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**AFGHANISTAN: RICH POOR COUNTRY IN THE WORLD****Pakiza Mahboobi**

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**Abstract**

*Afghanistan a country that is rich in natural resources yet economically suffers unnecessarily. This paper presents the factors that contribute to its becoming a poor country in the South Asian Region. This paper uses content analysis of published books and journal articles that explore the socio-economic and political landscape of Afghanistan which shape the country today. This study finds that the internal factors which helped make the country unnecessarily economically challenged were lack of woman participation in the society, lack of access to education, and intertribal conflict among the locals while on the other hand, the external factors were the foreign occupation of the British, Soviets and the United States of America and its allies. Combined all together, Afghanistan became a country that is rich in natural resources yet suffers from economic setbacks unnecessarily.*

**Keywords:** *Political Economy, Foreign Occupation, Afghanistan History*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Afghanistan is one of the countries of Southwest Asia which has more than 5000 years of history has been long known as the crossroad of Asia. Being located in ancient trade and invasion route, some people passed through its boarder while others decided to stay. According to Shroder (2009), modern-day Afghanistan represents a country of multi-nationality as evidence of its ethnics and linguistic diversity.

From 1747 to 1973 Afghanistan was a country ruled by the monarch until the military officers headed by Muhammad Daoud took over the kingdom then overthrew the monarch and replaced the political system with its presidential system. In 1978 another coup took place and instilling the formerly banned communist party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power. Which further strengthen its ties with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). However, the traditionalist Muslim conservatives also are known as the *Mujahedeen* to opposed PDPA and led an insurrection movement against them. To help the PDPA the Soviets launched the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and made a moderate member of PDPA as the country's head of government. A move intentionally designed to attract supporters from the *Mujahedeen* and thereby suppress possible rebellions but still, they failed to do so and the resistance continued.

While the PDPA was supported by the Soviet Union, The *Mujahedeen* group on the other hand had the United States of America (USA), Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries backing them up. When the Soviets finally left Afghanistan in 1989, a new chapter of political instability took place as the *Mujahedeen* group grew in power until they overthrew the PDPA in 1992. After the fall of PDPA, the *Mujahedeen* took over but resulted in another political disunity as they cannot agree among themselves as to which faction was to rule out which part of the country. In 1996 an Islamic fundamentalist movement Taliban with the help of the USA ruled over Kabul. The Taliban imposed strict adherence to Shariah which the USA was not preferred by the USA, thus later the group was toppled by the coalition of Afghan opposition forces called the Northern Alliance with the help of the USA and British forces.

Recently, a Peace Deal signed on February 29, 2020, which the USA pledge to pull their troupes out of the country. Meanwhile, both the Afghan government and the Taliban promised to release prisoners from both sides to formally give way to the intra-Afghan peace talk that could lead to peace and stability of the country and later economic prosperity.

This paper looks into the economic history and political landscape of Afghanistan over the years to systematically analyze the underlying reasons why it appears to be a rich yet poor country.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Meirav Mishali-Ram's statement that all conflicts in Afghanistan include the following factors, such as the global and domestic analysis cycle. Therefore, these two factors cannot be separated because the efforts of foreign forces to nationalize and manage ethnic conflicts alone cannot be accepted without the consent of the parties involved.

Schetter (2014) argues that the Afghan strong inclination to their respective ethnic groupings became an obstacle to national unity as often conflict and major political strife are influence by it as they often compete with one another. Thus, the author argues that the Afghan must principally incline to their national identity to prevent what he calls echinicasation of the masses in the Afghan conflict.

Zammit-Mangion, Dewar, Kadirkamanathan, and Sanguinetti (2012) utilized the science of statistics, signal processing, and ecology to propose the used of dynamic spatiotemporal modeling tools to identify the complex underlying process in conflict Afghanistan. The result gave them a forward prediction of armed conflict in the country based on the data from the previous years. The study concluded that: "*The Afghan conflict is characterized by insurgent movements and qualifies as a case of irregular warfare where the activity is only loosely dependent and actioned by a myriad of disparate groups*".

The study of Rubin (2000) showed that the decades of conflict in Afghanistan has created an open war economy not only affected Afghanistan but also its surrounding areas as well. The author finds that the war created Afghanistan as the world's lagers producer of opium, a center of arms dealings, and multibillion-dollar trade of smuggled goods from Dubai to Pakistan. Which helps funds the insurgent groups and their adversaries in the country. It is found that "*Only the drug, transit, and gem trades are worth taxing. The rest of the economy is hardly productive enough to recover the cost of governing it*" to stabilize the economy, Rubin suggests that Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) should be reformed. "*not in isolation but as part of a general change away from the high duties of an import substitution regime toward the legal institutionalization of the greater openness that exists de facto outside the law. This would reduce the incentive for transit trade, the Taliban's main source of funds*".

Goodhand (2005) looked into how the Afghan economy has been affected by war through what he calls four interrelated themes being first, war economy as cause and effect of the state crisis. Second, the war economy empowers borderlands, the transformation of politics to core-periphery relations. Third, the war economy as part of the regional conflict system. Fourth, foreign interventions coming into Afghanistan. The author argues that the war economy is not concerned with profit predation but also with coping and survival. The war economy is contributing to social and economic progress and development in the country. Thus, he suggested policy

recommendation that should be the focus not on the current emphasis on eradication and control but to one that seeks to harness the benefits from energies of war to build long term peace and security in the country.

This study is also related to the cited studies about Afghanistan and its economy, it only differences the approach was undertaken and a series of data analyzed to bring about a rather definitive and detailed conclusion.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Internal Reasons Why Afghanistan is a rich-poor country*

Other than the ethnic diversity, there are two main approaches to examine the conflict in Afghanistan. The first external intercession and the second is ethnic diversity. The first one examines the effect of global and neighboring powers and states as external factors on the Afghan conflict. Meanwhile, the second concentrates on the conflicts and fights between different ethnic groups in Afghanistan (Mishali-Ram, 2008).

According to Central Statistics Organization (2018), several issues slowed the development of Afghanistan and keep it under poor condition, which they are, the (1) deteriorating security situation, (2) the decreasing of international presence and assistance to Afghanistan and its economic conditions, (3) weak structural factors which play a role in development in the country, (4) women's low participation in society and economy, (5) the low quality of education, poor labor market, and (6) the high population.

Poverty in Afghanistan is a multidimensional problem which, involves complex issues and it can be issues that could be in the form of physical, financial, and human. Accordingly, the years of drought and insecurity, lack of infrastructure and public services, lack of education, traditional roles, and lack of economic opportunities can be considered as among the issues that influence the rising of poverty in Afghanistan. The poverty situation in Afghanistan has limited the lives of a large part of the Afghan population, reflecting the socio-economic and political dynamics. Throughout its history, Afghanistan also has been affected by many political-economic developments which have given rise to the poverty all around Afghanistan. The above issues have affected 96% of Afghanistan's population which involves disability, deaths, injuries, and demolition of homes, finance, circumstances, and including agriculture. Although, agriculture is the major activity of the people that includes 84% of Afghan populations. Notwithstanding, this sector has been affected by wars and natural disasters. The ratio of water scarcity and inadequate climate to arable land is very low and all these problems, especially since 1999, have affected the livelihoods of the villagers. Lack of employment opportunities for the public, lack of access to finance and educational technology options, as well as climatic and geographical conditions coupled with prolonged population growth conflicts have led to uncontrolled use of natural resources, all of which have prevented and slowed down the employment promotion. These ultimately had resulted in the rise of the graph on poverty in Afghanistan, especially in many rural households. For these reasons, Afghanistan is one of the countries which has the lowest life expectancies around the world. Education is important and forms the backbone of a country, unfortunately in Afghanistan, about 43 % of men and 13 % of women are literate. Because of all these factors that were previously mentioned, it resulted in insecurity, corruption, the shortage of skilled workers in the region, and ultimately hindered the development of the country. ( Hunzai, Jean-Yves, and Brigitte, 2011).

According to Kian-Thiébaud in (2005) Based on Elaheh Rostami Povey's field research, women who experienced violence and fight than men even during difficulties, they have courageously and bravely shown the ability to handle life with all those limitations they have. Therefore, they are social actors as well. Thus, they try to find an acceptable way to portray their objective which should be based on cultural practices. As a matter of fact, the most critical need for men, women, and children is an economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the author mentioned in her findings that the gender aspect is also played an important role in the economic reconstruction process. Hence, ignoring women and their ability in the economic restoration and other sectors would deny women the right to reconstruct their new verity in the country. Therefore, the Afghan government should not ignore these important economic and social issues, especially in the current situation.

According to Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, it is important to improve women's status and the value of their participation in social and family affairs based on the historical background in Afghanistan. He also believed that everyone has

to study it. The areas which need more aid and emphasis on reconstruction are in the rural areas of Afghanistan. Majority of Afghan concern on Afghanistan's future economics because there are thousands of widowed women, divorced and unmarried. Because many of these women live in poverty as single women or as heads of their families. Hence, the education, hiring, and training of these women can create a range of women which later can improve the economy in the country. This empowerment can turn into political power, which would affect the status of women in Afghanistan's developing economy and society. Essentially, the improvement of education is a major challenge for the future of a country.

According to Elmira Akhmetova, since the seventh century, Islam has empowered women and played an active role in building Islamic civilization. However, all of their Quranic abilities are severely suppressed and severely affected by the political unrest of poverty, corruption, and other social problems. Most women living in the Middle East and North Africa are facing many social problems. It is due to these reasons that citizens of these countries, including men and women, have been suffering from overwhelming economic and political exploitation of tyranny and poverty for decades. Which explained why the poverty graph is higher in these regions. The same case with the poverty in Afghanistan which doesn't happen in one night. Progressing policy talks at the global level have huge ramifications for Afghans who battle to survive due underneath or simply over the neediness line. From all perspectives, neglecting the pursuit of the military or any other strategy or exacerbating the plight of the poor is questionable. Therefore, these approaches, whatever their immediate results, are likewise susceptible to weakening to peace coordinate efforts. (United Nations Office Of The High Commissioner For Human Rights, 2010)

### ***External Factors Why Afghanistan is a Rich-poor Country***

International interference in local affairs of a country is not a new trend (Art, 1991). These foreign interventions are often justified based on helping other countries resolve their respective country's internal conflicts. This is to contain the internal problem within their borders so that it would not affect other nations (Corbetta, and Dixon, 2004).

Studies of Huth (1998); Stewart (2002); and, Werner (2000) found that foreign military intervention has a decisive impact in deterring major war that local policies and its militaries cannot. However, it is not without negative impacts, especially in Afghanistan. In the works of Mishali-Ram (2008), on one hand, he finds that while foreign military presence in Afghanistan helps to prevent extremist groups from taking over the country, however, on the other hand, this intervention also sparks inter-tribal conflicts within the nation. These conflicts are seen to have been expressed in violent competition and struggle for power amongst the Afghans where a foreign-backed party contested by another whose supporters are mostly locals which creates major division among the Afghans. Consequently, it oftentimes leads to violence. The foreign interventions caused not only crucial division among the Afghans but it also negatively affected their economy as well.

According to Visalli (2013), since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Afghans were just beginning to form their nation the British came in and launched at least 3 series of invasions from 1839 to 1919. This made them preoccupied with protecting themselves against foreign powers and therefore had little time to develop the national economy that would have helped them cope with poverty.

The British occupation of Afghanistan was soon followed by another foreign invasion, the Soviets, who also brought economic setbacks into the country. According to Ewans (2004) after the war with the Soviets, Agriculture, on which the majority of the Afghans relied, was largely ruined, along with some infrastructure industry in the country. About 4 million mines were sown nationwide totaling in 780 square kilometers causing thousands of deaths and major population displacement. It also reported that almost half of the injured Afghans during the war died due to a lack of medical facilities.

Nonetheless, the United States-led invasion of Afghanistan has interestingly increased the country's national economy. According to Schetter (2004), Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased to an average of 9 % a year. During these years, funds relevant to ensuring peace and order activities poured to the country had

created war-related Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) resulting in more jobs and other means of livelihood for the locals. However, as the Americans began to pull-out their troops from the country in 2014, its GDP went down to more than 50% per year. This causes the national economy to suffer too much as many people lose their jobs along the way. Moreover, around 45,000 members of security forces have been killed since 2014 as according to President Ashraf Ghani. Meanwhile, 3,500 members of the international coalition have died since 2001 from which 2,300 of them were Americans. (BBC News, 2020). UN reports in February of 2019 said more than 32,000 civilians had died and 43,000 opposition fighters have died that made the country suffer more than its economic losses.

The national resources of Afghanistan are relatively enough for its people to benefit from for generations to come. However, due to constant foreign invasion of other countries on whatsoever ground such military occupation devastated their fertile lands, threatens the very lives of the hardworking people/labor force. Afghanistan became a less ideal country for conventional business entrepreneurs to invest in this crippling economy making it a rich yet poor country.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Historically, Afghanistan has been featured in prominent foreign policy, given to its various actors. Afghanistan was one of the countries that declared neutrality in the two world wars. Nonetheless, it did not stop the intervention of the superpowers in this country, and they would not be canceled either. One of the reasons that the countries of the superpower are always interfering in the affairs of this country is due to Afghanistan's particular strategic position. The countries that most responsible for this chaos are Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America. For more than a century, it has been under these countries' influence and interventions. The only problem that 'influence' these superpower countries to always intervene in the political scene in Afghanistan are ethnic and religious minorities in Afghanistan. Which has made these minorities a weakness in the country, provoked them against each other, and used them on time? In addition to that, Afghanistan has a lot of political issues with neighboring countries, this also harms the situation in this country. In fact, even today this conflict has become a vague controversy, taking the example of the conflict happened in the Durand Line in (year), which has more people killed because of it. Another reason is due to the fact that Afghanistan is rich in minerals and natural resources. That is why the world does not allow the people of this land to use resources to enrich the country. Therefore, my goal in this study was to clarify a part of the history of the country, so that the world can understand the current situation of Afghanistan which has suffered throughout history, and although it is a rich country, but yet it is still poor. And the government must pay more attention to the country's economic infrastructure and its education. Because it creates a more stable economy and education in a country by that, it means whenever a country has a strong economics' infrastructure and brilliant education it will have a good future too.

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