
THE IMPACT OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF UNITED STATES MILITARY TROOPS ON FOOD SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN IN 2021-2022

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Abstract: This study analyzes the impact of the United States' armed military invasion of Afghanistan, initiated after the 9/11 tragedy, on food security in Afghanistan during the years 2021-2022. The research employs a qualitative approach, interpreting data through a descriptive method using literature review from articles, journals, and related scientific studies. The theoretical framework integrates Hegemony Theory to examine U.S. power in Afghanistan and Food Security Theory to assess the food security situation in Afghanistan during 2021-2022. The U.S. military invasion in Afghanistan resulted in economic, food, and political instability, placing the country under significant food security threats, exacerbated by geographic challenges that hinder economic recovery. After the full military withdrawal by the U.S. in 2021, driven by a shift in foreign policy prioritizing diplomacy, alongside critiques of the U.S. occupation and the "America First" policy under Donald Trump, nearly 11 million Afghans remained in critical food insecurity. This number rose to almost 20 million by 2022. International trade conducted by Afghanistan in 2021 had no significant effect on improving the domestic economy. Therefore, the study concludes that the U.S. military withdrawal did not improve Afghanistan's food security, as underlying issues such as geographic conditions and political instability remained the primary factors affecting the country's food security situation.

Keywords: Hegemony, Food Security, United States, Afghanistan, Economy, Politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is universally recognized as a fundamental human necessity. It not only serves as a primary need for individual survival but also plays a pivotal role in achieving societal and national welfare. Food security, from a state-level perspective, is indispensable and cannot be postponed, as it is essential to the well-being of a nation's populace. Governments are obliged to ensure adequate and sustained access to food for all citizens, as a failure to do so

can lead to profound social, economic, and political consequences (Dewanti, 2018). This critical importance has been acknowledged at the international level, with food security now regarded as a fundamental human right. Consequently, global bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have been established to combat food insecurity and promote nutrition and food accessibility across the world.

The World Food Programme, founded in 1961 following a recommendation from the FAO, formally commenced operations in 1963. Initially launched as a temporary experimental body, the WFP's mandate was extended permanently in 1965, and since then, it has grown into the largest humanitarian organization focused on food assistance. Its core mission has evolved beyond merely addressing emergency food shortages to include long-term initiatives aimed at strengthening global food systems. These initiatives encompass a range of activities, from improving nutrition and gender equality to enhancing disaster risk reduction, supporting smallholder farmers, and promoting sustainable ecosystems (WFP, 2020). The WFP's work is not limited to providing food aid; it also implements educational and community empowerment programs designed to foster more resilient food systems in the long term.

In Afghanistan, the WFP has played a critical role, particularly in the context of the nation's ongoing food insecurity crisis. Since the U.S.-led military invasion in 2001, Afghanistan has faced significant disruptions in its food production and distribution systems, primarily due to conflict, natural disasters, and political instability. The U.S. invasion, initiated in response to the 9/11 attacks and aimed at dismantling terrorist networks like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, had far-reaching consequences for Afghanistan's socio-economic stability. The invasion resulted in the disruption of agricultural activities, the displacement of farmers, and the destruction of critical infrastructure, all of which exacerbated the country's pre-existing food security issues. Even after two decades of military intervention and billions of dollars in aid, Afghanistan continues to suffer from acute food insecurity, with 93% of the population now classified as food insecure (FAO, 2021; Venditi, 2021).

This food insecurity crisis is multi-faceted, with a complex interplay of factors contributing to its persistence. The prolonged conflict has severely impacted food production and distribution, particularly in areas most affected by military operations. In these regions, agricultural activities have been disrupted by fighting, and farmers have been forcibly displaced from their lands, leading to a significant reduction in food production. Moreover, the destruction of infrastructure—such as roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities—has further hindered the transport and distribution of food, isolating many rural communities from vital food resources. Additionally, access to basic services, including clean water, sanitation, and healthcare, has been severely limited, contributing to the overall deterioration of living conditions. Natural disasters, especially recurrent droughts, have further compounded these challenges, drastically reducing crop yields, particularly of wheat, Afghanistan's staple crop.

The culmination of these factors has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, characterized by widespread hunger and malnutrition. According to reports, by mid-2021, 14 million Afghans were facing severe food insecurity, a number that surged to 23 million by early 2022 (UN, 2022). This escalating crisis has placed immense pressure on both national and international actors to intervene, with organizations like the WFP and FAO playing crucial roles in delivering emergency food aid and supporting agricultural recovery efforts. However, the situation remains dire, with many families struggling to meet their daily food needs. The prolonged food crisis has also led to increased social tensions and security risks, with internal displacement becoming more prevalent as people move in search of safer, more food-secure areas.

The U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, under the Biden administration, marked a significant turning point in the country's ongoing conflict. The withdrawal, which followed the Trump administration's "America First" policy, was seen as a strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy, prioritizing domestic interests over prolonged foreign interventions. However, the consequences of this withdrawal, particularly for Afghanistan's national and food security, have been profound. The absence of U.S. military support has left Afghanistan in a precarious position, with the Taliban swiftly regaining control over much of the country. This power shift has further destabilized the already fragile political and economic systems, exacerbating food insecurity and undermining efforts to stabilize the country's agricultural sector.

The link between armed conflict and food insecurity is well established, particularly in regions like South Asia, where ongoing conflicts have significantly weakened food systems. Studies by Mughal (2020) and Akbar et al. (2020) highlight the detrimental effects of conflict on food security, noting that South Asia, including Afghanistan, remains one of the most food-insecure regions globally due to the prevalence of armed violence, economic instability, and poor governance. Afghanistan's geographical and political challenges, coupled with its long history of conflict, have created a situation where food insecurity is not merely a result of war, but a complex outcome of interrelated factors, including geography, governance, and international relations.

Given this context, this study seeks to analyze the impact of the U.S. military withdrawal on food security in Afghanistan. Specifically, it explores whether the withdrawal has directly influenced food availability and access, or if other underlying factors, such as geographic challenges, political instability, and economic conditions, play a more significant role. This research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how international military interventions and subsequent withdrawals affect food security in conflict-prone regions.

The research problem addressed in this study is to analyze the direct impact of the U.S. military withdrawal on food security in Afghanistan's conflict zones, including its effects on agricultural production, food distribution, and public access to essential food resources. This analysis also examines Afghanistan's post-withdrawal economic activities and international

trade, assessing whether these factors have mitigated or exacerbated food insecurity in the country.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative approach was employed to analyze data and interpret findings, aiming to generate meaningful insights into the complex dynamics of food security in the context of Afghanistan's socio-political landscape post-U.S. withdrawal. The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative design, which is particularly effective in capturing the nuances of social phenomena through a thorough review and analysis of relevant articles, journals, and scientific studies. This methodological choice aligns with the need to understand the multifaceted nature of food security, especially in a conflict-affected region like Afghanistan, where various external and internal factors interplay to shape the food security landscape (Babu et al., 2021; , Samim & Hu, 2020). Descriptive research, as articulated by Azwar, is instrumental in systematically analyzing and presenting facts that facilitate understanding and enable clear conclusions to be drawn. The case study approach adopted in this research allows for an in-depth investigation of the specific event of the U.S. military withdrawal and its repercussions on Afghanistan's food security. The interpretation of data is informed by secondary data sources, including international phenomena related to the U.S. withdrawal, which are examined through the lens of existing theories to elucidate their impact on food security (Mughal & Sers, 2020; , Tin et al., 2022). This approach underscores the importance of contextualizing food security within broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly in the wake of significant political changes.

The theoretical framework of this research is anchored in two pivotal theories: Hegemony Theory and Food Security Theory. Hegemony Theory, as introduced by Antonio Gramsci, elucidates the dominance of one state or social class over others through cultural, political, and economic control. In the context of Afghanistan, this theory is employed to analyze the influence exerted by the United States during its military presence and subsequent withdrawal. The U.S. exerted its hegemony not only through military force but also through economic and diplomatic measures, which significantly impacted Afghanistan's political and economic stability, thereby influencing food security (Babu & Akramov, 2020; , Hussain, 2022). The analysis explores how the withdrawal of U.S. military forces may have shifted the balance of power, affecting food production, distribution, and accessibility in Afghanistan. Food Security Theory, as defined by institutions such as the FAO and World Bank, focuses on ensuring that all individuals have consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. This theory is particularly relevant in analyzing the impact

of the U.S. military withdrawal on the four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability. The ongoing political instability, disrupted food production, and restricted access to essential resources have exacerbated food insecurity in Afghanistan, making this theoretical framework essential for understanding the current situation (Samim & Hu, 2020; , Samim et al., 2021).

By integrating these two theories, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how international interventions, particularly the U.S. military presence and subsequent withdrawal, have influenced Afghanistan's food security landscape. The implications of the U.S. withdrawal on food security are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the socio-economic fabric of Afghanistan. The withdrawal has led to a significant shift in governance and power dynamics, which has, in turn, affected agricultural productivity and food distribution networks. The Taliban's resurgence has resulted in a reconfiguration of agricultural policies and practices, which are critical for food security in a country where agriculture is the backbone of the economy (Khail & Ahmadzai, 2022; , Samim et al., 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

United States' Global Interests and the Implications on Afghanistan

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, marked a pivotal shift in U.S. foreign policy, leading to the formulation of the Global War on Terror under the Bush administration. As noted by Babu et al. (2021), the immediate U.S. response to the attacks demonstrated the country's hegemonic approach to global politics, where military intervention served as a primary tool for safeguarding national security. The U.S. leveraged its military and economic power, as described in Hegemony Theory, to establish a dominant global position. In Afghanistan, this hegemony materialized in the form of prolonged military occupation, aimed at dismantling terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

This occupation, however, also had profound socio-economic repercussions, particularly in Afghanistan's agricultural sector, which is vital to the country's food security. Samim & Hu (2020) highlighted that international interventions, such as the U.S. military presence, can disrupt traditional farming practices and destabilize local food systems. The subsequent withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021, after 20 years of occupation, intensified these challenges. The sudden power shift created a vacuum that further destabilized Afghanistan's already

fragile political and economic systems, affecting the availability, access, and stability of food in the country.

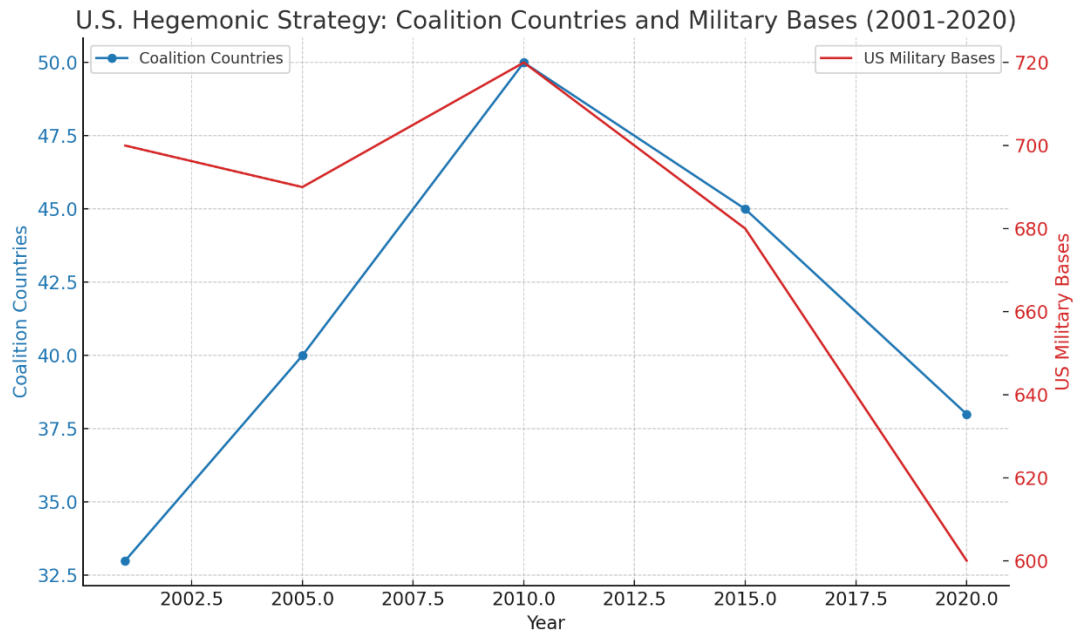


Figure 1 the U.S. hegemonic strategy and its global reach

Figure 1 illustrates the U.S. hegemonic strategy and its global reach, with particular focus on the military intervention in Afghanistan. The figure encapsulates the breadth of U.S. foreign policy post-9/11 and how it affected not only national security but also broader international dynamics.

Afghanistan's Food Security Crisis

The withdrawal of U.S. military forces in 2021 had immediate and far-reaching impacts on Afghanistan's food security, as evidenced by the surge in food insecurity rates. The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), as compiled by the World Bank, underscores a sharp increase in food poverty rates from 30% in 2007 to 70% by 2021 (World Bank, 2019). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the escalation of food insecurity in Afghanistan, emphasizing the severe impact of conflict and political instability on food availability and access.

The Food Security Theory, as defined by the FAO, emphasizes four pillars—availability, access, utilization, and stability—that are critical to ensuring consistent food security. The

collapse of Afghanistan's political structure following the U.S. withdrawal directly impacted these pillars. Disruptions in agricultural productivity, exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and economic sanctions, led to significant reductions in food availability. The Taliban's resurgence and the resultant reconfiguration of agricultural policies further destabilized the food distribution networks, making it difficult for the population to access sufficient, safe, and nutritious food (Khail & Ahmadzai, 2022).

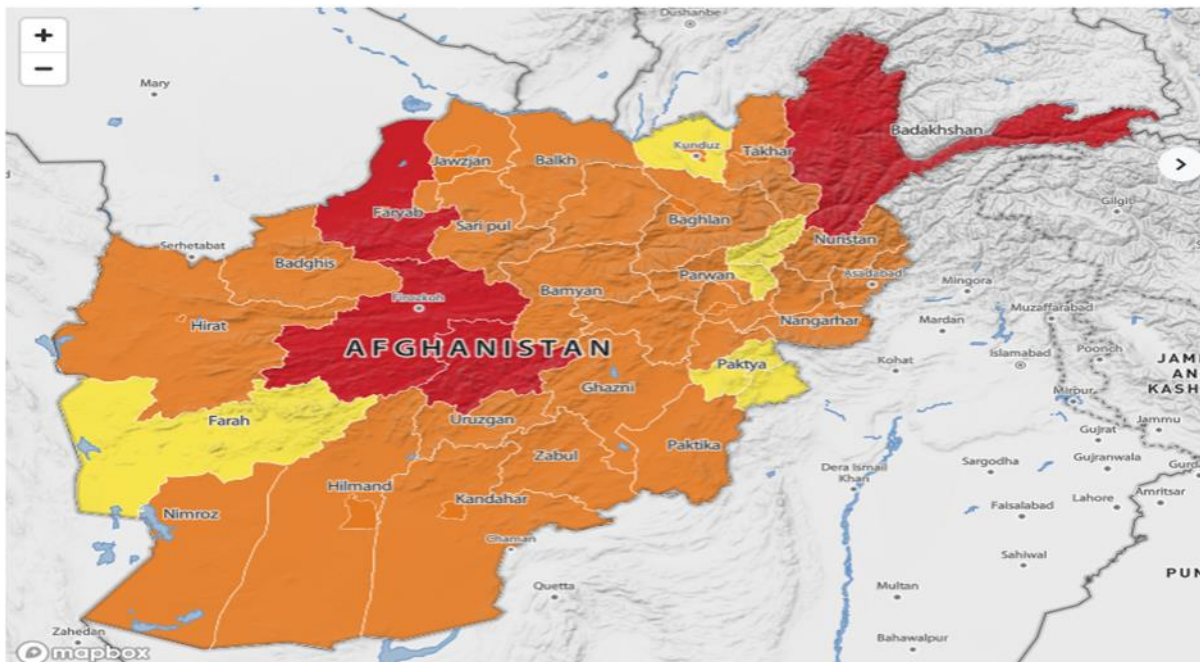


Figure 2 the escalation of food insecurity in Afghanistan

Impact of U.S. Military Withdrawal on Agricultural Productivity and Distribution

Agriculture forms the backbone of Afghanistan's economy, employing a significant portion of the population and serving as the primary source of food production. The literature, including studies by Mughal & Sers (2020), indicates that military conflict and subsequent political instability have had devastating effects on agricultural output. Figure 3 demonstrates the decline in agricultural productivity in the years following the U.S. withdrawal, illustrating how the disruption of farming activities and supply chains has exacerbated food insecurity in rural areas.

This decline is further compounded by Afghanistan's heavy reliance on imports for staple foods such as wheat. As Tin et al. (2022) note, the economic collapse triggered by the

withdrawal led to significant disruptions in trade, making it difficult for Afghanistan to secure essential food imports. The Taliban's control of agricultural policy has also contributed to the reallocation of resources away from critical food crops towards more lucrative but less essential exports, such as opium, further exacerbating food insecurity.

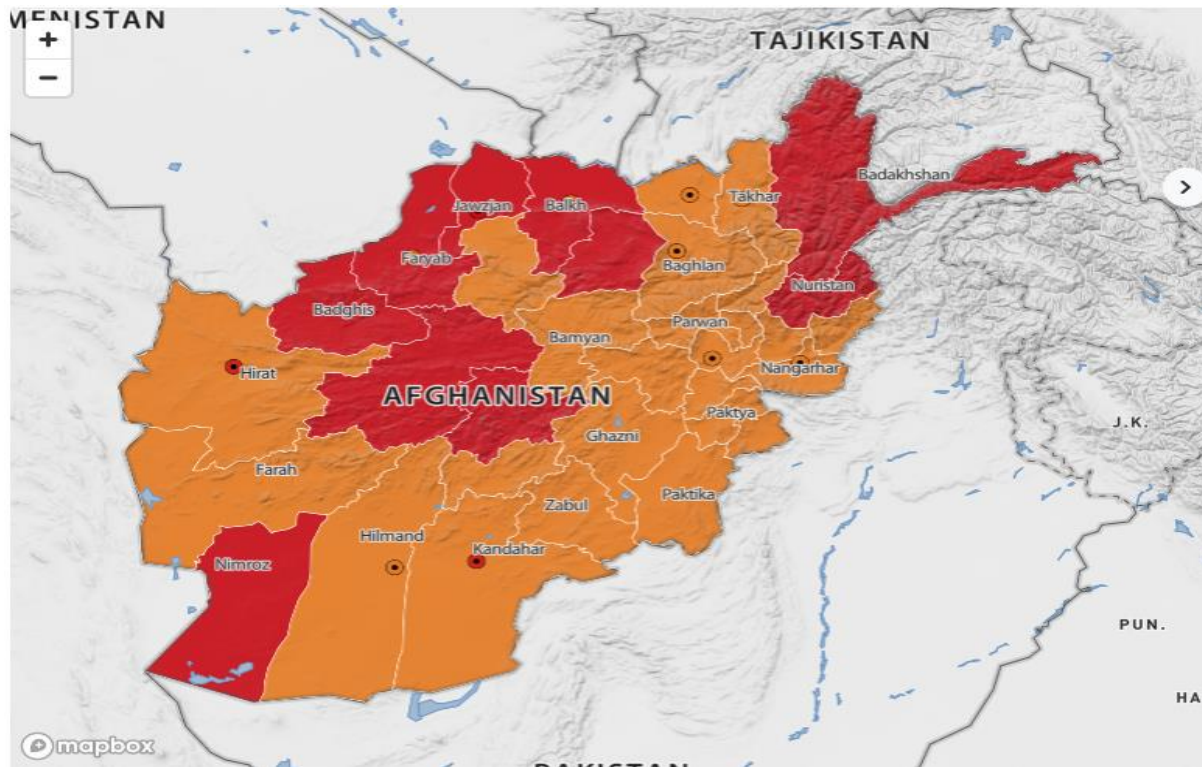


Figure 3 the decline in agricultural productivity in the years.

Food Distribution and Access Challenges

Afghanistan's challenging geography, coupled with the collapse of governance structures, has severely hindered the distribution of food throughout the country. Babu & Akramov (2020) highlighted how infrastructural limitations, worsened by decades of conflict, restrict access to remote areas, leaving millions of people without reliable food sources. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of Afghanistan's food distribution networks, illustrating the significant gaps in food availability, particularly in rural and conflict-prone regions.

Between November 2021 and March 2022, during the harsh winter season, Afghanistan's food security deteriorated further, with 22.8 million people facing acute food insecurity, as illustrated in Figure 5. This data highlights the urgent need for sustained humanitarian intervention to prevent widespread hunger and malnutrition. The situation was especially dire in rural regions, where the majority of the population relies on subsistence agriculture and has limited access to external food aid.

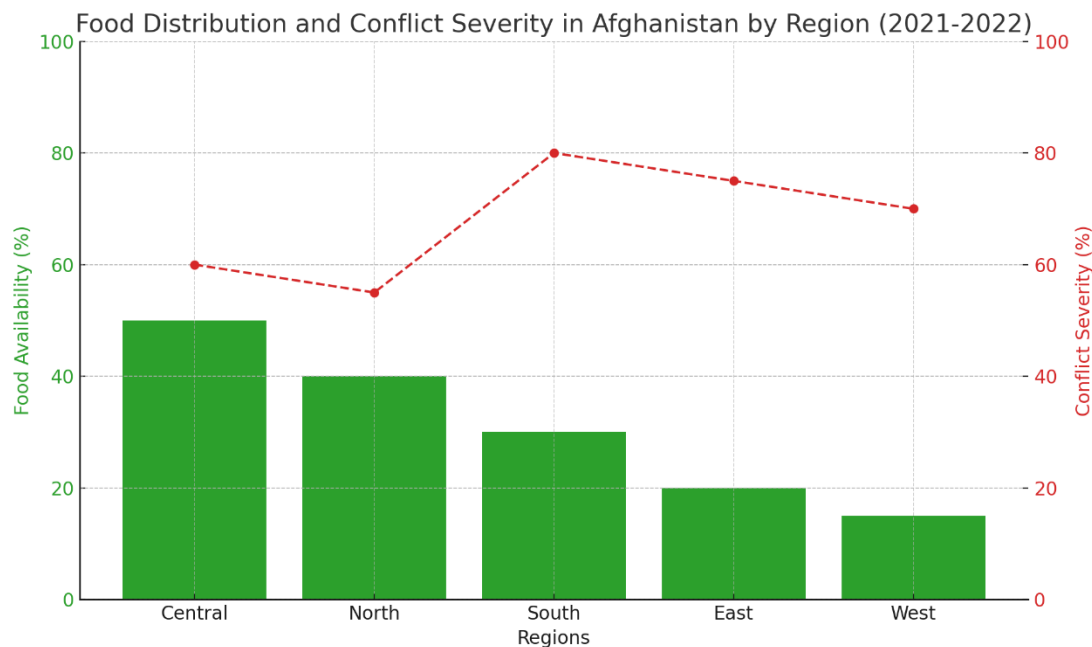


Figure 4 Afghanistan's food distribution networks

The U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 had profound effects on the country's food security, compounding the already precarious situation caused by decades of conflict, economic sanctions, and political instability. The integration of Hegemony Theory and Food Security Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how international interventions, particularly by hegemonic powers like the United States, impact the food security landscape in conflict-affected regions. The data presented, supported by Babu et al. (2021) and Samim & Hu (2020), reveals that Afghanistan's food insecurity is deeply intertwined with its socio-political context, where power shifts and agricultural disruptions have left millions vulnerable.

While humanitarian efforts have mitigated some of the worst effects, the continued presence of conflict, economic collapse, and political instability suggests that Afghanistan's food security challenges will persist unless comprehensive and sustained interventions are

implemented. The findings of this study underscore the importance of addressing not only the immediate food security needs of the population but also the broader structural issues that perpetuate vulnerability in the region.

CONCLUSION

The food crisis in Afghanistan can be attributed to two primary factors. First, the United States' foreign policy, particularly through the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which involved the military invasion and occupation of Afghanistan aimed at eradicating the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, played a significant role in creating a severe threat to Afghanistan's food security. The U.S. military mission, known as clear, hold, and build, viewed Afghanistan as a threat to both U.S. national security and global stability. Consequently, the U.S., acting as a global hegemon, intervened militarily and sought to transform Afghanistan from an authoritarian monarchy into a democracy. This intervention aligns with Hegemony Theory, which explains that hegemony is the pursuit of maximum power as a tool for exerting pressure on other nations. The U.S. military actions in Afghanistan demonstrated this hegemonic influence, but also contributed to significant disruption of food security in the region.

The second factor is the extreme weather conditions experienced in Afghanistan, including floods and droughts, which have severely affected food production and distribution, particularly in border regions. Afghanistan's challenging geography, compounded by its inadequate irrigation systems, further exacerbates the country's food insecurity. Poor irrigation infrastructure means that water resources are not effectively distributed across agricultural lands, which, in turn, damages crops during both droughts and floods. This lack of water management limits Afghanistan's access to adequate food supplies, as defined by the World Bank's 1986 concept of food security, which emphasizes that food security is achieved when all individuals have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to lead active and healthy lives.

According to international trade and food insecurity data from the World Bank, nearly 11 million Afghans faced severe food insecurity during the U.S. military withdrawal in 2021, a figure that rose to nearly 20 million in 2022. Therefore, despite the U.S. military withdrawal, the situation in Afghanistan did not improve, largely due to additional contributing factors, such as the country's challenging geography, the prolonged conflict, and the economic collapse triggered by political transition. Afghanistan has struggled to recover economically, which reinforces the conclusion that military withdrawal alone did not alleviate food insecurity. The study encourages the U.S. to continue preemptive actions against Al-Qaeda

and the Taliban, while also promoting trade liberalization through Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with neighboring countries to stimulate Afghanistan's economic recovery.

Recommendations

The most fundamental solution to addressing Afghanistan's food security challenges is the eradication of the Taliban. However, this must be approached cautiously, taking into account Afghanistan's political stability and military strength, as such actions would have profound implications for both food security and international trade. The elimination of the Taliban's influence could pave the way for humanitarian aid and development assistance to reach previously inaccessible regions. This would improve public access to food and other essential resources, in line with the food security framework employed in this study.

With greater political stability, Afghanistan could experience increased agricultural productivity, which would positively impact domestic food production. A stable government would be able to support farmers and promote investment in the agricultural sector, thereby enhancing food availability. The Taliban's eradication should be supported by the United States, through intelligence operations and the training of Afghan military personnel by U.S. forces, to improve Afghanistan's international standing. Such actions would encourage foreign investment, development assistance, and more seamless international trade.

A more stable political climate would also allow Afghanistan to expand and diversify its export markets. This could involve increasing exports of non-traditional products and developing a more diverse economic base. Additionally, improved stability in Afghanistan could foster regional economic cooperation with neighboring countries, enabling Afghanistan to participate in joint economic projects that support economic growth and trade across the region.

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