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Ukraine War and Its Geopolitical Implications for Afghanistan and the Region



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UKRAINE WAR AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR AFGHANISTAN AND THE REGION

INTRODUCTION

Russia's war in Ukraine after the collapse of the former Soviet Union means that Moscow is facing another historical test that can expand Russia to the borders of the former Soviet Union; or reduce it to the level of political isolation and economic collapse.

The regional and global order, which consists of geopolitical, geostrategic, geoculture, and geoeconomic order, can be understood more than any other time in the era of globalization. In the meantime, the war in Ukraine is considered to be the beginning of a new chapter of regional order, because we are living in a time when it is not possible for the security and stability of countries to remain within their defined borders. Whether we want it or not, effectiveness is essential in our time.

Afghanistan has always had a central and prominent position in the political conflicts of the world and the region, and currently, on one hand, the importance and position of Afghanistan can be seen in these major regional and global changes, and on the other hand, the impact of these changes on the current and the future of the country needs more discussion.

This paper focuses on the following four topics. 1. Geographical importance of Ukraine for Russia. 2. Geopolitical implications of the conflict for the region. 3. Putin's trips to countries in the region, and 4. Afghanistan's position in the regional order. Thus, the impact of the war in Ukraine on the region and Afghanistan has been analyzed in light of the above four topics.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UKRAINE'S GEOGRAPHY FOR RUSSIA

Ukraine is the second largest country after Russia in Europe and the geography of this country has been a security zone for Russia since 1812, which is located along the western borders of Russia. During World War II, this land played an important role in the defeat of Germany, as Germany had to reach Russia by passing 1600 km of Ukrainian land to reach Moscow. One of



the main factors of Germany's defeat in that war was the geography of Ukraine, which saved Russia from inevitable defeat. If this country falls into the hands of NATO, reaching Moscow will be reduced by 400 km.

Apart from its geopolitical and geostrategic importance, Ukraine also has an extraordinary historical and religious importance for Moscow. Historically, Russians see Kiev as their historical origin where the first Russian state was formed, and religiously, Kiev is considered the origin and foundation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Mackinder, one of the leading sociologists of the West, says: Whoever controlled Eastern Europe -the Heartland- would control the world. Eastern Europe is the heart of the world and Ukraine is one of the important parts of this heart. According to the aforementioned theorist, Ukraine has a high geostrategic and geopolitical importance for every major world power, especially for Russia. Most strategists believe that Russia is a world power with Ukraine, but without Ukraine, it will be nothing more than a regional power. Therefore, from the strategic point of view, Ukraine is in the center of Moscow's focus.

The reason why Ukraine is important for Russia is that the land of Ukraine is a security and privacy area (Buffer zone) for Russia, and if Ukraine joins NATO, it can pose a threat for Russia on its borders as in that case Ukraine will be hosting NATO forces and their missiles.

GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

Russia's attack on Ukraine, which at the beginning was thought to be a lightning attack with quick and tangible results, is becoming slower and more complicated day by day and no definite end for this conflict can be expected. Although this war has affected the lives of the people of Ukraine in the first step and has turned the cities and infrastructure of this Eastern European country into ruins; but its consequences are definitely not limited to the borders of Ukraine. Consequences of the war in Ukraine on the countries of the region can be viewed from two perspectives:

First: Political Perspective

From this perspective, the first consequence of the war in Ukraine can be seen as the lack of interest and attentions of the international community regarding the Afghani issue after 15th August 2021. Undoubtedly as a result of this conflict, Afghanistan and the human crisis in this country is partially forgotten by the international community, and the issue of Ukraine



attracted the attention of the world. The impact of the war in Ukraine on the current poverty and hunger in Afghanistan is also evident. On one hand, this war has had an unfortunate impact on the world economy as a whole and the war torn Afghanistan cannot be separated from this unfortunate effect, especially the price of food and oil has increased in Afghanistan and on the other hand, it caused the world community to allocate most of their aid to the displaced people of the war in Ukraine. However, the geopolitical location of Afghanistan makes this country to not be completely forgotten. As a major actor in the Afghan issue, Russia is trying to turn the Afghan crisis in a direction that will benefit them. That is why, recently, Russian officials have also pointed out the possibility of recognizing the Islamic Emirate as the government of Afghanistan, which will undoubtedly open the doors in regional and international politics for the Islamic Emirate, but in any case, it will put Afghanistan in the Russian bloc.

The consequences of this war have been significant for other global issues as well, such as the fading of the Palestinian crisis and Israel's anti-human actions in Palestine, or the isolation of the JCPOA and the agreement on Iran's nuclear program with the West, and the failure of efforts to achieve this international agreement. The war in Ukraine affected the political focus on this issue, as by creating new angles in Iran's relations with each of the parties to this agreement, it added to its complexity. Following the geopolitical impacts of this war, Turkey is also dissatisfied with the countries of the European continent due to the postponement of its joining to the European Union, and in recent years, it has been largely ignored by the US. Turkey seized the opportunity to retaliate and show its strategic role, and despite the initial promises, under the pretext of bilateral agreements with Russia, it closed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to Russian warships in the Black Sea, which could have had great impact on the conclusion of war. In fact, although Turkey and Russia having differences of opinion regarding Syria, Libya, Karabakh and even Ukraine, Erdogan is trying to take advantage of this crisis to make his Western allies understand that Turkey is not always available as an ally. This time, he does not want to play the role of NATO's south-eastern front guard easily and without getting points. Therefore, it seems that during the war in Ukraine, it became clear that the Western powers, including America and Europe, no longer have the power and ability to mobilize as they had it in the past. On the other hand, the countries of the West Asian region have also distanced themselves from the policy of listening to and simply following the Western powers and leaning towards more realistic and profit-seeking approaches. During the Ukraine war, these countries showed that, like America and Europe, they do not have a special commitment to their former allies and are seeking interests of their countries in the turbulent international scene.



South Asian countries, including Pakistan, as a strategic and traditional ally of the United States, have taken a more neutral stance towards the Ukraine war, although the former prime minister of this country was trying to get closer to Russia against the United States. For example, Hina Rabbani Khar, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, during a speech at a conference entitled "War between Russia and Ukraine; A Crisis Beyond Borders" said: "Pakistan wants balanced, objective and extensive relations based on mutual benefits and mutual respect with all major powers, and with this approach, it demands an immediate cessation of hostilities between the parties involved in Ukraine and the promotion of diplomacy to end the war." This Pakistani official emphasized that his country has experienced sufferings of war on its borders for several decades, and understanding this situation, her country wants an immediate cessation of hostilities and promote the use of diplomacy and dialogue for an immediate end to the conflict in Ukraine.

Second: Economic Perspective

From an economic point of view, it must be admitted that Russia and Ukraine are two important sources of wheat, oil, and bird feed seeds. On the other hand, Russia's special position in the export of oil and gas means that the consequences of the war in Ukraine are not limited to this country alone, but has also regional and international consequences and aftershocks. Russia is the second largest producer of oil after the US. The daily export of Russian oil is about 5 million barrels, half of which is sent to European countries. On the other hand, Europe supplies about 40% of its gas needs from Russia. Therefore, the special position of Russia and Ukraine in the supply cycle of the aforementioned items causes the war in Ukraine to have many political and economic dimensions, especially in the region, in addition to the security and military aspect. The war in Ukraine has directly affected the livelihood of the people around the world, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, and has caused a food crisis and a decrease in people's ability to purchase, which is also felt strongly in the markets of Afghanistan nowadays.

PUTIN'S TRIP TO THE COUNTRIES IN THE REGION

Vladimir Putin, President of Russia Recently visited Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan. The President of Russia went to Dushanbe at the invitation of Imam Ali Rahman, the President of Tajikistan. This was Vladimir Putin's second visit after Kazakhstan. Imam Ali Rahman, President of Tajikistan, said in this meeting: "Relations between Tajikistan and Russia have a



special place in our foreign policy priorities. Russia is our strategic and key partner, and all directions of cooperation with it are important to us."

Vladimir Putin said: "Tajikistan's position on regional issues is very important for us. Therefore, Tajikistan is considered a key country for maintaining security and stability in the region. As you know, our military base operates here, the purpose of which is to ensure the security of Tajikistan and the southern borders of the Russian Federation." Relying on the center-oriented principle in international relations, protection of the mother country means strengthening the center-oriented chain. Tajikistan is one of the Commonwealth countries, and as part of the content of this meeting, Tajikistan, as a peripheral country, is obliged to respect the side of the center, which is Russia, in its foreign policy.

Putin also visited Tehran and his meeting with the presidents of Iran and Turkey is also an attempt to deal with the consequences of Biden's trip to Israel and Saudi Arabia. The visit of US President Joe Biden to Israel and Saudi Arabia forced Russia to try to convey the message that they are able to work and cooperate with powers that want to end US supremacy and dominance. They tried to partially overshadow the visit of the American President to Israel and Saudi Arabia and show that the Ukraine crisis has once again moved the East-West confrontation from the diplomatic stage to face-to-face engagements. Putin's meeting in Tehran with the leaders of Iran and Turkey can be considered as a rare opportunity for Moscow to use the military and economic support of Iran and Turkey against Western sanctions. Among these political pull and pushes, China will definitely not be left out; If Putin wants to prioritize geopolitical calculations over economic calculations based on the policy of the former Soviet Union; China is willing to give priority to economics over geopolitical issues.

GLOBAL COMPETITIONS AND AFGHANISTAN

Looking at the great competitions of the world in which Afghanistan has also been a playground, it is possible to point out three historical stages of regional and global order. 1. The great game. 2. Cold war. 3. New world order.

In the era of great game, where the British and Russia were considered as the two sides of the great game, each of them wanted to control this land through their influencers to take over Afghanistan. Although the British succeeded for a while in controlling the political will of the land, but in the end they failed and this failure in fact was the turning point in the changes of the great game.



The cold war, which is considered another period of global competitions, unfortunately, Afghanistan was once again considered an important playing field. This global competition was between the Socialism under the leadership of the Soviet Union and Imperialism under the leadership of the United States. However, Socialism was able to occupy many countries including Afghanistan, but finally it failed not only in Afghanistan, but also in the world.

The new world order led by the United States and its Western allies was formed after the defeat of the Eastern Block in Afghanistan. This order made the world unipolar. Afghanistan due to its geopolitical and geostrategic position, became the center of gravity for political struggles in the new world order at the global and regional level.

AFGHANISTAN'S POSITION IN THE REGIONAL ORDER

Four decades ago, when the US and the former Soviet Union were in conflict creating blocs against each other, a new form of game began between them, and since then, the countries of Central Asia and Middle East witness numerous incidents. Afghanistan had a special position in several decades of transitions and games and has always witnessed the most bitter events in some way.

Afghanistan, having a geopolitical position in political geography and neighboring China, Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asian countries, is very important for America, China, Russia, and the neighbors. America and Russia are trying hard to strengthen their foundations in this country.

Afghanistan became the playground of the West and the East four decades ago. The presence and defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan as a result of the jihad of the Afghan people and now the defeat of the US in Afghanistan is Moscow's new approach to enter the great game of the region and parade for its long-time rivals. During a decade of intervention in Afghan affairs during the Soviet era, Russia used its influence in Afghanistan as a playground against America. Now, with the probable geopolitical change of the region, Afghanistan's strategic position in connection with the Ukraine crisis is important for both Russia and America from the geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic dimensions. In the past, the prominence of this geography was shaped by the passage of the Silk Road. But now its importance lies in the transfer of gas and oil pipes from Central Asia to south and east Asia. Undoubtedly, Afghanistan, as an oil passageway, has been one of the main interests of the West both in the past and in the current period. The prominent and strategic position of the country is that it is located in the path of gas and oil transmission from Central Asia to the south and the open



seas, which practically distances Iran from the negotiation table for energy transmission to the east and southwest of Asia.

Afghanistan's neighbors can be divided into two categories, far and near. Afghanistan's near neighbors can be classified into three categories from a geopolitical point of view: A; Iran and the Gulf countries in the west. B; The Indian subcontinent in the south and east. C; Russian Federation and Central Asia in the North. D; China. In the same way, there are countries that do not have a common border with Afghanistan, but have considerable influence in the internal affairs of this country, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Each of these groups, from Afghanistan's neighbors, represent a geopolitical sphere that has their own interests, expectations, and means of influence in Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghanistan with its political-ethnic-religious fragility and financial and military dependencies in the position of a third world country surrounded by land, there is a need for a good neighborly relationship relying on a realistic approach towards its own national interests in interaction and confrontation with great powers.

CONCLUSION

With the continuation and escalation of the Ukraine crisis, the atmosphere of the international system is witnessing a similar cold war in contemporary history. Looking at the changes during the Cold War and comparing it to the current environment surrounding the war in Ukraine, evokes the idea of the beginning of the Second Cold War.

Russia's alliance with China and Latin American countries, President Putin's trip to Central Asian countries, especially his trip to Iran and the tripartite meeting with Ebrahim Raisi and Erdogan, indicate the formation of a new geopolitical order. Repetition of these alliances indicates Russia's renewed effort to contain America's hegemonic policies and complete Khrushchev's unfinished policies during the Cold War. The assumption that if it happens, it will bring the possibility of changing the relatively stable international order and even the occurrence of a full-scale war.

From the point of view of geopolitics, Ukraine is considered as the border between the east and west blocs. The power of the West in the form of NATO ends at the western borders of Ukraine, and the vast power of Russia begins in the eastern borders of this country. Strategically, during the past four centuries, Ukraine has acted as Russia's defensive wall and



fortress against the West. The wall that will collapse when Ukraine joins NATO, and it will be the second wall of Russian power to collapse, after the Berlin Wall.

Of course, Ukraine is considered the strategic depth of Russia for many other reasons, including economic and cultural. In a way that most theorists believe that Russia with Ukraine is considered a world power and without Ukraine it will be limited to a regional power. Overall, it can be said: Ukraine is at the tip of the spear in the confrontation between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty, which is why Moscow has precise and inflexible policies in the Ukraine war. In fact, after three decades, once again Russia, in the hope of regaining the greatness of the eighties, and America, thinking of playing the role of a hegemonic power, have rejected the relatively stable order of the international system.

Finally, it can be said that the war in Ukraine will be the end of the unipolar global order and the beginning of the formation of small regional orders centered on the multipolar world. In this great transformation, the region will undergo a new geopolitical change. Afghanistan, as a country that has a history of the presence of the Soviet Union and the United States, with different duration but with almost similar conditions, and for each one, the geopolitics of Afghanistan is a strong defensive stronghold and a geography prone to competition after Ukraine. Afghanistan should interact in these conflicts of great powers according to realistic principles in international relations. The basis of friendship and enmity of a country in its foreign policy is based on national interests. Afghanistan's national interests are in having an active and multilateral diplomacy with great global powers and good neighborly relations with neighboring countries.

The end

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