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Afghanistan, Factor 17: Good Governance

Structures of government are established and contested constantly as corruption, debt, quests for power or war can cause a collapse and construction of new control. Political instability has persisted in Afghanistan for several centuries. Britain, in the 1800s, gained control of Afghanistan territory and established a Pashtun monarchy. Pashtuns are the main ethnic group that occupies Afghanistan, often referred to as the “original” Afghans. This weak monarchy failed to modernize and assert dominating control over the country and collapsed in 1973.

A power struggle for sovereignty of Afghanistan resulted in guerilla wars that pitted several contesting parties until the Taliban; a fundamentalist group composed mostly of ethnic Pashtuns, gained control of the country in 1996 and introduced radical Islamic ideals (ssrn). The Taliban were removed from power in 2001 by US forces and a new constitution was created, however, Taliban control over Afghanistan during the past 14 years has not dissipated (pub.naz). Several districts in Afghanistan are openly controlled and administered by Taliban rule, and the amount of territory under Taliban control has increased since 2009 (nytimes). The transition of governance over the years and the fight for control of Afghanistan has led to an unstable political and economic system for the country.

1. Typical Subsistence Farming Family

Around 73% of Afghans live in rural areas in small villages composed of around 400 people. According to Household Listing Data, the average household has 6.3 people. Women in Afghanistan will marry at around sixteen years of age and have approximately five children (ciafactbook). In rural areas, most Afghan families survive on a diet of meat and rice dishes. Due to the prevalence of herding in the arid lands, dairy products are also found in most meals. When available, fruits and vegetables are added for increased variety (uwf).

Afghanistan is an underdeveloped country with a high fertility rate (5.43), high mortality rate (14.2 per 1000 people), and low life expectancies (males, 61; females, 62) (kff) compared to other nations. There are several diseases prevalent in the country such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, malaria, rabies, and typhoid fever. Physicians are rare (the United States has over ten times the number of physicians per capita) and the hospitals (144 in total) where most physicians work are mostly found in larger urban areas (ucdavis).

Only 17% of children in Afghanistan live in villages that include a primary school, one out of every four children must travel over five kilometers to reach a school building (ucdavis). Males receive far superior educational opportunities than women, often going to an extra four years of school. Only 38% of the total population is literate, however, 52% of males are literate and only 24% of females are literate (ciafactbook). This discrepancy is a result of harsh Taliban principles that restricted women from pursuing educational opportunities, and extreme punishments for women that fought for their right to education such as Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in 2012 for advocating women’s rights and education.

2. Farm Size and Information

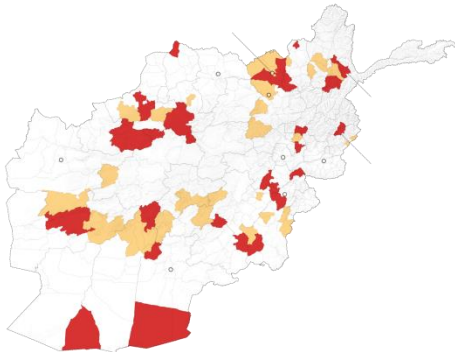
Most subsistence farms in rural areas produce subsistence crops such as wheat, maize, and corn or fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Animal products such as milk, butter, yogurt, and eggs are widely produced as livestock are a large part of farms in Afghanistan. These animals are also used for their raw materials (wool, hides, hair, and dung) and their labor for increased income and aid in farming. Land is unequally

distributed in Afghanistan; most small landholders control around 3.24 hectares (around 8 acres). Families with small areas of land have extreme difficulty living off of their agricultural production and have to participate in off-farm wage generating activities to increase their living wages. In Afghanistan, 65 percent of farming families rely on outside incomes to provide for themselves (cropwatch).

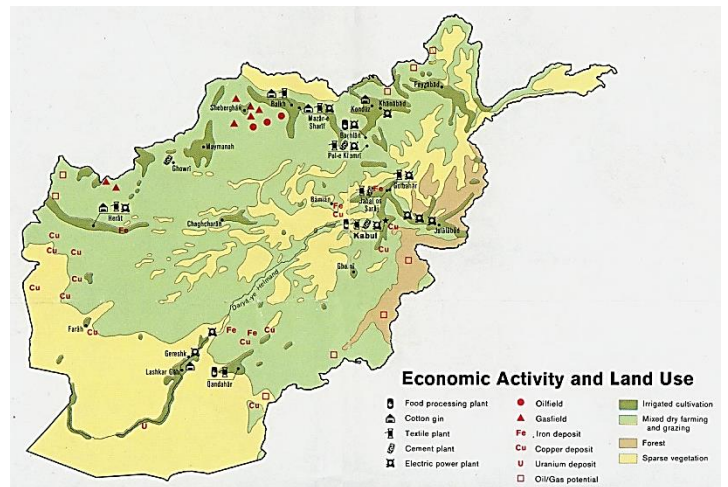
Most of these small farms have little to no irrigation using poorly maintained qanat systems (traditional mazes of pipes that secure water for human use) and rivers for over half of irrigation needs in Afghanistan. One of the most widespread crops, opium, is cultivated for export to be turned into the illegal drug heroin. This crop does not provide food for families, instead providing income for many farmers in the area to purchase food products. Opium is valued at over 4,000 dollars per hectare, contrasted with other staple crops in the area such as wheat, which is only valued around 300 dollars per hectare (iar).

3. Barriers in Afghanistan's Cultivation

Afghanistan's climate and geography hinders the cultivation of certain crops and the transportation of products around the country. Most of the country experiences a dry continental climate resulting in little rainfall. Higher elevations in the Hindu Kush mountain range, located in the northeastern corner of Afghanistan, receive more precipitation (areu.org). Only around 12% of the country's land receives sufficient rainfall and is used to cultivate crops.



Key: red=Taliban control
 Orange=contested territory
 (Image by: New York Times)



Key: dark=irrigated cultivation
 Light=sparse vegetation and farming
 (Image by: The University of Texas)

In these areas, informal irrigation sources are used by 90% of the country's farms and change year to year due to climatic conditions. Most of these irrigation sources use surface water available from streams and rivers near farm land. Few sources of irrigation come from groundwater sources such as wells and aquifers, as these are often too expensive to construct in poor rural villages. Formal irrigation is mostly provided and maintained by the national government, however, due to political instability there has been a decrease in federal upkeep to these irrigation sources, decreasing their productivity and usefulness. Without proper irrigation sources, crops that require larger amounts of water to be cultivated such as wheat, maize, and corn; are unstable sources of income for rural farmers as the climate varies and lack of rain can ruin an entire year's crop.

Only 24% of the rural population has access to safe drinking water, despite the fact that Afghanistan only utilizes one third of its water resources (new-ag). When farmers do produce crops, they struggle to

transport these crops to city centers in order to sell their products for wages. There are few roads throughout Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush Mountains create a barrier that separates several areas of the country.

The Hindu Kush Mountains also facilitates illegal opium trade which decreases food security in the country. Afghanistan is one of the leading producers of opium (85% of the world's supply), a crop that is mainly used to produce the illegal drug heroin. Opium cultivation can increase a farmer's income around ten times compared to other crops and around 1.7 million farmers in Afghanistan are currently dependent upon producing opium for sale (new-ag). This opium is almost entirely exported to other countries, reducing the production of food products that could be used to feed Afghanistan's population. Due to this massive export crop, Afghanistan imports are largely used to import food to the country from other areas, accumulating a cost of 12.19 billion dollars a year. In contrast, only 2 billion dollars of products are being exported from the country, as most transactions of opium occur illegally (ciafactbook).

War and turmoil has been a constant obstacle to peace and security in Afghanistan for the last three decades. Afghanistan's landlocked position between feuding Middle Eastern countries has introduced increased poverty, discrimination, and low security in the country. The spread of war and conflicts over the land has also disrupted the Afghan way of life, displacing people from their homes and decreasing the land that nomads and herders can travel safely. An estimated 1.5 million nomadic herders who depended on livestock migration patterns have been forced to settle due to insecurity and lost migration areas and are now among the poorest families in Afghanistan (ruralpoverty). The Taliban government (controlled Afghanistan from 1996-2001) introduced strict Islamic interpretations of law that increased gender discrimination in Afghanistan. Women are the main contributors to agricultural workers (composing 70% of the agricultural workforce), however, the Taliban severely decreased education opportunities for women, and only 3% of females were enrolled in public education. As a result, only 24% of women in Afghanistan are literate. Their social and economic discrimination forces women to be dependent on men (state.gov).

War in Afghanistan has killed thousands of Afghan people, leaving many homes without male heads and drew Western attention. The Taliban control resulted in the United States' War on Terror in 2001 when they invaded Afghanistan. Since the deposition of the Taliban, a new government has been appointed with elections and the Afghan constitution has been rewritten. However, Taliban rebels continue to fight for control of areas of the country and Afghanistan's new governmental system has had to deal with the political, economic, and social disparities that were introduced by the lack of political stability, lack of adequate military forces, and the Taliban's radical Islamic principles.

The United States has decreased the power of the Taliban and decreased the scope of war in the country which has introduced the opportunity for new leaders to implement improvements to the quality of life for Afghanistan's many ethnic groups. However, these improvements to basic services such as security, food, and shelter; have been slightly deterred due to continued governmental corruption. Kabul Bank, the main bank institution in Afghanistan was caught embezzling large sums of foreign aid money and funding a narrow group of Karzai government officials. The discovery of this scheme almost caused a collapse of the Afghan banking system and placed a large financial strain on the already struggling area (Center for American Progress). As a result of governmental corruption, over 36% of Afghanistan's population are living in absolute poverty and an additional 37% live below the poverty line (earning less than \$1.90 per day), and are unable to support their families (csis).

While the overthrow of the Taliban terrorist control over Afghanistan, and the implementation of an elected government has improved some ways of life in the country; there are still large barriers to food security. Afghanistan has experienced conflict and war for many years, stalling development in the country. Since the United States became involved in overthrowing the Taliban from Afghanistan,

continued aid has been supported. The United States has trained a growing military and influenced a new system of government with elections by majority in the country. However, Afghanistan has very different customs and beliefs than the United States and this country needs to adapt a new governmental system to suit the needs of this ethnically diverse war torn country.

4. Solution

What can be done about Afghanistan's new and fragile democracy that is still being tested by rebel Taliban forces? The United States, since occupying Afghanistan with troops since the start of the War on Terror against the Taliban, has influenced policies in the country. The United States has spent over 45 billion dollars training Afghan military troops and 8 million dollars attempting to eradicate opium production, attempting to provide order and stability in Afghanistan. Despite these large investments hostile feelings Afghan people feel over Western involvement in the country has reduced the success of US aid. In the beginning of American influence of Afghanistan in 2001, many Afghans welcomed troops and respected their presence helping to remove the oppressive Taliban regime, remembering the help Americans had also given in deposing the Soviet Union from the country years before. However, anti-foreign sentiment has increased as it became clear that the United States has little understanding of Afghan cultural values and beliefs. Fundamentalist groups, including the Taliban and neighboring countries have used these bitter feelings to rally support and have gained control of different areas of the country (Afghanistan Today). If Afghanistan is to govern fairly with the respect and support of the multiple ethnic groups in the country, the United States needs to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. This process has begun, and US president Barack Obama has promised several times to withdraw all troops from the country by the end of 2016. These troops had trained, advised, and assisted Afghans with counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda. Out of the United States troop's efforts Afghanistan's military force, the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) increased in size to over 350,000 members. This force has worked to reduce the threat of Taliban control of distinct areas in Afghanistan even as the US has reduced the number of troops in the country (worldaffairsjournal). Western influence should continue to be diminished in Afghanistan, to allow newly trained and equipped ANSF troops to successfully eradicate Taliban control without sparking jihad nationalism within the terrorist organization by working with the United States.

Aid in Afghanistan by the US extends not only to the military, but to the government as well. Afghanistan's government is currently ranked fifth by the International Corruption Perception Index for corrupt policies and officials in the government. Afghanistan instituted a civil service exam based on merit to elect government officials for government positions by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission in 2010 (IARCSC). This exam, used to hire the new Minister of Finance in Afghanistan, recently uncovered a corruption scheme in which the Kabul Bank in Afghanistan was embezzling funds from aid relief sent to Afghanistan by foreign countries (World Bank). Further investigation into corporations and stronger policies on the deterrence of bribes and embezzlement will decrease the amount of corruption in the country. Stopping these crimes with a civil service exam and removing American influences will ensure that the Afghan government has educated, responsible, trustworthy ceasing use of bribes and patronage.

Removing Western influences in Afghanistan will also improve the dire situation of opium production in the country. Currently, Afghanistan is the largest producer of opium and has continued to produce around 85 percent of the world's supply despite US efforts to eradicate production or introduce new crops (foreignpolicy). A different approach to a long lasting policy has recently been considered by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS). Called the "Poppy for Medicine" initiative, this program is trying to institute the production of opium as a legal crop, used to create different medications (mostly morphine). This organization has been careful to stress the importance of local productions of these medicines to enhance another vital aspect of Afghanistan culture, strong village and

tribal affiliations (icosgroup). This will help to increase profits for rural farmers and generate much needed revenue for the government from the increase in legal, legitimate exports, developing lasting industries, and creating jobs for varying skilled workers.

Afghanistan's Minister of Agriculture has recently supported a widespread education program, funded by The Farmer's Food Program, for farmers that have taught them advanced farming techniques, such as planting in rows instead of spreading random amounts of seeds (Afghanistan Today). This program has introduced 18 centers in Afghanistan (120 centers worldwide) and has funded the maintenance of qanat systems to increase the amount of water given to crops. Qanat systems are one of the most economical and environmentally friendly ways to implement a rudimentary irrigation system that draws water with the help of gravity. With the use of these systems that have been used in Afghanistan for hundreds of years, this program is increasing the diversity of crops able to be grown (such as wheat, corn, and maize that require larger amounts of water to cultivate) and has helped farmers move away from producing opium to a more legitimate crop. Since the program's integration, food output from 2012 to 2013 increased by around 30 percent (Afghanistan Today). Prosperous yields have increased the amount of goods exported from Afghanistan; benefitting local farmers, trade and commerce, and the government. According to the Director of Commerce in Afghanistan, exports from the country have expanded by around 40 percent since the implementation of this program.

Despite their long, war torn history, changing policies to support the diverse people of Afghanistan are possible with the removal of Western influences, military forces to reduce Taliban continued Taliban control. These changes will result in a more secure government, one that is able to deal with multiple food security issues. With secure plans to deal with opium, and valid irrigational improvements, agricultural yields will increase, reducing the need for imported food supplies to the country. Secure government will propel Afghanistan's transformation from one of the most destitute countries in the world to a country capable of improving the issue of food scarcity of the country.

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