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U.S Geopolitics in Afghanistan and the Control of China

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Abstract:

Geopolitics is considered as one of the most important and widely used topics in scientific and academic circles of the politics and international relations, with the fundamental focus of world politics largely based on it today.

Therefore, currently China, as a powerful regional country, seeks access to political and economic power in its near regions and the world, aiming to maintain its prestige on the international stage. However, the United States of America, which has positioned itself as a global hegemon and the mega power, constantly strives to curb and reduce China's growth factor and empowerment.

In this context, the geopolitical goals of this country have led policymakers and political elites to consistently work in this area. Given the above mentioned topic, a qualitative research has been emphasized in this study, with a descriptive and analytical approach. The sources for collecting the information in this study are library-based, and ultimately, the research focuses on examining America's geopolitics in Afghanistan and the control of China.

The results of this study have proven that the presence of the United States in Afghanistan as a prominent global power has aimed to achieve geopolitical interests in the Heartland region and continuously seeks to weaken its regional rivals through various strategies. In this regard, by using the land of Afghanistan, efforts have been made to hinder China's geopolitical and strategic interests in the region amidst issues and obstacles. This approach is considered as one of the methods to control China by the United States.

Keywords: Geopolitics, security, economy, US foreign policy, Afghanistan, China.

Contents

Abstract:	2
Introduction	4
Problem Statement	5
Research Questions:	6
Importance and Necessity of Research:	7
Literature Review	8
Variables of the Research	9
1. Concepts and General Discussions	10
1. Concepts and General Discussions	10
1-2. The Scope of Geopolitics and its Theory	11
U.S Geopolitics:	12
2.1. Foreign Policy and America's Geopolitics	13
2.2 America's Objectives in Afghanistan	15
2.3 America's Tools to Restrict China	16
China's Countermeasures	17
Evaluation of America's Long-term and Short-term Policies	18
Conclusion	20
Sources:	21

Introduction

International relations in the current conditions indicate the continuation of anarchic conditions (lack of central authority), and what is perceived as very important in such circumstances is the survival of the states (governments). Therefore, governments consider security as a vital matter, and use all tools to achieve this reality and their tangible necessity.

In such conditions, governments with the capability and efficiency to preserve and sustain themselves are of utmost important, and according to the notion and basis of neorealism, governments are the most important players and actors in the field of international relations. Although recently, other players have emerged in this field, they operate under the shadow of the power and laws of governments. That is why, in a structure where a powerful country seeks hegemonic position and superiority, other powers react to this issue, this case completely suits with the current situation of United State of America and China.

Both of these countries are seeking to ensure security for their elevation on the global stages, especially China, which, after gaining power in the town, is intensely pursuing the preservation of its security, survival, and presence in the international system as a prominent power. Although China and other regional and global powers do not have the ability to balance against the United States so far, they are using all the possible tools to confront the unilateralism of these countries to achieve their long-term goals.

However, the People's Republic of China is one of the significant players in the post-Cold War world and has always tried to demonstrate itself as a major power in global equations. This issue has been of interest from various perspectives in the current situation, and Beijing has sought to take steps towards reviving its historical power. China's focus on reviving its historical power and strength has led this country to be directly or indirectly involved in various global political issues, especially with the West and particularly with the United States of America. This confrontation has turned into an inseparable chapter in Beijing's foreign policy, forming a confrontational approach in China-US relations with various dimensions as an enduring conflict in various regional and sometimes trans-regional areas.

Till date, both sides have extended this conflict to various crises, making US geopolitical interests in its approach to Afghanistan is very effective and is considered as another strategic approach against China. Given the above points, the present case study aims to delve into America's geopolitics in Afghanistan and the control of China.

Problem Statement

In fact, in this contemporary era, achieving power is one of the most important issues that has captivated countries around the world from long time, and they have always used various strategies to reach it. Simultaneously, maintaining the security and sovereignty of countries at the international level and stage is another reality that has always been of special concern internationally for the top countries, and prominent powers always strive to stand against insecurity with as much strength and power as possible while preserving their position.

This reality sets the stage for intense competition among prominent powers. Given the above, geopolitics as the impact of geographical environment on politics in the world is the most important phenomenon that has attracted the attention of major world powers and increases their power. According to the scholars and researchers, countries seeking to increase their power should consider geopolitics as a science to discover the relationships between geographical environment and its impact on policy in order to enhance their political power.

The fact that Afghanistan is considered one of the most important countries geopolitically and plays a crucial role among major countries has drawn the attention of major world powers. Therefore, as a global superpower, the United States is compelled to have a special interest in the political and geographical arteries of its rival countries such as Russia, China, and Iran in this country. It wants to have a direct and indirect presence in this country and warns its rival countries about the importance of this issue. Hence, I aim to investigate the role of the United States in the geopolitics of Afghanistan and its significant impact on China in this research.

Research Questions:

Main Question: What is the geopolitics of the United States in Afghanistan and its control over China?

Sub-questions:

1. why is the geopolitical position of Afghanistan important for the United States?
2. What are the impacts of the presence of the United States in Afghanistan on China?
3. How does the geopolitics of the United States in Afghanistan lead to control over China?

Research Hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis: It seems that Afghanistan, as a country and as a region with prominent geopolitical characteristics for the United States, holds special importance. By focusing on this approach, the United States seeks to exert necessary pressure on China.

Sub-hypotheses:

1. It appears that the geopolitical position of Afghanistan for the United States is ultimately valuable and significant.
2. It seems that the impacts of the presence of the United States in Afghanistan on China could be promising and can strongly go against China's interests.
3. It appears that the geopolitics of the United States in Afghanistan can lead to long-term presence in this country, which in turn enables the United States to relatively successfully limit China's interests and control it.

Importance and Necessity of Research:

Understanding that one of the most important reasons for a nation's survival in the structure of today's world lies in a correct understanding of realities and realistic approaches to international politics, there are several important geopolitical issues based on this structure that many countries strive to achieve necessary benefits by employing various policies from this approach.

The main goal of understanding and comprehending geopolitical objectives is liberation from geographical and political entanglements, which ultimately leads to creating better conditions for achieving fundamental goals. Therefore, a conscious focus in this area leads to taking necessary and essential actions with a correct understanding of these realities. The present research, which is mostly based on innovative theories, aims to deeply and accurately examine the geopolitical objectives of the United States in Afghanistan and its control over China, provide a good scientific source for users and future researchers by obtaining necessary results.

Furthermore, by focusing on scientific resources and detailed analysis of information, the present research endeavors to address essential and deep realities so that based on them, scientific-research solutions can be considered for leading policymaking. Additionally, it aims to prevent interference and fill the void by gaining necessary information for the benefit of its people and country through a correct understanding of the geopolitical objectives of major powers such as China and the United States.

Literature Review

After conducting thorough and meticulous research on the studied effects and the background of research in this regard, it is concluded that extensive research has been carried out on the topics of global geopolitical system and global conflicts based on geopolitics, as well as the geopolitical objectives of the United States in Afghanistan. Each of these studies has significant results and findings that are discussed and analyzed below:

1. Joseph E. Fallon, Geopolitics of America; Afghanistan and control over China.
2. Zahra, Pishgahi Fard, The position of Afghanistan in the geo-strategy of the new global system.
3. Mohammad Reza Bahrami, Competition between America and China in three important geopolitical areas/ The position of Afghanistan is going to be elevated.
4. Mohammad Jafar Javadi Arjmand and colleagues, Evolution of U.S. foreign policy towards Afghanistan based on geopolitical theories.

Based on the mentioned researches, none of them directly address the questions of this research. Therefore, an independent approach is made to discuss and analyze this research while considering credible sources.

Data Collection Method

In this research, a qualitative method with an analytical-descriptive approach has been utilized, meaning that the information has been collected and each aspect has been analyzed and described. Additionally, the sources of this research are library-based, utilizing books, articles, and scientific journals.

Obstacles and Research challenges

In fact, there is no doubt that in the process of any research, there are various obstacles, problems, and limitations that may affect or hinder the research. Therefore, from the beginning to the end of this research, I have faced various problems and obstacles which are clearly mentioned below:

The first serious problem I encountered was the lack of e- resources while collecting the data for form and draft this publication.

The second fundamental problem in this research is the lack of internal sources, as most available sources are related to foreign countries, and the scarcity of sources leads to serious challenges in the research process.

The third problem in this research is the existence of an unstable situation and a changing current that has brought about deep social and administrative changes, causing delays in work matters and creating difficulties in the present research.

Finally, the fourth fundamental problem in this research is the lack of cooperation from research centers such as the Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences and the Center for Strategic Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has hindered the progress of the present research and may have had a tangible impact on the results.

Despite the above-mentioned challenges and obstacles, I have made efforts to complete my research accurately and based on scientific principles to the best of my ability.

Variables of the Research

Independent Variable: Geopolitics of the United States of America

Dependent Variable: Afghanistan and control over China

Organization of the Research

This research includes a research design and two main discussions as follows:

1. Concepts and General Discussions
2. Geopolitics of America: Afghanistan and control over China

The research concludes with a general summary and the sources used in this study.

1. Concepts and General Discussions

In this section, the most important concepts related to the discussion and general discussions of the research are addressed, which are crucial for a proper understanding of the topic:

1-1. The Concept of Geopolitics

Geopolitics in its literal sense means political geography. (Anvari, 2003: p. 3954)

In the terminology of international relations culture, geopolitics is defined as a method in analyzing foreign policy that aims to understand, explain, and predict international political behavior based on variables mainly geographical such as location, size, climate, topography, demographics, natural resources, technological developments, and technological potential (it is known) and thus this perception (more or less) exists that in geopolitics, identity and political action are determined by geography. (Evans and Newnam, 2012: pp. 303-304)

Geopolitics is defined as the analysis of the interaction between geographical backgrounds and related perspectives on one hand and political processes on the other. (Cohen, 2010: p. 43)

Geopolitics is the understanding of the reality of the geographical environment in order to achieve power in a way that enables one to enter the global game at the highest level and preserve national interests and national life. (Ezati, 2015: p. 7)

The term geopolitics refers to a knowledge that identifies resources, actions, and representations that enable control of land and resource extraction, and in current conditions; geopolitics is seen as competition for broader land than governance. (Flint, 2011: pp. 38-39)

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1-2. The Scope of Geopolitics and its Theory

Geopolitics encompasses geographical spaces, humans, and related societies and communities that are within the sphere of influence and impact of one or more political, cultural, economic, social, military-security, commercial, technological, media, etc. variables. In other words, countries and territories and surrounding geographical spaces within the sphere of influence of a central country are referred to as its geopolitical scope. Therefore, another point in geopolitical scope is that global and regional competitions occur when a spatial-geographical scope is defined as part of the geopolitical scope of two global or regional powers, and these geopolitical scopes have dynamic natures. Thus, they are closed or open and in the process of changing geopolitical scopes, regional or global geopolitical orders usually undergo changes; geopolitical order is a stable pattern of global politics governed by a set of rules by major powers. (Takhshid, 2022: p. 308)

As governments are considered the main actors in the international system, it must be noted that their foreign policies begin with their ideas, hopes, and fears, and the goals of foreign policy based on geopolitics are actually a vision of the future situation that governments must achieve it in order to survive its power. Based on this, the goals of foreign policy are the result of analyzing objectives and tools to achieve those goals. Therefore, determining the goal in foreign policy is the most important stage in a country's foreign policy. It must be acknowledged that

geopolitics and geography influence the foreign policy decisions of governments. (Qavam, 2010: p. 92)

Indeed, geopolitics is primarily about perceptions and geographical imaginations shaping foreign policy, and rational targeting of identifying the intrinsic aspects of geopolitics creates a nexus between geography and politics. As a result of this nexus, more tangible goals such as; striving for the survival of the political system, providing services, creating economic prosperity, and facilitating government sovereignty are pursued; however, the main goal is to create another nexus between domestic and foreign policies based on geographical realities; because identifying geopolitical genomes in increasing policymakers' share of geographical factors and their influence on their policies are crucial. Understanding geopolitical genomes leads policymakers to establish a logical connection between geopolitical foundations and spatial and geographical complements beyond borders that structurally harmonize internal geopolitics and functionally provide country deficiencies and facilitate expanding the scope of influence in foreign policy. (Khalili et al., 2013: p. 45)

U.S Geopolitics:

U.S Geopolitics Afghanistan and containment of China "Joseph E. Fallon" delves into the short-term and long-term analysis of the United States' policies in Afghanistan in the Small Wars journal. He believes that if the initial estimates are accurate, Afghanistan is the sixth largest holder of rare metal reserves. Washington, by controlling this resource, can potentially free America and other industrial countries from dependence on China.

Eurasia; America's presence in Afghanistan is an example of a Gorilla war by a superpower pursuing geopolitical goals, beyond just defeating a local insurgency. This war signifies a return to the Great Game theory where America and its rivals, China and Russia, strive to secure their resources, particularly oil and oil pipeline security in Central Asia, by influencing Afghanistan. If America wins, Russia and China will remain weakened powers.

If Russia or China emerge victorious, America will face a significant, influential rival capable of challenging U.S. strategies.

This article focuses on studying one of America's rivals, China. Initially, the concept of geopolitics will be examined based on the studies of Zbigniew Brzezinski. Following that, America's primary objectives in Afghanistan are discussed. The next

step involves the primary tools America uses to control China, followed by an analysis of China's counter-moves. Lastly, the article concludes with an evaluation of the short-term and long-term policies of the United States.

2.1. Foreign Policy and America's Geopolitics

Geopolitics is defined as: "Examining the impact of geography on the relationship of powerful countries in international politics."

The most renowned definition comes from Sir Halford John Mackinder, known as the father of geopolitics and geostrategy: he defines the geopolitics as "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the world."

The term "Heartland" refers to Eurasia, and the term "World-Island" encompasses Eurasia and Africa. If a country can control the political and military conditions in the Eurasian region, they are undoubtedly invincible, it because geography restricts rivals.

At the onset of the Cold War, America based its foreign policy on controlling the Russian Federation, with George F. Kennan, the United States' Special Envoy in Moscow, a defender and the founder of this plan. Geopolitics underpinned this policy, following the Mackinder theory. At that time, the Russian Federation essentially dominated Eastern Europe and held control over the Heartland. The aim was to confine Moscow within the Heartland to bring about its economic downfall.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and instability in the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the influence of geopolitics on America's foreign policy grew stronger, leading to a return to the Mackinder theory regarding control of Central Asia.

In 1991, America openly declared its new policy in Central Asia: "Our primary goal is to prevent the emergence of a rival threatening our security in the former Soviet Union region. This is a key consideration, and we must strive to prevent the dominance of any competitive power in this region to uphold global power... Our strategy must now focus on curbing the potential of future global powers."

The Neo-Mackinder strategy, as articulated by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his book "The Grand Chessboard," emphasized American priorities and urgencies in geostrategy. "The greatest achievement of geopolitics for America is Eurasia... How America deals with controlling Eurasia is crucial and vital. The power that controls

Eurasia holds sway over two of the three crucial advanced economic and production regions in the world."

A superficial look at the map also indicates that control over the Eurasia region automatically leads to the Western Hemisphere and Oceania becoming geopolitical appendages of Central Asia. Approximately 57% of the world's population resides in Eurasia, and most mineral resources, investment companies, and underground resources are concentrated in this area. Eurasia holds about three-fourths of the known world's energy resources. America's primary priority is to ensure that no power enters to control the political geography of the region and that the global community has financial and economic access to this area. Its priority is to ensure that no state or states have the capacity to expel America from Eurasia or diminish the decisive role of this country.

On October 5, 2001, America initiated Operation Enduring Freedom and launched an attack on Afghanistan with its allies to overthrow the Taliban regime and eliminate the Al-Qaeda organization. The occupation of Afghanistan essentially followed Washington's adherence to the Brzezinski theory regarding the management of Eurasia. However, there was a difference in theory and practice for America; instead of cooperating with China, America aimed to also restrict China in the region. (Fallon, 2018: pp. 1-2)



2.2 America's Objectives in Afghanistan

America's goal was to overthrow the Taliban regime and expel them from the country to defeat and eradicate terrorism. A part of this battle involved eliminating heroin production in the country. Afghanistan produces over 90% of the world's non-medical drug consumption. Additionally, this country is the largest producer of cannabis. Profits from the sale of these substances are the most important financial source for terrorists.

Geopolitical objectives by the Pentagon and the Brzezinski Center regarding control over Afghanistan and Central Asia's natural resources and to prevent the growth of Chinese and Russian hegemony have been raised. Afghanistan's mineral resources include oil, gas, copper, cobalt, gold, lithium, and other mineral reserves. The

financial value of these resources is estimated to be worth billions of dollars. Among these strategic mineral resources are rare metals that are essential for modern technologies today. The main resources in Eurasia are oil, gas, and oil pipelines. (Fallon, 2018: p. 2)

2.3 America's Tools to Restrict China

America takes three steps on rare metal resources, pipelines, and alliances to prevent the growth of China's hegemony.

1. China holds the largest reserves of rare metals and controls 95% of the world's supply. If initial estimates are correct, Afghanistan is the sixth largest holder of these rare metal reserves. Washington, by controlling this resource, can potentially free America and industrial countries from dependence on China. This will strengthen Washington geopolitically while simultaneously weakening Beijing.

2. China's growing economy faces increasing need for oil and gas reserves in Central Asia, which, however, requires unrestricted access to oil and gas pipelines. Brzezinski supports America's geopolitical goals in Central Asia regarding controlling oil and gas pipelines, stating: "Therefore, geopolitics in this puzzle and access to immense wealth were at stake. As long as the Soviet Union remains collapsed, power monopoly in this region was in Moscow's hands; all railroads, oil and gas pipelines, and even air routes passed through this center."

Russian policymakers and politicians preferred conditions to remain the same because they knew that anyone who wanted dominant access to the region aimed to obtain the economic and geopolitical benefits of Eurasia." As Brzezinski stated: "The economic growth and development of Asia result from mounting pressure for the exploration and extraction of new energy resources in Central Asia, such as gas and oil reserves in the Caspian Sea, which has less than Kuwait, the Gulf of Mexico, or the North Sea resources. Restricting China's access to these reserves and pipelines restricts China's economic growth. If China's economic growth is halted, Beijing's financial resources for military restructuring and development will diminish. Thus, preventing China from becoming a regional hegemon is crucial.

3. To prevent China's political and economic influence from growing in the region, America develops its alliances with dual-purpose goals and ultimately moderates power. The strategy of power limitation, as shown on the first map, consists of a series of bilateral alliances between America and bordering countries of China.

These alliances expand from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia and from South Asia to Central Asia.

Recovering the Cold War alliance between America and old allies like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, in the new era, includes Afghanistan and the former enemy, Vietnam. Based on concerns and common interests regarding China's power, America strives to create convergence with countries like Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, India, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The strategy of power balance, with the support of India's multi-party democratic system, seeks free trade as an alternative to China's development in Asia. India is the only country that has the range, population, and economic potential to become a rival to China. The assumption is that a natural evolutionary trend in Indian foreign policy will lead to economic growth and consequently political growth. Given the border disputes between China and India, as well as China's support for Pakistan and India's support for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile government, this competition will become more evident. (Fallon, 2018: pp. 2-3)

China's Countermeasures

1. Until the rare metal resources in Afghanistan are commercially exploitable, China can demonstrate itself as the exclusive controller of these resources globally.
2. Despite the pipelines of Kazakhstan and Russia being out of America's control, China's energy needs are currently being met.
3. China imports oil via sea and land routes. To support its maritime transportation routes, China has established bases in the Indian Ocean known as the "String of Pearls." As shown on the second map, these maritime facilities reach from Pakistan to Moldova, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand. Roads are being built or are in progress to connect China to Pakistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. As a result, China has bypassed America. All of these actions together manifest China's policy of containment towards India by China. In the chess game, India finds itself cornered. The Chinese follow their military strategist Sun Tzu's advice, "The art of war is to defeat the enemy without fighting."

Evaluation of America's Long-term and Short-term Policies

In the short term, America's policy focuses on preventing China from becoming a regional hegemon, which, however, has not been successful. China is not yet a hegemon, but its economic power is growing, increasing the chances of its emergence as a hegemonic power. In the long term, while America's goals are achievable, it may not be with current policies; instead, considering the unintended consequences of China's new economy, these goals may be attainable. China's economic power is significant. It has emerged as the world's second-largest economy after the USA and has experienced one of the fastest economic growths in the past three decades. China's annual economic growth rate is 10%. This country is now the largest exporter and the second largest importer globally. The driving force behind this economic growth is only one region, the southern coast. The repercussions of these conditions in China are not only dangerous for future economic stability but also for regional territorial integrity. (Fallon, 2018: pp. 3-4)

The widening wealth gap between coastal and inland regions may ignite unrest. The estimated migration of 10 million workers and their families has enriched coastal cities. It is estimated that out of about 100 million workers, half of them are employed in state-owned investment companies. Many of these state-owned investment firms are unproductive. If Beijing does not transition from subsidizing these industries, it will face an economic crisis. On the other hand, if Beijing does not provide subsidies to these industries, many will fail, and more than 300,000 workers will become unemployed, leading to a social revolution.

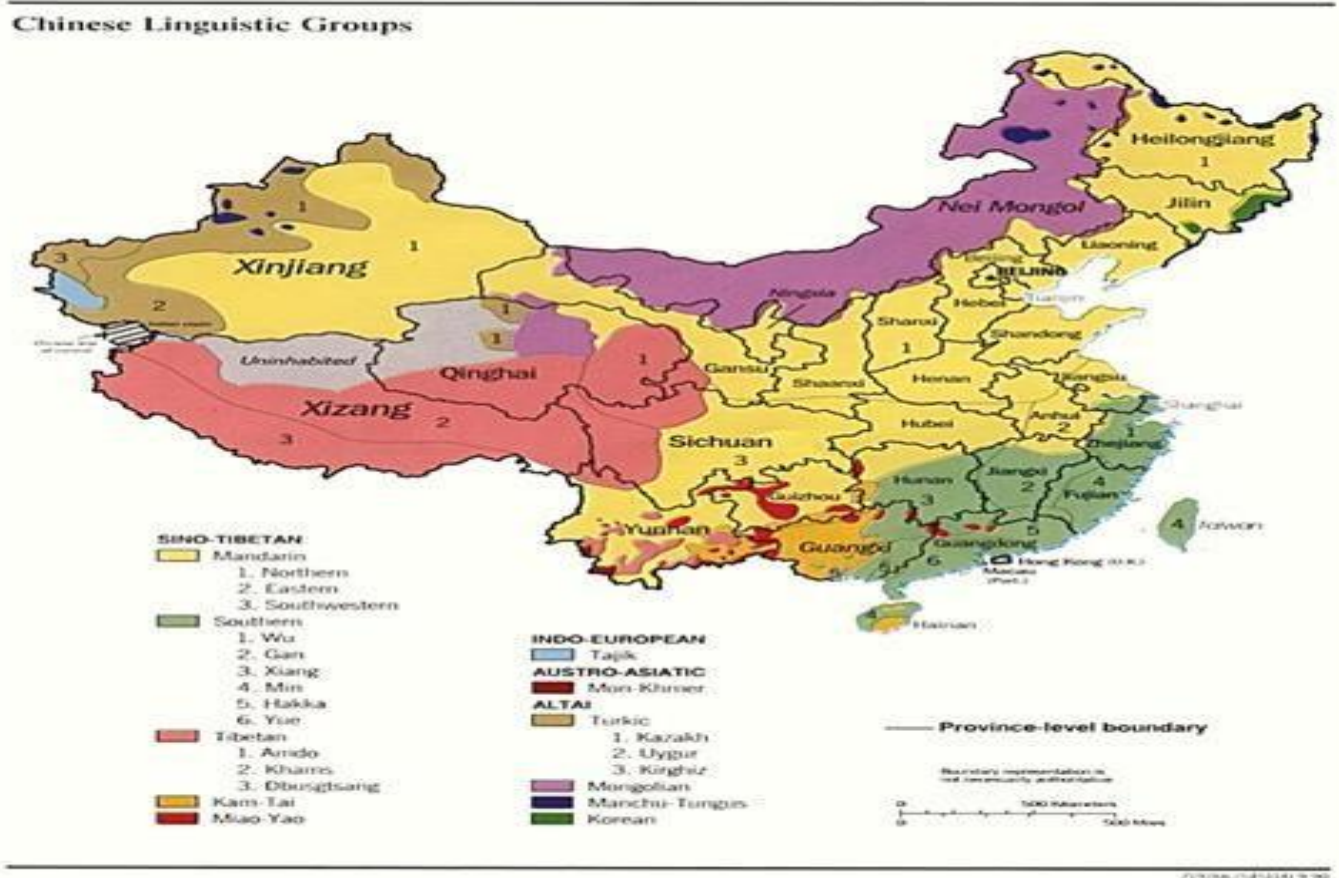
Beijing's goal is to prevent these economic and social problems from creating critical ethnic minorities for the country. Approximately 77 ethnic minorities live in China, including the Hui, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, Uighur, and Zhuang people. They make up 9% of the total population but control over 60% of the region.

The existing threat to China arises from ethnic minority issues, although they are a minority within the majority population.

China's fear doubled during the collapse of the Soviet Union. When border regions, Central Asia, and the Caucasus were lost, Russia was divided into three states: Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. If China loses its borderlands in Tibet and Xinjiang, the central government of this country may also be divided further.

The core of the Chinese population consists of the Han ethnic group, comprising about 91% of the country's population and approximately 1.1 billion people. However, practically, this is not accurate as China is composed of two distinct regions geographically, historically, and linguistically: Northern and Southern China.

As shown on the third map, out of 1.1 billion people, more than 300 million, about one-third of them, are Southern Chinese. While their region drives the economy in Southern China, they speak eight languages that are incomprehensible to Northern Mandarin Chinese.



In the past, ethnic and linguistic differences were reinforced by linguistic borders, leading to the emergence of North and South states. This occurred in the centuries three, four, five, six, ten, and twelve. The absence of this issue in the past eight centuries does not prevent its reoccurrence in the future; an example of this is the fate of the former Soviet Union's collapse. Economic recession and social unrest could diminish the power of the Chinese Communist Party and create rifts within

the government. Southern China has the necessary economic, physical, and population capacities to become an independent country, similar to Ukraine. Not only Southern China but also Northern China will have the potential to become a regional hegemon, and America's geopolitical goal to prevent China from becoming a dominant power in Eurasia will be achieved. (Fallon, 2018: pp. 5-6)

Conclusion

The results of this research have shown that the United States of America, following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist world, defined a global hegemony agenda for itself, which mandated ensuring the security of various regions worldwide. This led to a confrontational engagement with China in various domains, with Afghanistan and some Middle Eastern countries becoming the most significant focus of US security, political, economic, and cultural attention in recent years. These regions are perceived as strategically important for America due to various geopolitical reasons such as rich oil and gas resources, political Islam, terrorism, and fundamentalism. Securing these regions has played a fundamental role in the US foreign policy, and by focusing on these areas, it can directly impact the security of China and other countries in Asia.

Considering the above, America's geopolitics in Afghanistan has had a significant impact on regional and global dynamics. Military presence and strategic policies in Afghanistan have not only affected the security and stability of this country but also influenced China's relations with the region. Analysis of these impacts indicates that China has actively engaged in securing economic and security interests in Afghanistan, and this pathway may lead to new geopolitical challenges in the future.

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