“The (New) Great Game”
Regional Geopolitics

Instructor: Tim Hollifield, LTC Ret’d

This presentation is Unclassified
Regional Geography Pop Quiz
Official Name: Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi-ye Irān
(Islamic Republic of Iran)
Capital City: Tehran
Population: 74 - 78 million
Size (land): 636,372 sq mi
(18th largest)

Got Nukes?
Probably... sooner or later
Official Name: Türkmenistan (formerly known as Turkmenia and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic)
Capital City: Ashgabat (also largest city)
Population: 5.1 million (5,110,000)
Size (land): 188,456 sq mi
Official Name: *O‘zbekiston Respublikasi* (Republic of Uzbekistan)

- Capital City: Tashkent (also largest city)
- Population: 27.6 million
- Size (land): 172,742 sq mi (56th largest)

Got Nukes? Not likely
Official Name: *Kirgiz Respublikası* (Kyrgyz Republic)

Capital City: Bishkek (also largest city)

Population: 5.4 million (5,482,000)

Size (land): 77,181 sq mi (86th largest)
Official Name: Çumhuriji Toçikiston (Republic of Tajikistan)
Capital City: Dushanbe (also largest city)
Population: 7.9 million (7,995,754)
Size (land): 55,251 sq mi (102nd largest)
Official Name: Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Afgānistān (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)
Capital City: Kabul
Population: 29.8 million
Size (land): 251,772 sq mi (41st largest)
Got Nukes? Nope (alhamdulliah!)

VEOs: Taliban, HQN,
Official Name: Islāmī Jumhūrī-ye Pākistān (Islamic Republic of Pakistan)
Capital City: Islamabad (Karachi largest city: 18 million!)
Population: 177 million (6th largest pop.)
Size (land): 307,374 sq mi (36th largest)
Got Nukes? Yes
Official Name: Bhārat Gaṇarājya (Republic of India)
Capital City: New Delhi
(Mumbai largest city: 20 m)
Population: 1.2 billion
(2nd largest pop.)
Size (land): 1,269,219 sq mi
(7th largest)
Official Name: Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó (People’s Democratic republic of China)
Capital City: Beijing (Shanghai largest city)
Population: 1.3 billion (world’s largest pop.)
Size (land): 3,704,427 sq mi (3rd or 4th largest)
Other Countries (On and Off Map)

- **Not identified (but important)**
  - Russia and Kazakhstan
  - Gulf States / Saudi Arabia

- **Identified (but not discussed)**
  - Nepal
  - Bhutan
  - Bangladesh
  - Burma

  Awesome trekking destinations!

  South Asia’s version of New Orleans (one “perfect storm” away from oblivion)!

  Narco-State ruled by military junta… only Rambo and SecState goes there!

- **Two contested “autonomous regions”**
  - Tibet
  - Kashmir
“The (New) Great Game”
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Learning Objectives

- Describe and explain the meaning of Geopolitics and the “(New) Great Game”

- Describe major interests and challenges of neighbors and regional powers:
  - Bordering Nations: Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asian States
  - Regional Powers: Russia, China, and India
  - Others: Gulf/Arab States (primarily UAE and Saudi Arabia)*

- Describe how regional powers are affecting and influencing stability and security of AFPAK

* Note: U.S. and Coalition partners (i.e. EU and NATO) Turkey, Jordan, and the International NGOs (i.e. UN) will not be discussed in this module
AGENDA

- Geopolitical Overview
  - Defining “Geopolitics”
  - “The (New) Great Game”

- Interests, Policies, Goals
  - Pakistan and Iran
  - Central Asia States
  - Russia
  - People’s Republic of China
  - India
  - Arab / Gulf States: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan

- Challenges and Opportunities
Crescent of Crisis?
Tough Neighborhood: Afghanistan Geopolitics

- Afghanistan weaker than its neighbors
  - Sovereignty and security
  - Economy and infrastructure
  - Development

- Most major ethnic groups are trans-border
  - Use of co-ethnic proxies common throughout region
  - Ethnic identity factor in present insurgency and past (future?) civil conflict

- Nuclear Neighborhood (Future WWIII: Indo-Pak or Iran)
**INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**
- Strategic Impatience
- Coalition / Alliance Cohesion
- Use of Multi-national companies

**RUSSIA**
- Seek / maintain dominant influence in Central Asia
- Maintain strong ties to India
- Prevent spread of extremism / terrorism
- Challenge southern natural gas route to maintain monopoly on European gas supplies
- Seek partnerships on countering narcotics and other organized criminal activities

**CENTRAL ASIA STATES**
- Mining, Gas and Oil
- State fragility
- NDN security

**AFGHANISTAN**
- Ethnic / Religious Multi-Polarity
- Poverty / Unemployment / Health
- Urbanization
- IDPs / Refugees / Youth bulge

**IRAN**
- Expand power
- Counter US
- Ties to Tajiks and Hazara
- Youth bulge
- Counter narcotics

**SAUDI ARABIA**
- Expand influence
- Strong ties to Pak / US
- Contain Iran Influence
- Prevent AQ
- Youth bulge

**PAKISTAN**
- Prevent India encirclement
- Strong ties to China / Saudi / US / UK
- Contain extremism / terrorism
- Weak Economy / Poverty
- Unemployment / Youth bulge
- Control / Contain Ethnic Separatism

**CHINA**
- Wants AFG stability
- Heavily invest in AFG strategic minerals
- Maintain strong ties to Pakistan
- Concerned about long term US presence
- Prevent spread of extremism / terrorism

**INDIA**
- Wants a stable AFG
- Strong ties to AFG
- Access Central Asian energy resources
- Prevent spread of extremism / terrorism

**THE NEW GREAT GAME**

**Black Text:** Goals or Interests
**Red Text:** Challenges or Threats

**MAP LEGEND**
- Nuclear State
- Diplomatic Tension
- Strong Ties
## Statistical Comparison of the Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pop. (in millions)</th>
<th>Population Growth Rate</th>
<th>GDP Growth Rate (%)</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita (USD)</th>
<th>Exports to Region (mil. USD)</th>
<th>Below Poverty Line (%)</th>
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Meaning and Origin of “Geopolitics”

- MacKinder: founder of geopolitics as field of study; coined terms “geo-strategic,” “manpower,” and “heartland”

- Mid-20th cent: IR theory and practice
  - **Theory**: describes relationship between politics and territory
  - **Practice**: Analyzing, proscribing, forecasting and using political power over a given territory

- Today: Shorthand for set of **interests**, challenges, and relations between **nation-states** and transnational actors

**English Geographer**
Sir Halford John Mackinder
(1861-1947)
MacKinder’s “Heartland” Theory

- 1919: MacKinder proposes “Heartland” theory to Royal Geographic Society
- According to Mackinder, the Earth's land surface was divisible into:
  - **World-Island**: Interlinked continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa (most populous and richest)
  - **Offshore islands**: British Isles and the islands of Japan
  - **Outlying islands**: Continents of North America, South America, and Australia
  - **Heartland**: Center of the world island, stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic
The Eurasian Heartland and AFPAK

"Who rules Eurasia commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island controls the world"

--- Sir Halford MacKinder, 1919
Pakistan: Why It Matters

- World’s Only predominately Muslim Nuclear state
  - 80-100 Nuclear WMDs w/ 1,500-mile range
  - Proliferation / Black Market

- Ties to Taliban, AQ, and other militant groups
  - Sanctuary (Kashmir, Waziristan)
  - Early warning, logistical support, and funding

- Many interests counter to U.S., AFG, and Regional Stability
Pakistan’s Interests, Goals, and Policies

- Counterbalance influence of India and U.S.
- Promote Pakistan and PRC interests (esp. Central Asia)
- Maintain “Strategic Depth” in AFG
- Counter / Deter Pakistan Taliban and anti-gov’t militants
- Counter / Deter Baluchi separatists
Challenges in AFG-PAK Relations

- Past / ongoing difficulties inhibit new strategic relationship
  - Secure border / fight militancy and drugs
  - Promote trade, commercial and energy interests

- Pakistan claims Afghanistan used by India to foment trouble (esp. in Baluchistan and FATA)

- Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of intervention and using Taliban as proxy for PAK regional policy

A view shared by Afghanistan and U.S.-led Coalition
PAK(MIL) National Security Priorities

- **Two Focused Priorities**
  - Defend Against India
  - Maintain integrity and viability of Pakistani state

- **Eight Principle Ways**
  - Maintain strategic partnerships: Security and Economic
  - Constrain Indian quest for regional hegemony
  - Deter Indian Aggression
  - Prevent encirclement from/by the “West”
  - Seek international recognition of borders
  - Suppress Internal Unrest
  - Assure responsible governance

The Main Means

- Conventional Formations
- WMD Weapons (NBC)
- Irregular Militias

Pakistan Strategic Perspective: India is the Existential Threat
PAKMIL Irregular Militias (aka Militant Proxies)

- **Most offensive (and active) means** in PAK security triumvirate

- **Several dozen Islamist “militia” groups** --- members from 10/1000s (trained / active) to 100/1000s (available)

- **Common traits**: Anti-Hindu, Pro-Sunni, Pro-Pakistan

- **Focus**: Indian Kashmir, AFG, S. Asia, Sectarian Strife

**Locus of Control:**

ISID and PAKMIL Senior Leaders (Active and Retired)
Iran: Why It Matters

- World’s only absolutist theocracy
  - Seeks global recognition and regional dominance

- May possess Nuclear WMDs
  - Defies Nonproliferation treaty
  - Political will to use against U.S. and allies

- Seeks to destabilize AFG and region to assert influence
  - Training and logistical support to militant and terrorist organizations
Iran: Territories Lost and Gained

- Once controlled parts of modern:
  - Afghanistan
  - Turkmenistan
  - Baluchistan
  - Iraq and Bahrain
  - Caucasus

- Lost Herat in 1856-57 Anglo-Persian War

- Cultural influence from Iraq to India
Iran: Territorial Changes (1800 - 1900s)

Qajar Imperial Persian Coat of Arms
1907 - 1925
Iran’s Interests, Goals, and Policies

- Seeks stable but weak AFG free of US influence
  - Training and logistical support to militant and terrorist organizations
  - Maintain awareness of and pressure on U.S.-NATO forces
- Active role in reconstruction, esp. infrastructure
- Active in Counternarcotics
- Maintain religious / cultural ties with Shi’a communities
- Alignment with India
  - Chah Bahar Port Development
  - Zaranj-Delaram Road Project
Iran

- **A history of influence in the region**
  - Once controlled parts of modern-day western Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Baluchistan (as well as Iraq, Bahrain, Caucasus)
  - Lost Herat in the Anglo-Persian War in 1856/7

- **Ties to Shi’a co-religionist in Afghanistan**
  - Historical and cultural linkages to Tajik communities
  - Supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban
  - Hosted perhaps 2 million refugees during the 1990s
Iran and Afghanistan

- **Iran’s objectives**
  - Expand influence in Afghanistan
  - Put pressure on the United States and NATO
  - Decrease the flow of drugs from Afghanistan

- **Iran’s strategy**
  - Support the Afghan government
  - Hedge by funding Taliban groups: QST, HQN, and HIG
  - Contribute to road, rail, energy infrastructure
  - Retain long-standing linkages with Tajiks
  - Subsidize charities and expand patronage networks
Iran and Pakistan

- “Frenemies” with Pakistan
  - Closer ties before the Iranian Revolution
- Mutual mistrust over sectarian-related issues
  - 1980s-90s: Relations hit extreme low during Sunni-Shi’a sectarian violence in Pakistan
- Pakistan wary of Iran’s relationship with India
- Engagement continues on trade and energy issues
- Both countries concerned about Baluch separatism
Defining “Central Asia”

- Broadly / historically: Caspian Sea to Central China; Southern Russia to Northern Pakistan
- Also known as “Inner Asia”
- Today: Five former Soviet republics of…
  - Kazakhstan
  - Kyrgyzstan
  - Tajikistan
  - Turkmenistan
  - Uzbekistan
Central Asia: Interests, Goals, and Policies

- Deter / Halt Islamist militant “contagion” and narcotics trafficking
  - Marginalize capability/influence of IMU/IJU
  - Less concerned for stability and security in AFG / PAK

- Resolve water-sharing issues with AFG

- Balance tug-of-war between U.S. and Russia (while ensuring aid and investment from both)

- Expand economic ties and in energy production capabilities (oil, natural gas, rare earth minerals)
India: Why It Matters

- Historical ties with Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Largest regional contributor to Afghan development
- Animosity and distrust with Pakistan defines the region
- Almost 160M Muslims living in India
- Desires a pre-eminent role in regional dynamics
India’s Interests, Goals, and Policies

- **Goals**
  - Seeks recognition as great power and dominant nation in South Asia / Indian Ocean
  - Wants decisive role in regional security
  - Prevention of developments which undermine its strategic interests in region and abroad

- **Interests in AFPAK**
  - Gateway / Corridor to Central Asian Markets and Beyond
  - Prevent / Deter proliferation of Islamist militancy (esp. groups trained/supported by PAK)

Note: India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan
Russia: Why It Matters

- History in the region from Great Game to Soviet states to invasion of Afghanistan
- Views Central Asia as its sphere of influence
- Significant problem with Afghan narcotics
Russia’s Interests, Goals, and Policies

- Wants recognition as Great Power
- Protect Central Asian economic and political interests
- Curtail Islamic extremism
- Slow the flood of drugs
- Counter or limit U.S. presence

Afghanistan is extremely wary of Russian interests and activities because of their history and the resulting animus.
China (PRC): Why It Matters

- Largest private development investor in AFG
- Seeks to exploit natural resources to feed markets at home.
- Fears the development of Islamic extremism in its Western provinces
PRC’s Interests, Goals, and Policies

- Financial support and investment
- Halt spread of Islamic extremism
- Limit/contain the West’s influence in Asian sphere
- Aligning with Pakistan as a balance to India’s growing influence
  - Gwadar Port development

Chinese Pres. Hu Jintao and Pres. Hamid Karzai, during a welcoming ceremony in Beijing, Apr 2011 (AFP)
Gulf States: Why They Matter

- Saudi Arabia
  - Support to AFG and Pakistan going back to Mujahideen era and before
  - Strong promoter of Wahabbism
  - Diplomatic ties and credibility with the Taliban
  - Maintains a robust, but quiet, security relationship with Pakistan

- UAE
  - Serve as a fundraising hub for Taliban and sectarian groups in South Asia
  - Is a prominent investors in Pakistan and Afghanistan
  - Is a major transit point for licit and illicit trade
  - A significant destination for migrant labor
Gulf States’ Interests, Goals, and Policies

- **Saudi Arabia:** Maintain cultural/religious ties/influence
  - Build/maintain diplomatic influence
  - Continue relationships with militaries and intel services
  - Limit/counter-balance Iranian influence

- **UAE:** Limit/counter-balance Iranian influence
  - Maintain position as regional center for banking and trade

- Bilateral ties in AFPAK reinforced by Islamic identity, solidarity, and patronage:
  - Afghans have heroic VIP status (since Anti-Soviet Jihad)
  - Pakistan’s relationship much stronger due to Nuclear WMD prestige and common foreign policy goals
Regional Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges
- Multiple competing alliances/allegiances
- Nuclear WMDs raise stakes for miscalculation
- Competing religious/sectarian interests makes the competition incredibly personal

Opportunities
- Energy and natural resources
- International attention/resources
- Ethnic ties, overlapping interests
Key Lessons

- Afghanistan remains a prize in Great Game
- Competing regional interests = aid and instability
- US goal of strong and stable Afghanistan benefits no regional player
  - Iran and Pakistan benefit from weak but stable Afghanistan
  - COIN contradicts some nations’ interests
- No regional player contributes troops

“When everyone is dead the Great Game is finished. Not before.”
--- Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (1901)
QUESTIONS?

Afghanistan-Pakistan Regional Expertise Training Program

This briefing is classified
UNCLASSIFIED

Derived from: Multiple Sources
Recommended Reading


Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia by Ahmed Rashid (Penguin, 2009)

*The Dust of Empire: The Race for Mastery in The Asian Heartland* by Karl Ernest Meyer (Public Affairs, 2004)

*The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* by Lutz Kleveman (Grove Press, 2004)

*Postmodern Imperialism: Geopolitics and the Great Games* by Eric Walberg (Clarity Press, 2001)

*The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* by Peter Hopkirk (Kodansha Globe, 1992)
## Afghanistan: Converging / Diverging Objectives

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<th>Legal Opposition</th>
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<th>Europe (EU)</th>
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**Source:** Adapted from Page 54, *Aspen European Strategy Forum “Sustainable Strategies for Afghanistan and the Region After 2014”*

- **Strong Support**
- **Marginal Support**
- **Indifference**
- **Weak Opposition**
- **Strong Opposition**

- **Indicates ideological differences between core and fringe**