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## A Review on the Great Game in Afghanistan: A Realist Perspective on the Geopolitical Struggle for Control

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### ABSTRACT

This review aims to analyze the Great Game in Afghanistan from a realist perspective, focusing on the geopolitical struggle for control among major powers. The study delves into historical events and power dynamics to comprehend the motivations and actions of key actors. The Great Game in Afghanistan refers to the historical rivalry and strategic competition between great powers for regional influence and control. This review adopts a realist perspective, which asserts that states act primarily in their own self-interest and pursue power and security in international relations. The methods employed include historical analysis and comparative analysis, providing comprehensive information on the Great Game in Afghanistan and examining key events, diplomatic maneuvers, and power dynamics. The results shed light on the motivations and actions of key actors, highlighting the enduring nature of the Great Game. The Great Game in Afghanistan, involving great powers like the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and the US, has led to instability and hindered Afghanistan's development as a sovereign nation. The conclusion underscores the significance of power politics in shaping Afghanistan's trajectory, and the Great Game in Afghanistan highlights the persistent power dynamics in international relations, driven by geopolitical considerations and self-interest, resulting in conflicts and instability. The recommendation emphasizes the need for a nuanced and pragmatic approach to managing the country's geopolitical dynamics. The Great Game's historical context calls for a pragmatic approach to managing Afghanistan's geopolitical struggles, prioritizing regional cooperation, inclusive diplomacy, and economic development for stability and progress.

### INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical conflict over Afghanistan typically known as "The Great Game" has been going on for millennia. The 19th century observed the rise of the phrase as the British and Russian empires fought for influence and dominance in Central Asia (Huband, 2019). The Great Game, connected to the 20th-century Cold War, was a secret, open conflict between Victoria Britain and Tsarist Russia over Central Asia for over 50 years. Such a Game is still being played today as numerous regional and international forces compete for influence and control over Afghanistan. The realist interpretation of the Great Game, its historical background, and implications for Afghanistan's political and social climate significantly. Since 1830, Afghanistan has been on the cusp of the Great Game due to its strategic location at the key intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as its status as a key buffer state between the burgeoning Russian and British Empires (Husain, 2018). The Great Game refers to the 19th-century geopolitical conflict, particularly between Russia and Britain, for influence and control over Central Asia. The Durrani dynasty, which had constructed a sovereign supreme government and increased the country's geographical holdings, controlled Afghanistan in the early 19th century. However, with the passing of the Durrani king, Shah Shuja, in 1842, Afghanistan entered a period of political unrest and strife that left it open to outside meddling (Fraser, 2018).

Russia and Britain were both enlarging their spheres of influence and attempting to gain a presence in Central Asia at the same time. While Britain had secured authority over India and sought to extend its influence beyond its boundaries, Russia had already acquired significant portions of Central Asia. As these two nations viewed Afghanistan as a crucial buffer state, they both attempted to forge relationships and exert influence there.

The British Empire tried to put in a pro-British monarch in Afghanistan in the 1830s and 1840s, which sparked the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842). Although the British originally succeeded in putting in place a puppet government, their soldiers were ultimately routed and driven out of the nation (Rubin & Rashid, 2008). This signaled the start of a period of unrest and fighting in Afghanistan as competing factions fought for control and foreign forces tried to gain sway. Afghanistan remained on the cusp of the Great Game during the 19th and early 20th centuries as Russia and Britain opposed it out for sway in Central Asia (Husain, 2018). Afghanistan's leaders tried to balance the conflicting interests of key countries while preserving their own independence and sovereignty, as the country was caught in the center of this potential conflict. However, as the Great Game grew, more intense, and foreign countries attempted to exert more influence on the nation, and this proved to be more and more challenging. Overall, due to its strategic location and the conflicting interests of exterior powers,

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Afghanistan was on the cusp of the Great Game starting in 1830. Due to its openness to outside influence, internal unrest, and political disarray, the nation served as a crucial theater of conflict in the quest for dominance over Central Asia. (Bearden, 2001). The rivalry and conflict between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for influence and direct control over Afghanistan in the late 19th and early 20th century is referred to as “The Great Game” in Afghanistan. In the 1830s, British intelligence officer Arthur Conolly created the key phrase “Great Game” to refer to the struggle between the two empires for potential influence and dominance in Central Asia. The Great Game in Afghanistan had its roots in the 19th century, a time of territorial expansion and rivalry for influence in Central Asia between the British and Russian empires (Huband, 2019). Afghanistan, which was placed between the two empires in a strategic position, was used as a key battleground in this potential conflict. Early in the 19th century, when they were attempting to generate a buffer state to safeguard their interests in India against Russian expansion, the British first got engaged in Afghanistan. To preserve their influence in the nation, the British assisted in the completed installation of a pro-British ruler in Afghanistan and later engaged in two wars with that nation. The Russians aimed to develop a buffer zone between their empire and British India and were also interested in gaining influence in Afghanistan. In 1878, the Russians promptly dispatched a diplomatic mission to Kabul in an effort to install a sympathetic administration there. Both Russian and British empires competed with one another for control of Afghanistan far into the 20th century, trying to win over Afghan leaders and tribes. The British sought to prevent the Ottomans and Germans from acquiring power in Afghanistan as a result of the rivalry between the two empires, which eventually boiled over into World War One. With the 1917 Russian Revolution and the British withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1919, the Great Game in Afghanistan came to an end. Nevertheless, even into the 20th century, the geopolitics of Afghanistan and Central Asia were still being shaped by the Great Game’s legacy (Burke, 2015). The Great Game manifested in terms of military interventions, proxy wars, and diplomatic maneuvers. The struggle between Russia and the British in Afghanistan to control India was a key aspect of the Great Game (Huband, 2019). The East India Company (EIC) identified the Russian Empire’s perceived incursions into Central Asia as a threat similar to its own expansion in South Asia, leading to diplomatic dealings and military interventions (Jalali, 2017). The Great Game also involved various political factions within the British and Russian empires, as well as their agents who traveled across regions (Afridi, 2023). Additionally, The Great Game artwork by War Boutique depicted successive British military interventions in Afghanistan, highlighting the interplay between art, geopolitics, and military actions (Leslie, 2021). Overall, the Great Game encompassed a complex web of military, proxy, and diplomatic activities aimed at securing control and influence in the region.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Great Game, Conflict, and Afghanistan

The “great game” of international geopolitics impacted Afghanistan by making it a buffer zone between Russia or the USSR in the north and the contiguous power/powers of the Indian subcontinent, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. Afghanistan was therefore in many ways a classic buffer state throughout much of the nineteenth century and possibly until 1947 when the British withdrew from India. The persistence of Soviet-American rivalry in Afghanistan between 1960 and 1973 gave an illusion of a continuing buffer role for Afghanistan in that period (McLachlan, 1997). Afghanistan’s political and social environment was significantly shaped by The Great Game, which also negatively affected the country’s stability and strife. The Great Game has largely contributed to the unrest and violence in Afghanistan in the following ways. Puppet rulers who were frequently unpopular and lacking in legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people imposed as a result of the rivalry between the British and Russian empires for influence in Afghanistan. This exacerbated the nation’s political upheaval and social discontent (Jalali, 2017). Tribal alliances and disputes frequently characterized the struggle between the British and Russian empires, with each side vying for the allegiance of various Afghan tribes (Bearden, 2001). As a result, there were more tribal disputes and splits throughout Afghan society. With the British and Russian empires attempting to influence Afghan politics and society, the Great Game also contributed to outside meddling in Afghan affairs. This meddling stoked anti-colonial and nationalist movements in Afghanistan and added to a feeling of anger and suspicion against foreign powers. Border disputes between Afghanistan and its neighbors, notably the British Raj in India, were also influenced by The Great Game. These conflicts increased the sense of unease and instability in Afghanistan and fueled tensions and conflicts along its borders (Jalali, 2017). Overall, the Great Game fueled political unrest, tribal strife, outside involvement, and boundary disputes, which led to instability and bloodshed in Afghanistan. The geopolitical environment of Afghanistan and the surrounding area is still being shaped by the Great Game’s legacy, which also contributes to the country’s continuous instability and lack of security. Afghanistan saw substantial long-term effects from The Great Game, which are still influencing its political, social, and economic growth today. The Great Game, in which foreign powers competed for influence and control over regional leaders, led to the fragmentation of Afghanistan’s political landscape. Over time, this division remained, resulting in continual war and instability in the nation (Amanullah *et al*, 2016). The Great Game also played a role in Afghanistan’s inadequate administration, since outside countries frequently supported unreliable or dishonest leaders in order to serve their own agendas. As a result, it has been challenging for the nation to create efficient institutions and take care of its residents’ needs. The Great Game negatively impacted.

Afghanistan's economic growth because it frequently served as a pawn in a wider geopolitical conflict between foreign countries. As a result, the nation's resources were overused and its economic potential was ignored. As a result, it brought border conflicts between Afghanistan and The Great Game influenced its neighbors, notably Pakistan. Tension between the two nations is still a result of the Durand Line deal, which split the Pashtun people between Afghanistan and British India. The Great Game established a standard for outsider meddling in Afghan politics, which has endured through time. Due to this, it has become challenging for the nation to establish its sovereignty and advance its own interests on a worldwide scale (Afridi, 2023). All things considered, Afghanistan has been affected negatively by the Great Game, which has exacerbated the nation's persistent strife, instability, and underdevelopment. The Great Game still shapes Afghanistan's relationships with its neighbors and the larger international community, highlighting the country's persistent difficulties in constructing a secure and prosperous future. The significance of the Tribal Belt as a buffer to the buffer state of Afghanistan during the Great Game of the 19th century (Amanullah *et al.*, 2016). Discover the geo-political tactics and strategies of expansion used by the Imperial British and Czarist Russia in Central Asia. The "Great Game" between the British and Russian empires in the 19th and early 20th centuries significantly influenced Afghanistan's geopolitical struggles. The competition for influence and control over the country shaped its relations with external powers, led to wars and interventions, and left a legacy of instability and conflicts that continue to impact Afghanistan's political landscape (Afridi, 2023).

### The Strategic Interests

Besides, Russian and British, the Regional and international powers possess a number of strategic interests in Afghanistan. The pivotal country of Afghanistan is strategically significant to both regional and international powers because of its specific location at the key intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East (Walberg, 2011). Due to its position, it serves as a vital transit point for commerce and energy networks and might serve as a base for armed activities. Afghanistan has long served as an operational base for military operations including Russia and British, according to Counterstrategies. Strategically, regional and international powers want to keep Afghanistan from turning into a refuge for political and military operations and get rid of the political threat of coming from there (Reilly, 2003). Raw minerals, oil, and gas are among the numerous essential resources acquired in Afghanistan. Strategic access to and use of these resources is important to regional and global powers. Regional and international countries retain a strategic interest in influencing Afghanistan politically, economically, or militarily. This is known as influence and power projection (Eventon, 2011). Exerting influence on the nation might involve

assisting sympathetic regimes, setting up military bases, or giving help economically. British India, Iran, and China are among the nations that Afghanistan borders. Border security and limiting the excessive spread of unrest and political violence from Afghanistan to other nations remain strategic concerns for regional and international powers (Afridi, 2023). Afghanistan has endured controversial decades of violence, which has created fundamental humanitarian problems such as food shortages, poverty, and displacement. Regional and international powers maintain a strategic incentive to solve these humanitarian issues, whether by donating money, fostering safety and political security, or aiding peace talks. In general, the complex and diversified strategic interests of regional and international forces in Afghanistan. There may be locations where diverse powers cooperate, but there are, moreover, places where they compete and engage in conflict, which can add to the nation's persistent instability and unease. The alleged inability of the Russians, Persians, and British to control Afghanistan was due to its topography, which made it difficult to control, as it is a mountain fortress and virtually a residue of tribal territories and geographical fastness (McLean, 2017). Additionally, Afghanistan was a land-locked state and was absolutely much at the mercy of conspiracy, treaty, or tacit arrangement between the neighbors between which it was a buffer state. The Russo-British division of spheres of political influence in Central Asia in 1907 merely demonstrated the political reality of this political assertion. In summary, both the British Empire and the Soviet Union have had significant influences on the political and security dynamics in Afghanistan. The British exerted influence during the "Great Game" rivalry, while the Soviet Union's intervention in the 1970s and 1980s shaped the country's political landscape and triggered a decade-long conflict. (McLachlan, 1997). Power politics and self-interest have significant implications in the context of the Great Game. The behavior of states in the international system is driven by their need for survival, leading to the development of strategies to ensure their own security (Afridi, 2023). In the case of the Great Game in Central Asia, the major powers, including the United States, Russia, and China, are vying for power and influence in the region (Leslie, 2021). Central Asian states, on the other hand, have become important actors in their own right, pursuing multidirectional foreign policies to avoid dependence on any one patron (Amantayev, 2014). These states have established "local rules" that guide their interactions with external powers, prioritizing regime survival and the use of state resources for private gain (Sareen, 2021). As a result, external powers have had to accept these "local rules" in order to maintain their presence and access in the region (Eventon, 2011). The pursuit of power and self-interest by both the major powers and the Central Asian states has shaped the dynamics of the Great Game, impacting democratic development, human rights, and the overall geopolitical landscape of the region.

### British and Russia in Afghanistan

The British and Russian Empires' strategic rivalry and quest for influence and control over Central Asia and Afghanistan is referred to as "The Great Game". The game persisted until the early 20th century, according to British intelligence officer Arthur Conolly, who invented the phrase in the 1830s (Burke, 2015). For the British, Afghanistan served as a vital buffer state that might prevent Russia from encroaching on their cherished property, India. Afghanistan's topography is significant in its role as a buffer state because it is topographically divided both north and south and east and west by virtue of the mountain knot of the Hindu Kush. This topography has made it difficult for foreign powers to control Afghanistan, as it is a mountain fortress and virtually a residue of tribal territories and geographical fastness (McLachlan, 1997). The Russians might conceivably threaten India's northern frontiers and attack the nation, and the British were worried, that they would take over Afghanistan. The British therefore aimed to uphold Afghanistan's independence and foster cordial ties with its leaders. Afghanistan was valued strategically, but it was equally considered a potential market for British products and a supply of raw commodities like cotton and wool (Walberg, 2011). To get access to the region's resources and markets, the British were also interested in constructing trade routes across Central Asia. The Russians, on the other hand, regarded Afghanistan as a potential entryway to the Indian Ocean, providing them access to ports with warm water and enabling them to increase their influence in the region. They also attempted to create a safety zone between British India and its southern boundaries (McLean, 2017).

To accomplish their goals in Afghanistan, both countries engaged in military operations, espionage, and political game-playing. In the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842) and Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880), the British engaged in several conflicts with the Afghan government, while the Russians sought to exert influence through covert operations and diplomacy (Leslie, 2021). The renewed rivalry between regional and international powers for influence and control over Central Asia and Afghanistan in the post-Soviet era is referred to as the "New Great Game", with the fall of the Soviet Union, new players with distinct interests and goals entered the game, including China, Iran, and the United States. In conclusion, throughout the Great Game, the British and Russian Empires were interested in gaining control of Afghanistan for strategic, financial, and geopolitical reasons. With the advent of contemporary actors and interests in the post-Soviet period, the rivalry between these powers, which had been ongoing for more than a century, has been rekindled. Both the British and Russian Empires kept up their key interests in the area after Afghanistan attained independence in 1919 (Khalilzad, 1996).

However, because they no longer devolved direct authority over Afghanistan, their jobs had to adapt.

Afghanistan was however seen by the British as a buffer state that might defend their interests in India. To preserve cordial ties, they maintained diplomatic ties with the Afghan government and gave financial and military support. The British supported Afghan leaders who were cordial to them in an effort to retain their power in the key area (McLean, 2017). On the other hand, the Russians persisted in seeing Afghanistan as a potential entry point to the Indian Ocean and produced efforts to build cordial ties with the Afghan leadership. They supported Afghanistan militarily and economically and worked to expand their influence in the area through commerce and diplomatic relations. To defend their interests in the region, both powers persisted in political bluffing and espionage. The arrival of contemporary players like China and the United States, who also aspired to strengthen their influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan, however, helped to moderate their competition (Sareen, 2021).

Ordinarily, the British and Russian Empires played a role in preserving their interests in the region by diplomatic, economic, and military methods after Afghanistan gained its independence. The geopolitical conflict in Central Asia between the British and Russian Empires in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is referred to as "The Great Game" After Afghanistan gained its independence in 1919, the competition persisted as both nations battled for dominance in the area. Afghanistan followed a policy of neutrality and attempted to forge cordial ties with both the British and the Russians during the rule of Ghazi Amanullah Khan (Khalilzad, 1996). However, Amanullah's efforts to modernize and secularize Afghanistan alarmed the British, who regarded them as a danger to their interests in India. Afghanistan shifted its allegiance to the British when Amanullah was deposed in a coup in 1929 and began receiving financial and military support from them. This persisted under King Zahir Shah (1933–1973), who upheld a neutral stance but supported the British (McLean, 2017).

Afghanistan started receiving increasing help from the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s as it attempted to expand its executive power in the area. Because the British and Americans perceived Soviet engagement in Afghanistan as a danger to their interests, this developed a tense relationship. Afghanistan's ties with the West worsened after a coup in 1978 that installed the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan as the country's controlling party. To help the communist regime, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. This led to a struggle that lasted for ten years before the Soviet soldiers withdrew in 1989. Afghanistan entered a civil war in the 1990s and was governed by several groups, including the Taliban. The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which ousted the Taliban rule and established a new government, was prompted by the Taliban's backing for worldwide terrorism (Khalilzad, 1996). However, the nation continues to be unstable and a focal point of geopolitical conflict between numerous countries.

### **Realist Perspective and Geopolitical Struggle for Control**

The significance of power and national interest in influencing the conduct of the British and Russian empires may be highlighted by a realism viewpoint in order to better comprehend the geopolitical fight for dominance in Afghanistan within the context of the Great Game. Realistically speaking, in order to further their respective national interests, the British and Russian empires were vying for influence over and control over Afghanistan (Walberg, 2011). The Russians wanted to set up a friendly government in Afghanistan to act as a buffer between their empire and British India, while the British were interested in Afghanistan as a buffer state to defend their interests in India from Russian expansion. To retain or increase their authority and influence in the area, the British and Russian empires competed with one another in Afghanistan (Amantaev, 2014). Several strategies were used to play out this rivalry, including the installation of puppet leaders, assistance for various Afghan tribes, and boundary conflicts. A realistic viewpoint can also assist us in comprehending why the British and Russian empires were prepared to utilize military force or other coercive methods in Afghanistan. For instance, the Russians dispatched a diplomatic mission to Kabul in an effort to install a sympathetic administration, while the British fought two wars with Afghanistan to protect their influence there and stop Russian growth. Realists view governments as logical agents who pursue their domestic interests amid a chaotic international environment. Regional and international countries are vying for influence and control over Afghanistan in order to further their own national goals (Walberg, 2011). The realist perspective on the “Great Game” between Russia and Britain in Afghanistan highlights the pursuit of power and competition among states. Both nations sought to expand their influence in Central Asia, including Afghanistan, to secure their strategic interests. Afghanistan’s strategic location made it a crucial battleground, serving as a buffer state between the Russian Empire and British India. Security concerns drove their involvement, with both countries aiming to prevent potential invasions. Both nations engaged in proxy wars, supporting local Afghan rulers aligned with their interests (Bhat, 2020). The realist perspective also emphasizes the balance of power, with both countries striving to prevent each other from gaining dominance. This led to the lasting legacy of instability and conflicts in Afghanistan. The emphasizing the importance of power and national interest in influencing the conduct of states and other players, a realism viewpoint might aid us in understanding the geopolitical fight for dominance in Afghanistan within the context of the Great Game. However, it’s crucial to keep in mind that a realist viewpoint does not take into consideration other elements that could affect state conduct, such as customs, ideologies, cultural aspects, and internal politics. In summary, the realist perspective and geopolitical struggle for control in the “Great Game” between Russia and Britain in Afghanistan revolved around the pursuit

of power, security concerns, proxy wars, and maintaining a balance of power. The strategic significance of Afghanistan and the desire to control its resources and access to Central Asia shaped the actions and policies of both powers during this period (Berkowitz, 2007).

A realist perspective on the Great Game in Afghanistan reveals several key findings. Firstly, Afghanistan is considered the hub of the “New Great Game” as regional and global powers vie for influence in the country, impacting regional stability and international security (Peter, 2012). Secondly, India’s active involvement in Afghanistan has raised questions about the nature of the new Great Game, the main actors involved, and the future map of Afghanistan. This involvement has also disturbed the balance of power in the region, which is not favorable for the stability of South Asia (Bhat, 2020). Thirdly, the historical Great Game between Imperial Britain and Czarist Russia in the 19th century revolved around power politics and the manipulation of Afghanistan’s geostrategic location as a buffer state and the Tribal Belt as a buffer to the buffer (Idil, 2013). Lastly, foreign interventions in Afghanistan, such as the Soviet invasion, the involvement of regional players like Pakistan and India, and the US invasion after 9/11, have had unintended consequences, including the promotion of clandestine terrorist activities and proxies, leading to a more insecure Afghan society (Reilly, 2003).

### **The Lack of Effective Governance**

Afghanistan’s capacity to preserve its domination, notably during the Great Game era, was significantly hampered by the absence of efficient government structures and institutions. It was challenging for Afghanistan to present an adhesive front against external threats because of the lack of a substantial central authority, internal instability (Bhat, 2020), and persistent warfare between various ethnic and tribal groupings. Afghanistan’s military and security forces were weak, which had a significant impact on the country’s capacity to preserve its domination due to the absence of functional government structures and institutions. Afghanistan’s military lacked the organizational and logistical capabilities necessary to effectively defend the nation’s borders or preserve its territorial integrity during the Great Game period, and it was ill-equipped and undertrained (Ahmed, 1981). Due to this, it became genuine to internal uprising and invasion as well as external aggression and invasion. Afghanistan’s inadequacy to successfully manage its borders and territory had an impact on its capacity to defend its domination in another way, as well. This was required due to the absence of functional governance institutions and processes. Afghanistan’s borders were sometimes ill-defined and porous, making it difficult for the country to monitor and control the flow of people and products across them. As a result, the government discovered it challenging to prevent the smuggling of guns and other illegal goods as well as the infiltration of foreign agents and subversive elements (Idil, 2013).

Additionally, Afghanistan's lack of efficient governance institutions and processes fueled a culture of patronage and corruption that made it difficult for the nation to efficiently manage its resources and comply with the demands of its people. This made it more difficult for the government to mobilize national support for its attempts to safeguard the nation's sovereignty since it reduced the legitimacy of the government and undermined the social compact between the state and its citizens (Berkowitz, 2007). Overall, Afghanistan's inability to defend its sovereignty during the Great Game was severely hampered by the absence of efficient government institutions and mechanisms. Afghanistan was vulnerable to external invasion and internal revolt in the absence of a strong supreme government, competent military and security forces, and a clearly defined and controlled border, which added to the continued instability and strife in the nation (Ahmed, 1981). The British and Russian Empires engaged in a fierce geopolitical war for dominance and influence over Central Asia known as "The Great Game" in Afghanistan. It is broadly accepted that this time span, which roughly corresponds to the early 19th to the early 20th centuries, was marked by a number of significant occurrences that influenced Afghanistan's political, social, and economic environment as well as that of the larger area (Idil, 2013). Several significant occasions that took place in Afghanistan during the Great Game include: The Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828) established a shared boundary between Russia and Persia, enhancing Russia's power in Central Asia. The First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842) saw the British Empire impose a pro-British government in Afghanistan, leading to the Siege of Herat (1838-1842). The Second Anglo-Afghan conflict (1878-1880) saw the British invade Afghanistan, leading to the Panjdeh Incident (1885). The Durand Line Agreement (1893) established the border between British India and Afghanistan, causing ongoing hostility. The Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919) saw Afghan monarch Amanullah Khan declare his nation's independence, resulting in a war between Afghanistan and the British Empire. The Bolshevik Revolution (1917) influenced the Great Game in Afghanistan. The Anglo-Soviet Treaty (1921) recognized Afghanistan as an independent state. The Afghan Civil War (1929-1933) ended with the Mohammadzai dynasty. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989) resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and displacement (Bearden, 2001). Principally, the Afghan Great Game was marked by a number of battles, coalitions, and diplomatic engagements between foreign powers and local leaders. The major incidents that took place during this time period retained a significant influence on the political, social, and economic growth of Afghanistan and the surrounding area, and they still have an impact on the geopolitical environment of the area today.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review employed qualitative research, the data collected from articles and books, and applied a realist

perspective, which suggests that states prioritize their self-interest and seek power and security in international relations. The study employed historical and comparative analysis to present detailed information on the Great Game in Afghanistan, including critical events, diplomatic strategies, and power dynamics.

## RESULTS

The Great Game, a strategic rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, lasted until the early 20th century. The British aimed to maintain Afghanistan's independence and access resources, while the Russians saw it as a potential entryway to the Indian Ocean. The "New Great Game" emerged in the post-Soviet era, with new players like China, Iran, and the United States. Afghanistan, strategically located at the intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, has been on the brink of this conflict since 1830. The Great Game has significant implications for Afghanistan's political and social climate. The Great Game of international geopolitics, significantly impacted Afghanistan, making it a buffer zone between Britain and the USSR. This period led to political unrest, tribal strife, boundary disputes, and instability. The legacy of the Great Game continues to shape Afghanistan's political landscape, inadequate administration, and economic growth, posing challenges for the nation's sovereignty and global interests. Regional and international powers, including Russia and the British, have significant strategic interests in Afghanistan due to its strategic location and role as a transit point for commerce and energy networks. They aim to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a refuge for political and military operations, and address humanitarian issues through donations, peace talks, and aid. The Great Game, a geopolitical conflict between the British and Russian empires, focused on power, security, and maintaining a balance of power. The British sought to establish a friendly government in Afghanistan to protect India from Russian expansion, while the British sought to maintain their influence. The "New Great Game" now involves regional and global powers competing for influence. During the Great Game era, Afghanistan's sovereignty was hindered by inefficient government structures, internal instability, and persistent warfare. The country's weak military and security forces made it vulnerable to internal uprisings. The lack of governance institutions led to a culture of patronage and corruption, making resource management difficult. The Great Game, involving the British and Russian Empires, further exacerbated the situation.

## DISCUSSION

The "New Great Game" concept in Afghanistan is examined from a realist perspective. The paper argues that Afghanistan is the hub of the "New Great Game" as many actors try to further their agendas in the region. The motivations and actions of regional and global powers involved in Afghanistan are analyzed using the theory of realism. The study highlights the importance

of understanding the dynamics of the New Great Game for regional stability and international security. The paper also discusses the geopolitical factors contributing to the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, including the interference of hostile countries and the rivalry of supra-regional and global powers. The involvement of India in Afghanistan is seen as a significant factor in the new great game, disturbing the balance of power in the region. Overall, the research provides insights into the geopolitical struggle for control in Afghanistan and emphasizes the need to consider realist perspectives in understanding the complex dynamics of the region. External meddling from regional and international forces contributed to political turbulence and social discontent. Future strategies should prioritize Afghan-led initiatives and avoid outside meddling. The Afghan government, international community, and Taliban must be involved in the peace process for lasting peace and stability. The future of Afghanistan may involve a combination of internal conflict, regional power competition, increased Taliban influence, fragmentation, international intervention, and peace building.

## CONCLUSION

Afghanistan has a tragic legacy of the Great Game, a series of wars and strategic rivalries between Victorian-era Britain and Tsarist Russia. For over 200 years, Afghanistan has been at the forefront of world affairs due to its geopolitical location. The rivalry between Britain and Russia has used military operations, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic talks to conquer and control Central and South Asia. The Great Game in Afghanistan exemplifies the importance of Afghan-led initiatives in achieving peace and stability. The installation of puppet kings and the struggle for influence among regional and international powers considered. A comprehensive strategy incorporating political, economic, and social initiatives adopted. Addressing the underlying causes of unrest was crucial for establishing long-lasting peace. The historical background of the Afghan Great Game offers valuable lessons for future peace efforts. The Great Game, a cycle of instability and violence in Afghanistan, has resulted in thousands of deaths and millions of refugees. The conflict has impeded economic growth, impacted the environment, and sparked mistrust among ethnic and religious groups. The realist viewpoint emphasizes states are selfish, all the time try to get self-interest like the great powers tried in Afghanistan. The Great Game between the British and Russian Empires in the 19th and 20th centuries highlighted the importance of self-interest and understanding in conflicts. The British saw Afghanistan as a buffer state to protect India from Russian expansionism, while the Russians sought to increase their influence. Both countries engaged in military operations, espionage, and political game-playing, leading to a protracted and destructive conflict. The Soviets withdrew in 1989, but the country remains in turmoil.

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