

THE IMPACT OF THE U.S. MILITARY WITHDRAWAL ON AFGHANISTAN'S FOOD SECURITY (2021-2022)

Atina Izza¹, Luthfi Wahyu Basuki²

^{1,2}International Relations Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
Universitas Nasional

atina.izza@civitas.unas.ac.id, luthfiwahyu.basuki@civitas.unas.ac.id

Abstract: The Doha Agreement, signed in 2020 between the United States and the Taliban, set the stage for the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan after nearly two decades of military involvement. This withdrawal raised significant concerns about Afghanistan's stability, particularly regarding food security, which had been a critical issue since the U.S. intervention in 2001. This study examines the impact of the U.S. withdrawal on food security during the 2021-2022 period using a mixed-methods approach. Secondary data from international reports, government publications, academic research, and news sources are analysed to provide a comprehensive view of the food security situation in Afghanistan. Quantitative data, including food security indicators from international organizations are examined alongside qualitative insights from expert analyses and reports on local conditions. The level of food insecurity in Afghanistan escalated during the 2021-2022 period. The US policy of isolation towards Afghanistan, coupled with environmental challenges such as droughts and floods, significantly contributed to the worsening situation. Limited access to international aid, along with the breakdown of local agricultural systems, exacerbated the food crisis. Although food security had been a concern in Afghanistan following the US intervention in 2001, the US withdrawal in 2021 did not improve the situation; in fact, it worsened it. The reliance on international aid, combined with the negative effects of US policies towards Afghanistan post-withdrawal and the ongoing challenges posed by climate change, has further deepened food insecurity in the country.

Keywords: Afghanistan, United States, Withdrawal, Food Security

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan began in October 2001, under the mission named Operation Enduring Freedom, following the September 11 attack. The mission aimed at dismantling the al-Qaeda network responsible for the attacks and removing the Taliban regime that had provided a haven for terrorists against the U.S. and its allies (Katzman & Thomas, 2010). From counterterrorism, the mission evolved to

nation-building as the U.S., along with its NATO allies, sought to stabilize Afghanistan through military, economic, and humanitarian means (Thomas, 2018). This included developing Afghan security forces, establishing governance institution, and economic development. However, despite all this, Afghanistan remained unstable, with frequent insurgencies staged by the Taliban and such, besides a weak central government struggling to establish control. As the war dragged on, public American support for the mission drastically declined, and U.S. leaders increasingly questioned whether an enduring peace in Afghanistan was achievable. The longest war in American history has taken thousands of lives and spent \$2.313 trillion on the war in Afghanistan from 2001-2022, leading many to question its worth and likelihood of success (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2021).

In February 2020, an agreement, known as the "Doha Agreement," between the Trump administration and the Taliban was reached in Doha, Qatar; where plans for an outline for withdrawal from Afghanistan by the U.S. and end to the two-decade-old conflict were created (Patras et al., 2022; Theros, 2023). The agreement was based on several commitments: the U.S. agreed to withdraw all troops no later than May 2021 in exchange for the Taliban making stronger efforts to reduce violence and not to support terrorist groups in Afghanistan (Bobkin, 2022). In return, the Taliban agreed to participate in peace talks with the Afghan government to achieve a political resolution and ensure that groups like al-Qaeda would not use Afghan soil to plan attacks against the U.S. and its allies. This was somewhat limited in scope, however, as the Afghan government was excluded from these negotiations (Muzaffar et al., 2020). The Taliban's refusal to negotiate directly with what they viewed as a U.S.-installed administration left the peace process on shaky ground, leading to ongoing challenges between the Afghan government and the Taliban over power-sharing, governance, and the future political framework.

As part of the Doha Agreement, the U.S. began reducing its troop levels in Afghanistan, lowering them to 8,600 within the first 135 days (United States Government Publishing Office, 2020). By the close of the year 2020, the troop levels have considerably gone down from about 100,000 during the surge in 2010 to about 2500 troops. When the Biden administration came into power in January 2021, President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. would completely withdraw in accordance with the terms of the Doha Agreement. The withdrawal date was later adjusted to August 31, 2021, to accelerate what was initially planned for September (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Biden argued that maintaining the U.S. military presence would not change the situation in Afghanistan. Biden also emphasized that it was time for Afghanistan to take responsibility for its own governance.

Starting from mid-2021, the Taliban went on an aggressive attack across Afghanistan as the U.S. started pulling out its remaining troops. Afghan security forces,

though they had been trained and supported for years by the U.S. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, had an extremely hard time holding off the Taliban advances. The 2020 Agreement in Doha between the U.S. and the Taliban set the framework for the U.S. to withdraw but also excluded the Afghan government in negotiations (Muzaffar et al., 2020). By mid-August 2021, the Taliban had reached Kabul. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country on August 15, a move in all but name signalling the fall of the Afghan government. A few days later, the Taliban took over the capital, proclaimed their victory, and brought an end to the US-backed government (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Since the Taliban seized power, Afghanistan has faced a host of troublesome challenges related to economic instability, humanitarian crises, and violations of human rights, especially those against women and minorities (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). The international community has been very reluctant to recognize the government of the Taliban and has, therefore, put a stopgap in their access to foreign aid and international markets. This worsens food security and the economic plight of millions of Afghans. Food security is a priority issue in Afghanistan, where three decades of war, economic instability, and natural conditions have left millions vulnerable to hunger and debilitating malnutrition. Indeed, even before the U.S. withdrawal, Afghanistan was among the most food-insecure nations in the world, with widespread malnutrition, low agricultural productivity, and high dependence on imported foods. Food security in Afghanistan largely depends on international aid (Bowen, 2021). This dependence on foreign sources and assistance made the country very vulnerable to external shocks, such as withdrawal of international support and the attendant political turmoil that a return of the Taliban to power had brought about.

This study tries to analyse the impact of the U.S. military withdrawal on food security in Afghanistan, using the four pillars of the IPC, namely: Availability, Access, Utilization, and Stability. Through this framework of IPC pillars, the present study will review how each dimension of food security has been impacted in the post-withdrawal scenario. The IPC framework is one of the good prisms through which to assess and classify the severity of food insecurity since it allows a more nuanced analysis of different contributing factors and their interlinkages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Security

Food is universally recognized as a fundamental human necessity, essential not only for individual survival but also for societal and national welfare. From a state-level perspective, food security is indispensable and cannot be delayed, as it is critical to the well-being of a nation's populace. Governments bear the responsibility to ensure adequate and sustained access to food for all citizens, as failure to do so can result in

profound social, economic, and political consequences (Shemyakina, 2022). The complexity of food security is underscored by its multidimensional nature, which encompasses not only the availability of food but also its accessibility, utilization, and stability over time (Béné, 2020).

Recognizing the critical importance of food security, global institutions like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have been established to combat food insecurity and promote global nutrition and food accessibility (O' Connor et al., 2017; Boliko, 2019). The FAO's 2006 Food Security Policy Brief defines food security through a framework based on four essential pillars (World Food Programme, 2006). First, food availability refers to ensuring an adequate supply of quality food, whether obtained through local production, imports, or food aid. Second, food access ensures that individuals have the resources, or entitlements, necessary to obtain the foods needed for a nutritious diet. Third, utilisation emphasizes the importance of food being used in a way that promotes nutritional well-being, including access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare, so that all physiological needs are met. Lastly, stability highlights that, for food security to be sustained, people must have consistent access to sufficient food without the risk of sudden disruptions that could compromise this access (FAO, 2008). Together, these pillars form a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing food security (Makombe, 2023).

Since the U.S.-led military invasion in 2001, Afghanistan's food production and distribution systems have been severely disrupted by conflict, natural disasters, and political instability. The U.S. invasion, initially launched in response to the 9/11 attacks to dismantle terrorist networks like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, had far-reaching consequences for Afghanistan's socio-economic stability. Agricultural activities were disrupted, farmers displaced, and key infrastructure destroyed, exacerbating the pre-existing food security challenges. According Messer & Cohen (2007), The majority of conflicts in late 20th and early 21st centuries can be characterized as food wars, which food system deliberately targeted and destroyed during conflicts, and food insecurity remain a lasting consequence of these wars.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

Food security in Afghanistan is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Even before the U.S. withdrawal, Afghanistan was one of the world's most food-insecure nations. The multifaceted food insecurity crisis in Afghanistan is deeply intertwined with ongoing conflict. Prolonged warfare has severely impacted food production and distribution, particularly in areas most affected by military operations (D'Souza & Jolliffe, 2013a). Fighting has displaced farmers and hindered agricultural activities, leading to a significant reduction in food production. Afghanistan is primarily an agricultural country; however, its agricultural productivity is limited by significant inefficiencies (practical,

allocative, and economic). Various studies have highlighted several challenges, including resource scarcity, unstable markets, insufficient crop storage, outdated farming techniques, poor management practices, low-quality seeds, high input costs, all of which negatively impact production and contribute to low agricultural output (Samim & Zhiquan, 2020). Furthermore, limited access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare has exacerbated living conditions. Recurring natural disasters, particularly droughts, have further diminished crop yields, particularly of wheat, Afghanistan's staple crop (Rafiullah, 2018).

To better understand and address food insecurity in conflict zones like Afghanistan, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) framework provides a comprehensive tool for analysing food security. In analysing food insecurity, it's crucial to understand not only the duration of the problem that people had faced but also the intensity and severity of their impact on overall food security and nutrition (Practical, 2008). Therefore the IPC framework evaluates food security levels. By utilizing this framework, governments and humanitarian organizations can make informed decisions to improve food security and guide interventions in conflict-prone regions like Afghanistan.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) offers a standardized scale to assess the severity and extent of food insecurity and acute malnutrition. It provides a reliable and comparable scale to help decision-makers understand the severity and scope of food insecurity, guiding targeted responses. The IPC framework has different classifications, including acute food insecurity, chronic food insecurity, and acute malnutrition.

1. **Acute Food Insecurity:** This scale assesses short-term or sudden disruptions in food access or availability. It categorizes populations based on the immediate risk to life and livelihoods, which may be caused by crises like conflicts, natural disasters, or economic shocks. Acute food insecurity ranges from Phase 1 (minimal) to Phase 5 (catastrophe or famine). The highest phases indicate critical levels of hunger, where immediate interventions are essential to prevent widespread malnutrition and loss of life.

Phase name and description	Phase 1 None/Minimal	Phase 2 Stressed	Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine
	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households either: • Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or • Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either: • Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or • Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For Famine Classification, an area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.)
Priority response objectives	Action required to build resilience and for disaster risk reduction	Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods	Urgent action required to: Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps		
			Save lives and livelihoods		Revert/prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods

Figure 1: The Acute Food Insecurity Scale (FAO, n.d.)

2. **Chronic Food Insecurity:** This scale assesses prolonged or ongoing food insecurity, typically caused by structural problems like poverty, low agricultural output, and inadequate access to essential services. Chronic food insecurity is categorized from Level 1 (mild) to Level 4 (severe). Populations with chronic food insecurity experience consistent or recurring challenges in meeting their food needs, leading to cumulative effects on health, economic stability, and development.

Chronic food insecurity level name and description	Level 1 No/Minimal Chronic Food Insecurity	Level 2 Mild Chronic Food Insecurity	Level 3 Moderate Chronic Food Insecurity	Level 4 Severe Chronic Food Insecurity
	In a common year, households are continuously able to access and consume a diet of acceptable quantity and quality for an active and healthy life. Household livelihoods are sustainable and resilient to shocks, households are not likely to have stunted children.	In a common year, households are able to access a diet of adequate quantity but do not always consume a diet of adequate quality. Household livelihoods are borderline sustainable, and resilience to shocks is limited, households are not likely to have stunted children.	In a common year, households have ongoing mild deficits in food quantity and/or seasonal food quantity deficits for 2 to 4 months of the year, and consistently do not consume a diet of adequate quality, household livelihoods are marginally sustainable, and their resilience to shocks is very limited, households are likely to have moderately stunted children.	In a common year, households have seasonal deficits in quantity of food for more than 4 months of the year and consistently do not consume a diet of adequate quality, household livelihoods are very marginal and are not resilient, households are likely to have severely stunted children.
Key Implications for response planning	Monitor the food security situation, invest in disaster risk reduction, and reinforce livelihoods as needed.	Monitor the food security situation, invest in disaster risk reduction, and protect and strengthen livelihoods as needed. Address underlying factors to increase the quality of food consumption.	Urgent Action Required to: Address underlying factors to increase the quality and quantity of food consumption and decrease chronic malnutrition. Consider safety net programmes as needed.	
			Implement safety net programmes to improve the quality and quantity of food consumption. Implement complementary programmes to address underlying factors to substantially decrease food insecurity and chronic malnutrition.	

Figure 2: The Chronic Food Insecurity Scale (FAO, n.d.)

3. **Acute Malnutrition:** This scale focuses on assessing the severity of malnutrition in a population, particularly in children and vulnerable groups. Acute malnutrition is categorized from Phase 1 (acceptable) to Phase 5 (extremely critical), based on levels of wasting, underweight, and other nutrition indicators. High levels of acute malnutrition signal a critical public health issue, often accompanying severe food insecurity, requiring urgent nutrition and healthcare interventions.

Phase name and description	Phase 1 Acceptable	Phase 2 Alert	Phase 3 Serious	Phase 4 Critical	Phase 5 Extremely Critical
	Less than 5% of children are acutely malnourished.	5-9.9% of children are acutely malnourished.	10-14.9% of children are acutely malnourished.	15-29.9% of children are acutely malnourished. The mortality and morbidity levels are elevated or increasing. Individual food consumption is likely to be compromised.	30% or more children are acutely malnourished. Widespread morbidity and/or very large individual food consumption gaps are likely evident.
	The situation is progressively deteriorating, with increasing levels of acute malnutrition. Morbidity levels and/or individual food consumption gaps are likely to increase with increasing levels of acute malnutrition.				
Priority response objective to decrease acute malnutrition and to prevent related mortality. ²	Maintain the low prevalence of acute malnutrition.	Strengthen existing response capacity and resilience. Address contributing factors to acute malnutrition. Monitor conditions and plan response as required.	Urgently reduce acute malnutrition levels through →		
			Scaling up of treatment and prevention of affected populations.	Significant scale-up and intensification of treatment and protection activities to reach additional population affected.	Addressing widespread acute malnutrition and disease epidemics by all means.

Figure 3: The Acute Malnutrition Scale (FAO, n.d.)

The IPC scales help humanitarian organizations, governments, and other stakeholders assess the needs of populations affected by food insecurity and malnutrition and prioritize interventions accordingly. Therefore using IPC we also can analyse the impact of US withdrawal to Afghanistan's food security in 2021 - 2022, by comparing Afghan's food security before and after US withdraw from Afghanistan.

METHOD

This research aims to investigate the consequence of U.S. withdrawal on food security in Afghanistan during 2021-2022 using a mixed-methods approach. A mixed-method research combines qualitative and quantitative (Halcom & Hickman, 2015). Qualitative analysis is conducted through thematic analysis of the secondary literature. Reports, media articles, and interviews cited in these documents provide insights into how the U.S. withdrawal affected agricultural practices, local food distribution systems, and the broader socioeconomic environment. Key themes include the disruption of food supply chains, the impact of the withdrawal on local governance, and changes in humanitarian aid distribution. Additionally, media articles and news reports are analysed to understand public perceptions and narratives surrounding food insecurity during the period.

Primary data collection is not possible for several reasons; hence, this study will depend on secondary data that is collected from academic journals, various international organizations reports, government documents, media articles, and news outlets. In this mixed-methods design, the quantitative data analysis will be combined with the qualitative insights in describing the food security scenario in Afghanistan about the period mentioned above. Data for this study draws from a wide range of secondary

sources, including peer-reviewed journals and reports from the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme, and other humanitarian organizations working in Afghanistan. These organizations have published data on food insecurity, economic conditions, and agricultural disruptions in the region. In addition to institutional reports, the study incorporates media articles and news reports that discuss the effects of the U.S. withdrawal on food systems and local communities. These sources provide both statistical data and qualitative accounts of how the withdrawal influenced food security on the ground.

The literature review focuses on three main areas: 1) food security conditions in Afghanistan before the withdrawal, 2) the immediate effects of the U.S. withdrawal, and 3) changes in food security indicators and the role of humanitarian aid after the withdrawal. These topics are examined through an in-depth analysis of reports and studies published between 2021 and 2023 to ensure the research incorporates the latest available information.

The study employs a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse the data. On the quantitative side, secondary data on food security indicators, such as availability, access, utilization, and stability, are examined. This information, gathered from organizations like the WFP, FAO, and IPC, includes statistical metrics on food insecurity, economic difficulties, and agricultural production patterns. Whereas descriptive statistics are utilized to compare conditions before and after the U.S. withdrawal, emphasizing notable changes in food security levels.

Mixed-methods research helps provide a better understanding of the topic by capturing details that might be missed with just one approach when we only use qualitative or quantitative (Caruth, 2013). The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allows for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the U.S. withdrawal. Quantitative data, such as food insecurity statistics, will be contextualized through qualitative insights, including reports on the ground, expert analyses, and first-hand accounts from affected individuals. This combination helps to identify both measurable changes in food security and the broader socio-political factors that contributed to these changes.

While the use of secondary data offers valuable insights, this study is limited by the availability and reliability of existing data, as highlighted in secondary research literature (Johnston, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Many sources may present food security indicators with varying levels of detail or reliability, and some regions may lack comprehensive data due to ongoing instability (Babbie, 2020). Moreover, relying on literature from international organizations and media outlets introduces potential bias, as the perspectives of local Afghan communities are underrepresented (Johnston, 2017). Despite these limitations, this mixed-methods approach enables the study to draw conclusions about the broader trends in food security in Afghanistan during the U.S.

withdrawal, offering insights that would be difficult to achieve through a purely quantitative or qualitative approach alone.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

In August 2021, the U.S. military completed its withdrawal, faster than US first original plan on 11 September 2021. This is marking the end of an era and leaving Afghanistan to face a complex set of challenges on its own. The withdrawal triggered a cascade of immediate impacts: heightened security concerns as the Taliban swiftly regained control and overran the country on 15 August 2021 (Theros, 2023). This transition has significantly affected Afghanistan's food security, leaving millions of people vulnerable in a country already grappling with widespread poverty and limited resources. The collapse of the US-backed government and the rise of the Taliban in Kabul has left America looking for ways to protect its interest in the regions (Miller, 2022).

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the U.S. government cut all non-humanitarian foreign aid, closing the US Embassy, and froze approximately \$7 - \$10 billions of Afghan central bank assets held in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (Miller, 2022; Essar et al., 2022). This action, taken out of security and humanitarian concerns, aimed to prevent the Taliban from accessing these funds, as the group had regained control of Afghanistan. With the Taliban designated as a sanctioned entity, the U.S. and its allies were reluctant to allow resources that could strengthen the regime, especially given concerns about human rights abuses and potential connections to terrorist organizations (Essar et al., 2022). However, the US policy of isolation towards Afghanistan under the Taliban has hurt the Afghan people more than it could have hurt the Taliban.

The freeze of Afghan's assets by the US had profound implications for Afghanistan's economy and food security (Essar et al., 2022). Without access to foreign reserves, Afghanistan's currency sharply devalued, driving up prices for essential goods, especially the cost of food and fuel, lead to humanitarian crisis (Najafizada, 2021). The lack of funds caused liquidity problems in banks, limited public-sector payments, and disrupted businesses, leaving many Afghans jobless and unable to afford basic needs. With high inflation and economic collapse, food insecurity skyrocketed, placing millions at risk of hunger and malnutrition. As a country that is highly dependent on imports and as one of the world's most dependent on world aid funds, Afghanistan has experienced economic chaos due to the asset freeze. It brings humanitarian crisis where access to food and essential resources became increasingly limited for vulnerable populations (Essar et al., 2022).

The relation between the US and Taliban remains very tense after US withdrawal due to Taliban's non-commitment to the Doha agreement (Shahnan & Hussein, 2024). In July 2022, Al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a drone strike under US

operation which was acknowledged as first American operation after its withdrawal in 2021. The killing of Al-Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, drew global attention because it indicated that the Taliban still had ties to Islamist groups (Shahnan & Hussein, 2024). Another Taliban's behaviour that contradicts the Doha agreement, such as not creating an inclusive government for women, has given the United States reason to stop humanitarian aid to Afghanistan under the Taliban. Political and economic globalization has left the Afghan people suffering from a dire humanitarian crisis that continues to be exacerbated by events, including the recent earthquake, floods, and drought after withdrawal (Essar et al., 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Climate change is a big problem for Afghanistan, but it often gets less attention because people focus more on conflict and security issues. Since Afghanistan relies heavily on farming, changes in the climate and local environment directly affect people's lives. In recent years, the country has seen rising temperatures, longer dry periods, more droughts, and an increase in severe weather and natural disasters (Gautam, 2023).

Afghanistan's Humanitarian crisis after US withdrawal in 2021 was severe. A collapse in economy brought almost all Afghanistan's population into poverty. The UNDP report also warned that food security was "deteriorating sharply" due to falling production, rising prices and import constraints. According to data provided by the Kabul Retailers Association, the prices of staples, rice, cooking oil, and flour increased by 30% from the moment Taliban took over power (Najafizada, 2021). An estimated 18.9 million people in Afghanistan, or 47 percent of the analysis population, were seen to be at levels of acute food-insecurity severe enough to meet the classification criterion of IPC Phase 3 or worse during the post-harvest period of September-October 2021, almost 30 percent more than 14.5 million people seen at such levels of food insecurity during the same period of 2020. According to the recently published report called The Afghanistan Acute Food Insecurity Situation September-October 2021 Report, this crisis is attributed to a severe drought affecting agriculture and livestock and increased conflict in Afghanistan that has collapsed public service delivery and livelihood systems. There is also severe economic downturn after the US froze US\$9.5 billion Afghan assets, causing very steep rise in food prices. According to the Afghanistan Acute Food Insecurity Situation September – October 2021 Report, following the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the country has reached record levels of food insecurity, with close to 19 million people facing severe food insecurity estimated to be at 6.8 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), while 11.9 million people are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

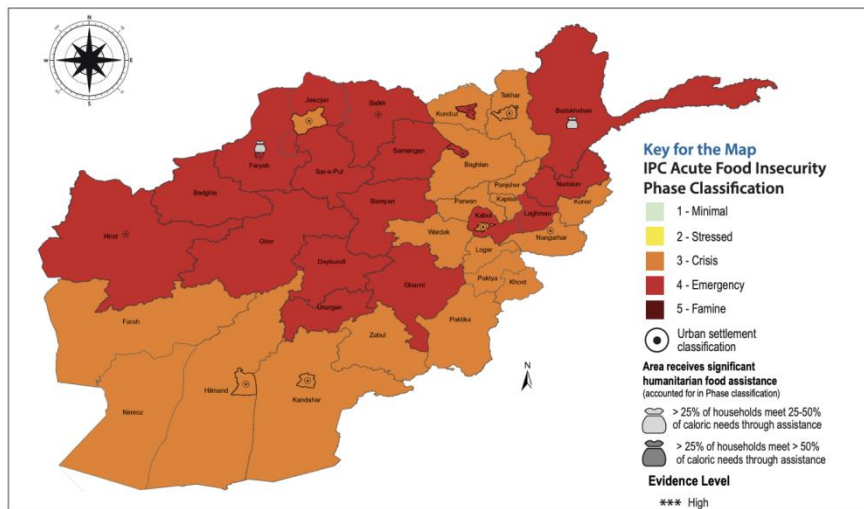


Figure 3. Afghanistan Acute Food Insecurity Situation September – October 2021
 (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2021)

Food availability in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal was severely impacted especially due to the freezing of Afghan's assets by the US, causing currency depreciation and price increases for necessities like cooking oil and wheat flour (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2021). Additionally these problems were made worse by drought which affected the communities who depended on rain-fed livestock and agriculture. A decline in employment, particularly after Taliban takeover, also contribute to the economy crisis as many people losing their jobs. According to the report from Afghanistan Food Security & Agriculture Cluster 2021, 95% of the population reported income reduction, of which 76% experienced a high decrease, standing at 83% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas compared to the previous year. Reduced job opportunities were the main drivers of such income reduction. It was confirmed that as WFP reported, hunger in Afghanistan surged significantly because the rates of inadequate food consumption have gone up to 93%, which were 13 percent higher than the ones before US exit (World Food Programme, 2021).

Market access in both Afghanistan's rural and urban was significantly impacted by the decline in economy activity and the security concerns following the US exit. The economy crisis is severely restricting Afghan's families to access food. Sudden price increase in food commodities impacting the purchasing power of many households in Afghanistan. Not only that. the high number of unemployment has contributed to the household income which also impacting the purchasing power. However, low incomes and high unemployment rates were not the only factors that reduced the access of many Afghan households to food; other household groups with income could also not access cash due to banking restrictions on cash withdrawals (Integrated Food Security Phase

Classification, 2021). According to World Food Programme (2021), challenges with market access in August 2021 rose from 18.8 percent to 23.4 percent due to security concerns, posing a significant problem for the 97 percent of Afghans who rely on markets to purchase their food.

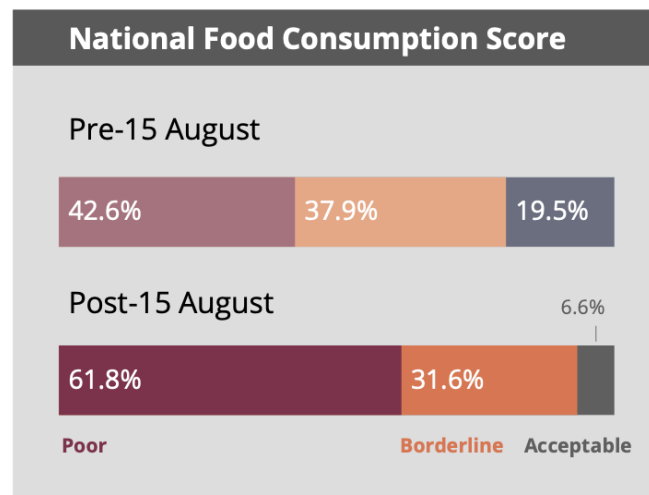


Figure 4. National Food Consumption Score before and after August 15, 2021 (World Food Programme, 2021).

The ability of the population to utilize food effectively, another key pillar of the IPC, was also negatively affected. Years of conflict had damaged public health services and clean water supplies, contributing to poor nutrition and health outcomes. Without adequate infrastructure to support food storage and sanitation, the population's capacity to make use of available food diminished, increasing levels of malnutrition, particularly among children and vulnerable groups (Samim et al., 2021). After August 15 when Taliban took control, some healthcare professionals fled the country and many have stopped working because not being paid in three months (Taylor, 2021). According to World Food Programme (2021), around 67% households reported for not receiving healthcare due to financial constraints, 12% due to hospital closure, and 10% for long distance to hospital. Furthermore, many urban and rural households lack access to clean water due to the economic collapse that followed withdrawal, which exacerbates the risk of sickness and hunger. Under the Taliban, lack of family planning and cultural norms frequently cause girls and young moms to be less nourished, which exacerbates their health issues and affects families' capacity to maintain adequate nutrition and sanitation, which in turn exacerbates food consumption in these groups.

The U.S. withdrawal and its policy to freeze Afghan's assets has destabilized Afghanistan's political and economic systems, which in turn affected the overall stability of the food system. According to the IPC framework, food stability is essential for ensuring

consistent access to food over time, and this was severely undermined in Afghanistan. In countries affected by conflict, food insecurity can become a significant problem as food production and distribution systems are disrupted, and providing emergency food aid becomes difficult. Additionally, economic shocks like sudden increases in food prices due to US policy of isolation can worsen the situation for populations already at risk (D'Souza & Jolliffe, 2013b). This instability in governance and agricultural support has created uncertainty in food supply, worsening long-term food security prospects. Even before the withdrawal, Afghanistan has relied heavily on international development assistance to prevent a complete food crisis. From 2002 until 2021, the U.S. contributed over \$17 billion in humanitarian assistance for critical needs like food, water, and healthcare to the Afghan government (Thomas & Margesson, 2022). Despite this aid, access to food remains unreliable for many, particularly given ongoing sanctions on the Taliban that complicate Afghanistan's ability to secure stable financial transactions for food imports. For number of congress member in the US, continuing the humanitarian aid to Afghanistan under the Taliban, could be interpreted as supporting Taliban (Thomas & Margesson, 2022). Consequently, Afghanistan, a country that has been enduring a food crisis since the US entry in the year 2001, but this situation has been gravely worsened by a decision of the Biden administration to freeze Afghanistan's financial assets following the retreat of US military forces (Hussain, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Food security in Afghanistan is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Even before the U.S. withdrawal, Afghanistan was one of the world's most food-insecure nations, with ongoing conflict, economic challenges, and dependence on foreign aid limiting access to adequate food. The abrupt shift in governance and the subsequent economic shocks, including currency devaluation and inflation, have exacerbated these challenges, further straining the ability of households to meet basic food needs. Additionally, the disruption of humanitarian aid delivery due to insecurity and political restrictions has worsened conditions, particularly for already vulnerable groups like displaced populations, women, and children.

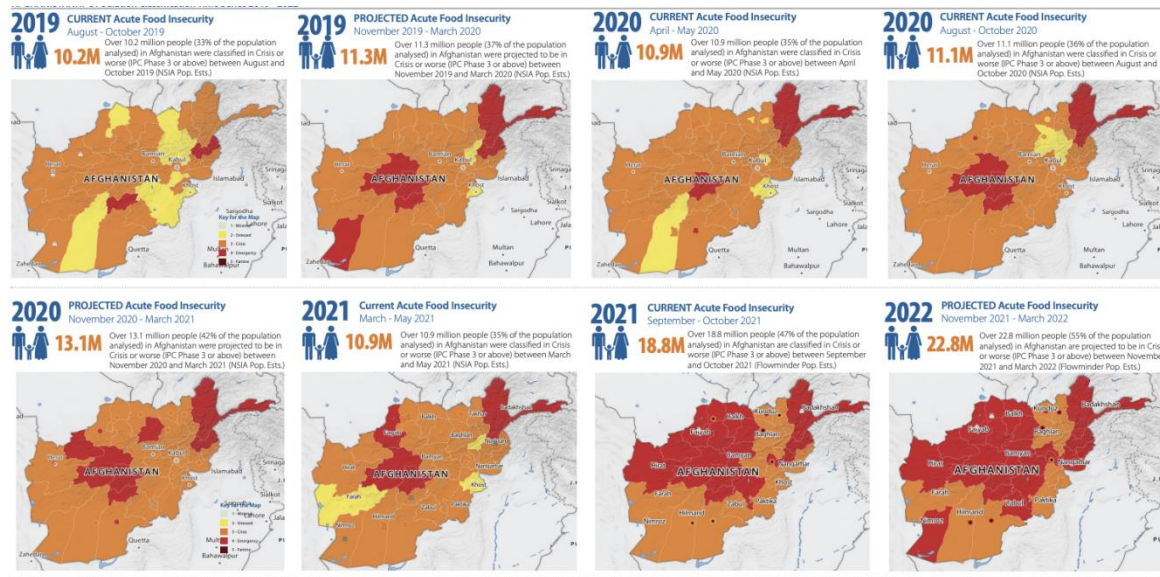


Figure 5. Afghanistan IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification Time Series 2019 – 2022 (IPC Global Partners, 2021).

According to IPC Global Partners, 2021, for instance, the number of people in Afghanistan classed in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or above, meaning IPC phase 4 and 5 for the years 2021-2022, has significantly increased compared to the year 2019-2021 before the US withdrawal. While food security has become an issue before US exit from Afghanistan, the level of acute food insecurity almost doubled in 2021. Between March and May 2021, more than 10.9 million people were classified in IPC phase 3 or above, while from September to October 2021-one month after the US withdrawal-the number of people classified in IPC 3 or above reached 18.8 million. Owing to political and economic instability after the Taliban takeover in mid-August 2021, it was reported by Miller in 2022 that this year the projected level of acute food insecurity is higher, with approximately 22.8 million people likely to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Global Partners, 2021; Miller, 2022). The level of food security was projected higher, because the US do not recognised Afghanistan under Taliban; therefore US and its allies stop international aid to Afghanistan and freeze Afghan's assets. According to World Food Programme (2022) in WFP Afghanistan Country Brief December 2022, with 28.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, Afghanistan is one of the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Years of conflict, intense climate-related events, and a deep economic downturn that marked by high unemployment, limited cash availability, and increasing food costs, have driven millions into poverty. US policies toward Afghanistan after its withdrawal has impact Afghanistan food security. All four pillar of food security (food availability, food access, utilisation, and stability) in Afghanistan are all affected due to US policies after the withdrawal.

CONCLUSION

The food crisis in Afghanistan can best be contextualized from an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification framework, emphasizing the critical pillars of food availability, access, utilization, and stability. The withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021 dramatically had adverse impacts on Afghanistan's food security, deepening the already seasoned vulnerabilities from decades of war and political turmoil. The withdrawal resulted in disrupted agricultural productivity and food distribution networks, which further reduced food availability and access due to widespread occurrences in rural areas as well as conflict areas.

Governance structure collapse after withdrawal further devastated the already fragile food systems, especially with the freezing of Afghan assets and isolation policy by the US, which left Afghanistan helpless and unable to manage the distribution of food and agricultural resources within the country appropriately. The power vacuum that has resulted has led to not only a shift in agricultural policies but also hampered the ability of the country to stabilize supply chains related to food. Thus, millions of Afghans have continued to face acute food insecurity. Between 2021 and 2022, 22.8 million people were found to be food insecure.

Alongside political instability, severe weather events like droughts and floods have worsened food security challenges by destroying crops and reducing food production even further. Climate change is a serious issue for Afghanistan, but it is often overlooked because most attention is directed toward conflict and security matters. Afghanistan's inadequate water management and irrigation infrastructure have exacerbated the impact of these environmental shocks, reducing agricultural output and impairing the country's ability to ensure food stability. The findings of this study, grounded in the IPC framework, demonstrate that addressing Afghanistan's food security crisis requires a comprehensive approach that not only targets immediate food shortages but also strengthens agricultural systems and stabilizes governance. Simply focusing on military solutions or political transitions will not be sufficient to alleviate the food insecurity in the region.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, triggered by the U.S. withdrawal and the ensuing isolation policy targeting the Taliban-led government, has largely affected Afghan civilians rather than the Taliban authorities. The US policy of isolation which originally designed to pressure the Taliban into adopting more moderate policies or sharing governance, has resulted in serious economic and humanitarian hardships, such as widespread food shortages, high unemployment, and limited access to healthcare and education. As a result, Afghanistan, which has been facing a food crisis since the US intervention in 2001, has seen the situation worsen due to the Biden administration's decision to freeze the country's financial assets after the withdrawal of US military forces.

To respond to Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis after the U.S. withdrawal and the ensuing isolation policy, the U.S. could take a more adaptable approach that combines focused pressure on the Taliban with direct assistance to Afghan civilians. This could involve adjusting sanctions to reduce their economic impact on the population, possibly unfreezing certain assets with strict oversight for humanitarian relief, and enhancing support for international aid organizations to broaden their efforts in crucial areas like food security and healthcare. The U.S. could also engage in limited, humanitarian-focused dialogue with the Taliban and collaborate with regional partners like Qatar and Pakistan to improve aid delivery and promote stability. Supporting community-led development programs, such as agricultural support and local job-creation initiatives, could reduce reliance on aid while building economic resilience. Additionally, the U.S. could establish clear benchmarks for Taliban engagement that focus on human rights improvements and minority protections, adopting a pragmatic, humanitarian-centered stance that addresses the needs of Afghan civilians over geopolitical objectives. Finally, regional stability could be promoted by cooperating with neighbouring countries to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a base for extremist groups, thereby supporting long-term peace and security in the region.

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