, China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) [signed](#) a \$205 million contract to build the 178-kilometer Dare-e-Sof-Yakawlang road project connecting the northern Samangan with central Bamyan province. This is the second phase of the National North-South Corridor. The now completed first phase was Mazar-i-Sharif - Yakawlang road and the third, yet to commence, being the 550km central Bamyan- southern Kandahar road project.

At first glance, it seems that China has made these lucrative deals at the expense of the security cover provided by NATO-US troops. Nothing could be further from the truth. The start of extraction work of the Chinese workers at Mes Aynak copper mine under the security coverage by 2,000 government troops coincided with the popping up of armed groups which specifically targeted Chinese workers forcing a halt to extraction and their return home.

In the meantime, two governors of Logar province namely Abdullah Wardak and Arsala Jamal, both tasked with facilitating extraction at Mes Aynak, were assassinated in September 2008 and October 2013 respectively. Taliban claimed responsibility for the assassination of Wardak but no group claimed responsibility for assassinating Jamal. Ten years on and the project remains in a limbo.

Similarly, the start of extraction of crude oil by the Chinese in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab provinces was met with attacks by armed groups targeting the Chinese and efforts to destabilize these provinces. Six ICRC staff members were [killed](#) in Jawzjan province in February 2017 with no claims of responsibility by any group.

In recent months, IS fighters many of them foreigners were moved to the north of Afghanistan where they have [established](#) a foothold in Sar-i-Pul, Faryab and Jawzjan provinces.

There are also intensified efforts to destabilize Xinjiang and encourage separatism there through the Afghan northeastern province of Badakhshan, a main route in the ancient Silk Road, which shares borders with Tajikistan to the north and east and China's Xinjiang and Pakistan to the east through the historical Wakhan Corridor. The separatist East Turkistan

Islamic Movement (ETIM) is believed to be mainly operating in Badakhshan.

Xinjiang is an important region of China as it borders eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

In response, China is taking precautionary measures as it expands its economic, security and political role in Afghanistan through bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral arrangements.

Image on the right: Former president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai and former General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Hu Jintao.



On June 16, 2006, China signed the Treaty of Good-Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation with the Karzai government. Article Four of the [Treaty](#) is an indicator of China's strategic forethought when it comes to the US presence in Afghanistan:

“The parties have undertaken not to join coalitions or blocs that violate the sovereignty, security or territorial integrity of the other party, or to resort to such measures, including the conclusion of treaties of this kind with a third country. The parties shall not allow a third country to use their territory to threaten the national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other party.

The two sides shall prevent the establishment of organizations and institutions that violate the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other party in their territory.”

In August 2016, the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism in Counter Terrorism, comprising the militaries of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, was [launched](#), symbolically, in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang. In one of the most dramatic turn of events, Chinese military was [spotted](#) in early 2017 conducting “anti-terrorism” [patrols](#) deep inside eastern Afghan territory marking the presence of Chinese military involvement in Afghanistan and signaling China's readiness for potential military engagement should developments necessitate. As China expands its security stakes in Afghanistan, it has also [started](#) supplying military aid to the Afghan army.

At the December 2017 trilateral dialogue in Beijing, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan agreed to joint cooperation against terrorism tied to Xinjiang specifically against [ETIM](#).

China is also proactively increasing its political influence in Afghanistan in concert with its economic and trade interests. Recently, China stepped up its efforts as a mediator and broker of peace in Afghanistan. In fact, the first round of the trilateral dialogue at the level

of foreign ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in December 2017 is an indication of the shifting geopolitical landscape in the region. These Chinese efforts are in line with that country's economic projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan and beyond.

China is also a party to the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) involving the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan which mediates talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Russia-China-Pakistan triumvirate

Russia, like Iran, was one of the first countries that supported the occupation of Afghanistan following 9/11. NATO-led forces in Afghanistan used Russian territory for their supplies until the Ukrainian war put an [end](#) to this cozy relationship.

Russia is, however, opposed to the long-term presence of the US in Afghanistan. Gone are the days when Russia wanted the US to stay in Afghanistan. Russia has expressed its position on several occasions against long-term military presence of the US in Afghanistan including [through](#) the Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolaiy Patrushev:

“Despite Washington’s claims that there is no program for the creation of permanent bases in Afghanistan, we know that US forces will remain in this country after 2014 ... Continued long-term foreign military presence in Afghanistan as a boardwagon against other countries in the region, it is unacceptable for Russia.”

On 7 December 2016, the Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Alexander Mantytskiy [announced](#) that Russia is in contact with the Taliban to protect the safety of its citizens. Some interpreted this move by Moscow as conferring political legitimacy on the group. On December 18, 2017 Mantytskiy [testified](#) before the Afghan Senate saying both Russia and Taliban have a common interest in fighting IS and highlighted failure of the US-NATO coalition in fighting terrorism in their sixteen years of presence in Afghanistan. IS, he said, aims to expand to Central Asia, Russia, and China.

The fact is that Moscow sees Taliban as a counter-weight to IS as the latter's presence in Afghanistan is dramatically growing. In the span of two years, IS increased its ranks from a mere hundreds in 2015 to over [10,000](#) fighters in 2017. US-NATO military bases and “unmarked foreign helicopters” [support](#) IS in Afghanistan including bringing foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria. Given that Afghan airspace is controlled by US-NATO for all strategic purposes, the Russian government has repeatedly [asked](#) NATO for explanation but to no avail so far.

In April 2017, Russia organized a conference on Afghanistan attended by China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan including Afghanistan. The US refused to participate [calling](#) it a “unilateral Russian attempt to assert influence in the region”. In a bold move, Russia [offered](#) to mediate peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

As India has been consolidating its growing reach and influence in post-9/11 Afghanistan, Pakistan, a dominant player in Afghanistan, has been increasingly politically isolated. China was its only political and economic lifeline. It needed to reach out to Russia.

The pace of Russian-Pakistani rapprochement is particularly interesting given the cold war enmity between the two and Pakistan's strategic engagement with the US.

In June 2014, Russia made a strategic foreign policy decision by [lifting](#) a longstanding ban on arms sales to Pakistan also opening a new market for its weapons after India's gradual but firm resort to western weaponry. In October 2015, the two countries [signed](#) a 25-year contract to construct the 1,100 kilometer North-South gas pipeline with an annual capacity of 12.4 billion cubic meters connecting Lahore in the northeast with Karachi in the south. This came in the wake of successful US and Saudi pressures on Pakistan to abandon the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. Given Pakistan's acute energy needs, the pipeline is a strategic investment by Russia giving it access to energy markets in the wider region.

It was a year later when they elevated their relationship to the level of military-to-military engagement. In September 2016, Russia and Pakistan [held](#) their first ever joint military exercise dubbed "Friendship 2016" in the eastern Pakistani province of Punjab. This was [followed](#) in September 2017 in the southern Russian region of Nizhny Arkhiz. These paved the way for a major concession on the part of Pakistan [acceding](#) to Russia's request to use Gwadar port for its exports in line with Russian interest to join CPEC. It could possibly open the way for a future Russian naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Ever since these new developments, Russia, China and Pakistan are holding trilateral consultations on Afghanistan. The first official round of the trilateral consultations was held in Moscow on 27 December 2016. A day earlier, the Afghan government (echoing US sentiments) protested for having not been invited to the consultations and questioned its "objectives"; some members of the Afghan Senate [questioned](#) its "legitimacy".

By [pressuring](#) Pakistan and asking India to [play](#) a colossal role in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the US is effectively pushing the former into an alliance with Russia that includes China and Iran giving momentum and dynamism to this multifaceted alliance. But the US moves against Pakistan are part of a grand strategy to contain China.

As Russia and China's influence expand in the region aligned with their security and economic interests that of the US is dwindling making it increasingly dependent on India.

The Indian Factor

As China and Russia gradually increased their influence in Afghanistan and the region, the US sought to envelop India in its regional strategy - mainly to counter China. In the new US regional strategy, India is meant to become part of the US war machinery to sustain America's hegemony in the region.

India's new role, as envisaged by the US, was [outlined](#) in a speech entitled "Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century" by Rex Tillerson, the US Secretary of State, in October 2017. Envisioning a strategic partnership for the 21st century, Tillerson, quoting US Secretary of Defense James Mattis, said: "the world's two greatest democracies should have the two greatest militaries".

And to signal the importance of India's new place in the US geopolitical psyche, he employed the phrase "Indo-Pacific", the new official US jargon for Asia-Pacific, which converges with India's own Look East Policy. In other words, India has become the new and

perhaps the only pillar of US's South Asia strategy. The "Arabian Gulf" construction by Donald Trump was loaded with geopolitical connotations and was not just an ignorant utterance; a containment strategy that began with the hegemonist power of constructions. The new US approach to India is in line with US's attempts at building an "Indo-pacific" coalition against China. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) involving US, Japan, Australia, and India and the Malabar naval exercises are such platforms aimed at Beijing.

India in turn needs to stand on US shoulders if it is to act as a meaningful counterbalance to China's weight in the region and in the world at large. The Look East Policy is India's own version of String of Pearls which courts China-wary East Asian countries into an alliance with India backed by the US. Following US-led occupation in 2001, India considerably increased its influence in Afghanistan commensurate with its strategic political, security, economic and trade interests and regional ambitions. India is Afghanistan's largest regional donor with over \$2 billion investment in various projects. As an indication of India's long-term presence, India [built](#) the new building of the Afghan parliament at the cost of \$90 million.

India has been engaged in a proxy war with Pakistan in Afghanistan for over three decades. India is also one of China's main rivals competing for control and exploitation of Afghan natural resources, trade and transit routes. It is important to realize that much of India's engagement in Afghanistan goes beyond its rivalry with Pakistan, driven as it is by its growing resource-hungry economy, and mostly directed at China as the main target.

To expand its influence, India established its consulates in four of Afghanistan's strategic provinces (Kandahar, Herat, Nangarhar, and Balkh), to the dismay of Pakistan which sees them as a threat to its security and interests. Repeated [attacks](#) on India's [diplomatic](#) representations and on Indian citizens engaged in Indian-funded projects are parts of Pakistan's proxy war against India.

India's mega-projects in Afghanistan are part of its "Connect Central Asia Policy" ([CCAP](#)) which aims to connect India with Central Asia, bypass Pakistan, and balance China's growing influence in the region.

In November 2011, a consortium of Indian companies led by the Steel Authority of India (SAIL) was [awarded](#) a \$10.8 billion contract to extract three out of the five blocks at Hajigak iron ore deposits, one of the biggest untapped [resources](#) in Asia, located in central Bamyan province. Another block was [awarded](#) to Canada's Kilo Goldmines Ltd which also mines Gold and Iron ore in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is [estimated](#) that the region has 1.8 billion tons of iron ore. India was awarded the deal only one month after signing the "Strategic Partnership Agreement" ([SPA](#)) with the Karzai government on October 4, 2011 which is seen as one of the most significant achievements of India's Afghan and regional policy over the past decades.

The development of Chahbahar port in Iran is a giant geopolitical leap for India in its efforts to balance China's growing influence in the region. Chahbahar is located only 76km from Gwadar port and is seen as part of India's strategic moves to counter China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean. The project fits well into the 7,200km long International North-South Transport Corridor - India's gateway to Eurasia - which is a [network](#) of ship, rail, and road routes connecting the Indian Ocean with the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran all the way to Russia and Europe. A joint Iranian-Indian railway line is planned to connect Hajigak with Chahbahar after a trilateral MoU was signed in May 2016 between India, Iran and Afghanistan to build an international trade-and-transit corridor through

Afghanistan. The investment at Chahbahar has deepened Indo-Iranian strategic ties as their interests converge on building connectivity between Central and South Asia.

The 215km strategic Zaranj-Delaram highway in the southern Afghan province of Nimroz constructed by India in 2009 connects southern Afghanistan to Chahbahar port in Iran. This is a strategic investment by India as the highway connects trade-routes between Central Asia and South Asia with the Middle East – bypassing Pakistan. The project was [built](#) at a great human cost as “...one human sacrifice was made for every kilometer and a half constructed”. In October 2017, India’s first wheat shipment [reached](#) Afghanistan via Chahbahar. As part of its efforts to bypass Pakistan, India also opened [two air corridors](#) in 2017 to transport cargoes between Afghanistan and India.

Linked to Zaranj-Delaram project is the \$290 million India-funded Salma Dam in Herat province with the capacity to irrigate 75,000 hectares of land and generate 42MW of electricity. Construction of Salma Dam particularly irritated Iran which [expressed](#) its opposition to such projects supporting Afghan [claims](#) of Iranian [plots](#) to destroy the Dam.

While India may have to team up with the US and Japan to counter growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean, it has to maintain cordial relations with Russia to sustain its footprint in Central Asia. On the other hand, US plans to destabilize Iran or to directly militarily confront it in future threaten India’s interests in Iran.

Reflection of the shifting geopolitical reality on Afghan politics

The changing geopolitical reality in Afghanistan has directly reflected on the domestic political landscape, unsettling the status quo and affecting the political power relations (believed to have been dominated by pro-Russia and pro-Iran groups since 2001). The domestic power shift favors US interests and is aimed at increasing US leverage in Afghan affairs. A significant chain of events – seemingly unrelated – unfolds:

- January 2014: veteran warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum [visits](#) Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to solicit support in anticipation of a post-US Afghanistan;
- September 2014: National Unity Government (NUG) is formed after presidential election results are disputed (the resulting NUG composition reflects how US shares power with regional powers);
- January 2015: IS [announces](#) formation of its “Khorasan Province” officially marking its presence in Afghanistan;
- October 2015: Dostum, now Vice-President in the NUG, visits Moscow and travels to the North Caucasus Chechen Republic to meet Ramzan Kadyrov in Grozny. Dostum seeks Russia’s help in the fight against IS [“as in Syria”](#);
- May 2016: Dostum is forced into [exile](#) to Turkey after allegations of sexual assault and torture by a former rival. The move is backed by the US, EU and Turkey. He has since been refused to return.
- September 2016: a so-called peace agreement is [signed](#) with veteran jihadist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar backed by the US and Saudi Arabia;
- May 2017: Hekmatyar [returns](#) to Kabul and has since made Iranian influence in Afghanistan the focus of his political rhetoric, thus, promoting US’s anti-Iranian agenda.
- December 2017: Ghani [fires](#) the Governor of strategic Balkh province in the north deemed to be a Russian and Iranian protégé, thus, disturbing the domestic balance of power. The Governor has since refused to vacate his post stating he

intends to remain “to defeat the Taliban and IS projects” prompting the US to [intervene](#) on the side of the Afghan president.

- In an unprecedented move, Afghan council of religious scholars [asks](#) the government to allow Taliban to open a political office in Kabul for intra-Afghan peace talks.

Conclusion

Afghanistan has been the focus of big power geopolitical rivalries ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The so-called Great Game, the geopolitical competition between Britain and Tsarist Russia, culminated in three Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42, 1878-1880, and 1919). Following the October Revolution, the Great Game continued between revolutionary Russia and Britain. It was, however, after the end of WWII that Afghanistan became a hotspot of geopolitical contest between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The Saur Revolution of 1978 - and the Soviet intervention in December 1979 - was a defining historical moment that disturbed the status quo - not only in Afghanistan but potentially in the wider region. Its immediate effect was that it expedited the overthrow of the Shah in Iran. The United States and their allies supported the counter-revolutionary Mujahedeen against revolutionary Afghanistan to prevent a domino effect in the region. Carter Administration's secret [deal](#) with Khomeini was part of this containment strategy.

Afghanistan's geostrategic location - including its potential as a major trade and transit hub linking South and Central Asia with the Middle East - as well as its vast [natural resources](#) has become a “geopolitical curse” and “resource curse” to its people who remain hostage to this predicament. An indication of Afghanistan's geopolitical and geoeconomic weight for regional and international players is the [number](#) of so-called strategic agreements signed in anticipation of post-2014 Afghanistan. This is not necessarily good news as it is a sign of the entanglement of competing and at times diametrically opposed interests in the rapidly changing Afghan geopolitical scene. Russian presidential special envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, even spoke of the [“disappearance”](#) of Afghanistan in two decades should the current nature and pace of geopolitical games continue. This is a subtle indication of the looming prospect for Afghanistan.

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