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## **The Breakdown of Food Security in Taliban Ruled Afghanistan**

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### **Background**

Being known as one of the most unstable countries in the world, Afghanistan has a litany of past conflicts in its history. Afghanistan has been a field of all types of conflicts, from ones that involved internal clashes between competing groups to those that involved the outside parties. From the USSR during the Cold War to the United States in reaction to the terrorist attack<sup>1</sup>, the country has been the graveyard of the two superpowers. Now, with the US no longer involved in the country, the Taliban is now in power over Afghanistan.

Witnessing and suffering over the impacts of the conflict were commonplace for the people of Afghanistan. Throughout the conflict raging over

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<sup>1</sup> "Afghanistan War", HISTORY, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/afghanistan-war>.

the country, they would be viewed as civilians entitled to their non-combatant immunity but little do they know that they would be the chief bearer of the conflict, directly or indirectly. One of the most prominent threats they are facing is one that emanates from food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. This perennial threat that has accompanied the country throughout the conflicts is becoming more prevalent as the Taliban took over the country. Now, with some countries taking a hard stance over Afghanistan and the current development of the rampant issue, food insecurity has taken the spotlight that plagued the people of Afghanistan.

### **The Path to Taliban's Rule**

After 20 years of active US involvement in the region, as shown in its military and political presence, the US finally left the country in late August 2021 following the Taliban's advance to the capital. In a way that was shown in one of the past US foreign policy fiascos, the involvement was ended painfully similar to that of the Vietnam War. Just like in Vietnam, the US failed to counter the non-state armed group/insurgents despite its possession of high-grade military equipment and a vast network of intelligence.

Once that incident occurred, the Afghan army, previously formed and backed by the US through training or arms provision, collapsed with no unity to fend off the enemy. Similar to that of Vietnam, which is the ARVN (Army of South Vietnam) for this case, where morale was low and there wasn't enough arm to keep the fighting going or to make any remarkable progress. With those factors combined, it is no surprise that many of them either deserted, gave up, or even put up a fight that didn't manifest into anything significant<sup>3</sup>. The absence of morals was also presented in the government where there was no sufficient central control to lead the people in times of crisis to the extent of the fact that the president left the country in the face of the Taliban. With the government in

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe Chabot and Paul A. Dorosh, "Wheat Markets, Food Aid and Food Security In Afghanistan", *Food Policy* 32, no. 3 (2007): 334-353.

<sup>3</sup> aroslav Trofimov, "How The Taliban Overran The Afghan Army, Built By The U.S. Over 20 Years", *Wall Street Journal*, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghanistan-army-collapse-taliban-11628958253>.

disarray, the army in collapse, and the US nowhere to be found, the stage was set for the Taliban to construct its current government.

### **The Threats to the Food Security**

Food security, according to the UNDP Human Development Report, is a condition where both physical and economical access to basic food is ensured<sup>4</sup>. This condition is rather still very difficult to be realized in Afghanistan considering its geographical features and the obvious instability that resulted from countless past and ongoing conflicts. Even back when the US was still massively stationed there, this problem was still very visible back then. The enormous problem also serves as a testament to how even the huge resources of part of the world's superpower are not adequate to get rid of it.

With countless people of Afghanistan are now in hunger and malnutrition, it is rational to assume that efforts to deal with this issue should be on top of the list for those who are in power which in this case would refer to the new government run by the Taliban. Unfortunately, there have been accusations by many Afghans that the Taliban has been misusing all the funds they got from numerous sources. The aid was misused in the sense that it was only given to those who had assisted or supported the Taliban in the past, before the takeover. Meanwhile, those who worked under the past government and many other groups who were neutral in the past are left with no access to those aids<sup>5</sup>. In this sense, despite the Taliban being the ruler of Afghanistan in a desperate time, they also pose to be a hindrance to the people by discriminating the distribution of aid and the access to it. Hence, the condition required for food security is already jeopardized by the absence of a guarantee of access for the food itself to the mass.

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<sup>4</sup> John Baylis, Baylis Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization Of World Politics*, 6th ed. (repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Abubakar Siddique, "Afghans Accuse the Taliban of Misappropriating Foreign Aid", Gandhara RFE/RL, 2021, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-foreign-aid-misappropriation/31532541.html>.

Apart from the structural hindrance caused by the Taliban after the takeover, there also exist other threats that emanate from other sources. One of the threats can be seen as a result of its region's climate which brings long droughts and harsh winters to the area. Many people of Afghanistan have cereals as part of their diet and with how the conflict has taken a new turn and the fluctuations brought by the dry spring or long winter, food security is again at huge risk<sup>6</sup>. In certain areas, some people can live in a food-surplus area after they've struggled when being faced with drought or winter. As the conflict progressed, many people are forced to move on to the food-deficit area which will also face risks from the climate, the result was surely disastrous. The same threats to the crops, climate factors, and intensity of conflicts, are also present to the livestock. With the agriculture and livestock along with other fields in ruins, this condition would also exacerbate the malnutrition suffered by the women and children.

The means of food distribution and marketing are also in ruins now after the Taliban takeover. One thing that stood out after the takeover was the rising prices of food and fuel, important goods that the people are still in dire need of, in the market. The Afghans were subject to being sustained with international aid provided by the US or the international community. Another thing is that many of the Afghans are now jobless both as a result of US withdrawal and the collapse of the national economy. The painful reality can be clearly seen in the village of Shenshayba Bazaar where the residents there are known to only have one kidney as a result of selling one of them so that they can have food on the table and making through the days.

Foregoing the former part of the event is mainly because of the US military base's important role in providing jobs for the local residents while the latter was due to the collapse of the currency and the skyrocketing price of public goods. Now, as the institution provided by them was crumbled and being replaced, the capacity of the new authority has yet to meet the demand set by the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Clarke, "Food Security And War In Afghanistan", *Development* 43, no. 3 (2000): 113-119.

people. With many people already drowned in poverty, unemployment, and the sharp decrease of the Afghanistan currency, it provided the perfect arena in which food insecurity is present.

### **International World's Responses**

Following its prior military successes in other cities, it was finally manifested in August 2021 when the Taliban finally gained control of Afghanistan. The US who already evacuated its forces prior to the takeover responded by freezing the Afghan government reserves that are worth billions of dollars in US banks<sup>7</sup>. This drastic move done by the US government was widely criticized as it was believed that it would do more harm to the civilians of Afghanistan. By inhibiting the new government's ability to tackle ongoing issues, it is believed that they would not gain the people's trust and prevent them to stabilize their authority<sup>8</sup>. But all in all, the US took the steps it perceived necessary, such as increasing sanctions and freezing Afghan assets, to halt further development of the new government that doesn't go along with its interest.

Besides the US having conflicting interests with the Taliban, there exist those who support it like China and Pakistan. The two countries then took their actions by delivering desperately needed aid in the form of medicines, food supplies, to even Covid-19 vaccines. The aid already amounted to more than \$60 million<sup>9</sup>. The humanitarian effort done by the two countries can also be considered a political action in view of their interest in the region. China, for example, has an interest in having an access to exploit Afghanistan's energy

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<sup>7</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Protests Erupt in Afghanistan over US Freezing of Funds", VOA, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/protests-erupt-in-afghanistan-over-us-freezing-of-funds/6363340.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Hasrat, "Freeze on Afghanistan's Assets Slammed as Unfair", Pajhwok.Com, 2021, <https://pajhwok.com/2021/09/27/freeze-on-afghanistans-assets-slammed-as-unfair/>.

<sup>9</sup> Pouyan Kimiayjan, "How China Views The Taliban Takeover - Responsible Statecraft", Responsible Statecraft, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/08/24/how-china-views-the-taliban-takeover/>.

resource and overall geographical standing due to its potential as a regional connector.

The UN has been the one to actively maintain its presence in the region throughout its dynamics. Following the takeover, the food assistance branch of the UN remained there to assess the situation while at the same time assisting those in need. In a press conference, the WFP representative and country director in Afghanistan, Mary-Ellen McGroarty, explained her findings that the crisis unfolding in Afghanistan is the worst she has witnessed<sup>10</sup>. Through the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, it was shown that for October 2021, over 47 percent of the population (around 18.8 million people) were having acute food insecurity. The number is believed to increase over time along with other problems notably malnutrition which is rampant among children and women.

From those assessments, plans and specifications for aid were also made. For example, a plan that required \$200 million was made and executed to respond to the crisis. Moreover, an additional plan for 2022 that needs over \$2.8 billion was also laid out. They also actively engage with donors and other partners to gather up and deliver the desperately needed aid. Despite the signs of progress mentioned, broader participation of the international community is needed to meet the mounting demands for aid and financial support for this end<sup>11</sup>.

Recently, the UN has settled on a new resolution that would continue its presence in Afghanistan<sup>12</sup>. The new development will get the UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) to be present there to help the Afghan people in facing their mounting humanitarian and economic crisis.

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<sup>10</sup> Mary-Ellen McGroarty, *Afghanistan: Food Security - Suffering & Hunger Spiraling Out Of Control- Press Conference*, video, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FUT46sCyeQ>.

<sup>11</sup> "Afghanistan Crisis: Food Supply for Millions Could Run Out This Month", UN News, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1098972>.

<sup>12</sup> "Afghanistan: UN Security Council Votes on Resolution Securing Formal Presence in Afghanistan", Econotimes, 2022, <https://www.econotimes.com/Afghanistan-UN-Security-Council-votes-on-resolution-securing-formal-presence-in-Afghanistan-1629548>.

## **Conclusion**

The threat that is caused by the food insecurity in Afghanistan is another agenda the world would need to work on. This urgent matter must be taken into deep deliberation amongst the states and other actors of the international system, especially in deciding what and how much should be pledged to meet its end of eradication of food insecurity. Political clashes may be encountered considering the Taliban's control over the region that invites either support or contradiction but it all must be put aside for a higher cause. This may be easier said than done, but one must clearly set in mind what needs to be done.

Aside from the diverse stance of the international community, we should also consider the factors present in Afghanistan itself. Afghanistan is the only link available for the donors and other international entities that seek to deliver their aid. With the numerous reports of how the Taliban has been misusing the aid, it is no surprise that many see how grim the prospect for food security is there. On top of that, there also lies the huge amount of money, both in the form of money, food, or other aid, that would be needed to sustain the lives of the Afghans until the country reaches a stabilized phase where then development can be executed<sup>13</sup>.

Fortunately, these threats mentioned above are not something that can't be changed. Time passes and along with that changes would be brought to the subjects involved. The Taliban recently appears to be more open to making suitable changes to meet the demand of the international community, one of them being its announcement that girls are now allowed to attend schools. With a further effort to open up the route for better and bigger participation of the international community and donors, the bigger the chance for everyone involved to finally remove the "in" in the human insecurity that clouded the mass in Afghanistan.

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<sup>13</sup> Tri Truong, "Rising Food Insecurity Rates In Afghanistan", The Borgen Project, 2021, <https://borgenproject.org/food-insecurity-rates-in-afghanistan/>.

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