



The Human Security Catastrophe in Afghanistan: A Human Needs Theory Perspective Post-U.S. Withdrawal

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Abstract: This research article employs John Burton's Human Needs Theory (HNT) as a theoretical framework to analyze the profound human security crisis in Afghanistan following the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. It posits that the failure to satisfy fundamental human needs—security, identity, well-being, and self-determination—is the primary driver of conflict and a critical barrier to sustainable peace. The article provides a detailed analysis of the deteriorating socio-political and economic landscape under the new Taliban regime, examining the collapse of the economy, the devastating food and health crises, and the systematic erosion of rights for women, minorities, and the media. It argues that the current situation, characterized by widespread deprivation and aggression, represents a frustration of basic human needs, which, if left unaddressed, will inevitably lead to renewed instability and violence. The study concludes that any viable peacebuilding strategy must prioritize a human security approach centered on fulfilling these non-negotiable human needs to achieve durable peace in Afghanistan.¹

Keywords: Human Security, Human Needs Theory, Afghanistan, Taliban, U.S. Withdrawal, Peacebuilding, Humanitarian Crisis.

1. Introduction

The Taliban's capture of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, not only brought down the republican regime that had been built since the Bonn Agreement in 2001, but it also placed the Afghan nation and people in a situation where they have faced a deep humanitarian and identity crisis with the entire world failing to protect their human rights.² The history of isolation and conflict in Afghanistan is not a recent phenomenon, but rampant. As is seen in such situations, the lack of power and freedom among the people acts as an obstacle to effective use of humanitarian and developmental programs that adversely affects human capital and agency, leading to further insecurity. The heavier dos and don'ts slapped by the Taliban after they sprinted into power have only compounded the anxieties, fears, and grievances among women, youth, and, critically, Afghanistan's educated.³

In addition, not long after taking over, the country began to encounter problems such as isolation from regional

¹ Muhammad Abbas Ashraf, Peace Building in Afghanistan Post U.S Withdrawal: A Human Security Approach (MPhil thesis, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2023.p.2

³ Joseph J. Collins, "Understanding War in Afghanistan," *National Defense University Press Washington*, June 12, 2011.

and global markets and investment and a halt in foreign assistance that made it hard for productive activities within the country to survive. The aftermath of the recent events saw over 120,000 Afghan nationals leaving their country. This brain drain, however, poses another challenge to the country by impacting and inhibiting the development of various key institutions while posing challenges to an effective Taliban-led governance.⁴ In that context the population of Afghanistan is deprived of humanitarian services, as is reflected in reports from various United Nations organizations.⁵

Upon the emergence of a new Taliban regime, all international peacebuilding actors, institutions, and their activity provisions ceased contributing to a human security crisis. Afghanistan, whose economy was centered around aid and foreign involvement, will now have a hard time. And on closer inspection, the inability of caring central institutions and international organizations to effectively use humanitarian assistance and development aid for human capital formation—having a spin-off effect of disseminating resources and knowledge out from the provincial capital—has been fundamental in this crisis of human security.⁶

The former peacebuilding practices that were launched after the U.S. attack on Afghanistan were not in a position to establish a safe and sound situation for durable peace, as they were mainly aimed at the success of the invasion. The United States and its coalition partners are the principal responsible party for inefficient or imbalanced handling of human services throughout Afghanistan, which was provided through parallel government institutions and many other nationwide organizations during the last two decades.⁷

This study is conducted in order to conceptualize the peacebuilding in post-U.S. withdrawal Afghanistan from the perspective of human security. The main purpose is to understand the impact of a new regime formed in Kabul (representing the Taliban) on the human security situation and to determine how much lack of human needs contributes to peace processes. According to this study, unmet human needs give rise to lack and aggression, which become the root cause of conflict.⁸ This can be witnessed in the case of Afghanistan, where earlier peace-building initiatives did not succeed because the wants and desires of the humans were not adequately addressed. While investigating the peacebuilding approach in Afghanistan, the study demystifies that, although negative peace is maintained after the withdrawal of the US and the Taliban capturing Kabul, positive peace still exists [due to] the severe humanitarian crisis.⁹ In addition, the report confirms that sustainable peace in Afghanistan can be achieved by freedom from fear and fulfillment of freedom from want.¹⁰

1.1.1 Theoretical Framework: Human Needs Theory and Human Security

To examine the way in which peacebuilding processes will generate sustainable peace within Afghanistan by reducing human insecurities, it is possible to make use of Human Needs Theory (HNT) as a roadmap to a better understanding. While it was Abraham Maslow who first proposed the theory, John Burton added an interesting dimension to the humanness of conflicts when he articulated his philosophy of why conflicts happen and how they can be resolved.¹¹

1.1.2 Human Needs Philosophy

With the aftermath of World War II, the analysis/examination and assessment/evaluation of conflict resolution

⁴ Charles J Sullivan, "Afghanistan in Anarchy: America's Withdrawal, Taliban Rule and Regional Implications for Central Asia." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2022): 513-530.

⁵ Arwa Ibrahim, "Are US-Led Sanctions Worsening Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis?" Aljazeera News, November 29, 2021.

⁶ Joseph J. Collins, "Understanding War in Afghanistan," *National Defense University Press Washington*, June 12, 2011.

⁷ Earl Conteh-Morgan, "Peacebuilding in Africa: the post-conflict state and its multidimensional crises." (2022): 2186-2187.

⁸ Sandra Marker, "Unmet human needs." *Beyond intractability* (2003).

⁹ Paul Collier, and Anke Hoeffler. "On economic causes of civil war." *Oxford economic papers* 50, no. 4 (1998): 563-573. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oepp/50.4.563>

¹⁰ Abraham Harold Maslow, "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370

¹¹ John W Burton, *Deviance, terrorism & war: The process of solving unsolved social and political problems*. (Australian National University Press, 1979), 15-79.

brought into discipline new dimensions about interests and needs.¹²The human needs philosophy emphasizes fundamental access for humans to resources that lead toward beneficial aims. This method is predicated on the principles of cooperation, non-violence, and inclusiveness, as human needs mirror social relations and human behaviors that impact how they meet their basic needs.¹³Thus, the social system must be in integrity with respect to human needs if it is not to destabilize or impose change through force, as we have seen multiple examples of violence resulting from disregard for and repudiation of human needs.¹⁴

In short, catering to basic human needs can help avoid any violence or destruction, which is what human needs philosophy hinges on the philosophy of human need entails a wide range of peacebuilding initiatives that help minimize both direct and structural violence.¹⁵However, to resolve conflicts from a human needs philosophy dimension, it is also important to clear the misunderstanding revolving around the nature of human needs. Some suggest human needs are physical, for instance, food, shelter, and clothes. Whereas others think conflicts arise from some non-physical human needs, such as identity, security, recognition, and understanding.¹⁶ Therefore, denying both physical and non-physical human needs can yield violence and conflicts.

1.1.3 Human Needs Theory

Maslow's work formed the foundation of Human Needs Theory. His theory takes on a hierarchy consisting of 5 levels. Of these five, the first is physiological: water, food, and shelter. The second is safety and security; the third level of this hierarchy is those of love, affection, and belonging; before coming to the fourth, or midpoint, of the pyramid, there is a need for self-respect or self-esteem, with, at its highest point, a need for self-actualization.¹⁷ For example, not all urges are called accidents... as they affect less urgently, they are even powerful. Maslow theorized about it. The needs are more powerful at the bottom of the pyramid and are distinctly human or weaker in nature at the top.

Burton then expanded Maslow's theory to conflict resolution, linking human needs to the peacebuilding process. He managed to use Maslow's theory on contemporary socio-political conflicts and arrived at the conclusion that "to avoid or end a conflict, certain basic needs have to be met or fulfilled, for ignoring the human needs leads to alienation of subgroups, which take up violent action to satisfy their unmet basic need."¹⁸ Education and culture—however necessary in Burton's eyes—are not what make destructive social conflict intelligible: rather, it is the needs for recognition (identity), security (not to live in fear), and personal development.¹⁹

1.1.4 Basic Human Needs in the View of Burton

For peace to exist or be established in any part of the world, Burton contends that at least minimum human needs—including security, identity, welfare and self-respect—must be met.²⁰

Right to security: Security is basic right and need of every human being - now or ever. This sense of security is quite often hidden and only emerges when it's being attacked. Then it is either fear or threat which locks its grip on the security and safety of life. Hence, security and conflict/violence have an inverse relationship. There are going to be doubts, confusion and turmoil in the society if human's do not feel safe and sound.

¹² Setyabudi Indartono, "Strategic Thinking Concept Among Middle Managers," *Jurnal Universitas Paramadina* 10, no. 2 (2013): 720–728.

¹³ John W Burton, "Conflict resolution: The human dimension." *International Journal of Peace Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 1-5.

¹⁴ Carolyn M. Stephenson, "The Power of Human Needs in World Society," *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 3 (1990): 1051–1053.

¹⁵ Sandra Marker, "Unmet Human Needs," *Beyond Intractability* (2003).

¹⁶ Sedat Laciner, Mehmet Ozcan, and Ihsan Bal, *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: USAK Books, 2008).

¹⁷ Abraham Harold Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370.

¹⁸ Ronald Fisher, "The problem-solving workshop as a method of research." *International Negotiation* 9, no. 3 (2004): 385-396. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233715513_The_Problem-Solving_Workshop_as_a_Method_of_Research.

¹⁹ John Burton, "Needs theory." *Introduction to Conflict Resolution: Discourses and Dynamics* (2019): 59.

²⁰ John W. Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism & War* (1979).

Therefore, harmony and safety of a society comes into the well-being only when security is ensured.²¹

Need for Identity : Identity is the fundamental need of everyone. Identity is so critical because it enables people, groups and nations to differentiate themselves from the rest. This identification defines specific features (novel assets/resources not available/readily shared with others because the identity must form in order to exist) that a group of entities has or utilize. Identity is significant ranging from the personal level of human being to a group or more specifically as a nation.²²

Necessity of Well-being: As well-being equals development or sustainable growth, need for well-being is the need of humans to develop and grow. This want, both as much material and non-material points of view are concerned carries all the needs necessary for human self development and growth. But if this need fails to be met, it leads to disturbance which ends in conflict. Well-being in this construction is the well-being that individuals need to lead a decent life above the poverty line. Well, this need is a primary requirement that allows us to live happily and healthily.²³

Need to be self-determined: Burton's theory of need for self-determination probably plays similar role as the self-actualization level does in Maslow's hierarchy. At its root, self-determination is about fair chances letting people get better lives. It is designed to help people exhibit or find their potentials; and how they can realise these. Disregard of this requirement gives rise to tensions at individual and interpersonal as well as intragroup or intergroup conflicts.²⁴

In all, once the identity, security, well-being and self-determination needs are addressed—met and respected—many of the major disputes can be avoided, contributing to a peaceful order insofar as they will not feel being violated or threatened by an outside entity. Therefore, Human Needs Theory supports and provides direction in conflict resolution.²⁵

1.2 Human Need Theory and Human Security Notion

The basic human needs which are considered important include food, shelter, clean air and water, clothing, education etc. and health & sanitation. Those material and physiological needs are at the heart of human security. If these needs are frustrated, denied and remain unsatisfied at any level and in any situation or under circumstance they become a potential danger to the health and survival of human life. So when they are not happy, humans become insecure. Thus, failure to satisfy such requirements expresses injustice and ipso facto is akin to depriving human beings of their fundamental rights and security.²⁶

The "want of a young person for his/her biological needs to be fulfilled is one of the main factors that drives them into recruitment, and in the post-conflict period, it deteriorates us and steers society toward renewed violence." According to Collier and Hoeffler, 'the motivation by youth towards satisfying their biological needs "' has been steadily increasing.²⁷This discussion demonstrates that the inquiry of HNT is relevant in human The "want of a young person for his/her biological needs to be fulfilled is one of the main factors that drives them into recruitment, and in the post-conflict period, it deteriorates us and steers society toward renewed violence." According to Collier and Hoeffler, 'the motivation by youth towards satisfying their biological needs "' has been steadily increasing.²⁸This discussion demonstrates that the inquiry of HNT is

²¹ Taraja Vayrynen, *Culture and international conflict resolution: A critical analysis of the work of John Burton*. Manchester University Press, 2001.

²² Christopher Mitchell, "Necessitous man and conflict resolution: More basic questions about basic human needs theory." In *Conflict: Human needs theory*, pp. 149-176. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990.

²³ Ervin Staub, "Notes on cultures of violence, cultures of caring and peace, and the fulfillment of basic human needs." *Political psychology* 24, no. 1 (2003): 1-21.

²⁴ Hideaki Shinoda, "The concept of human security: historical and theoretical implications." *Conflict and human security: A search for new approaches of peace-building* 19 (2004).

²⁵ Edward Newman, "Critical human security studies." *review of international Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 77-94.

²⁶ Des Gasper, "Securing humanity: situating 'human security' as concept and discourse." *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 2 (2005): 221-245.

²⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998): 563–573.

²⁸ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998): 563–573.

relevant in human security consideration for rejuvenation of socio-economic balance, health restoration and ensuring access to food, and shelters. Since the state-centric approach could not provide security; because, as Morgan argues “at the post-conflict stage/peacebuilding it is important to ensure not only security of the integrity of the state but also for that matter basis at which states are seen weaker capacity (to) handle its problems,” as a result he continues “their are (sic) civil clash(es) and sufferings at their turn this suffers from what I called poor capacity on their part in settling its difficulties out.”²⁹

Thus if individuals are no longer safe during the post-conflict phase, the failure to protect them does not only deny them their human security but also reduces the likelihood of peace being sustainable in the long term. For Maslow, no doubt the concept of security and safety needs are broadened when I am not allowed to sense a physical threat or feel any fear regarding loss of income, food, roof over my head and land. This expanded interpretation of Maslow's safety and security is related to the definition of security as being free from fear include want. The meaning of security today is, the concept of freedom from fear and want is associated with one of the most used existing security approaches.³⁰

In summary, Human Needs Theory meets our purpose of developing knowledge of human security in a holistic way as it does not only address physical security but also looks into deprivation (want) and more importantly the inclusive nature and human centred aspect that resolvers can use to manipulate occasions where an approach may be lacking or exploited to maintain stabilising forces in society.³¹

1.2.1 Theoretical Construct

The theory of human needs provides a better understanding of the Afghan conflict and how to settle it. In conflict resolution, the main task is to find out why such a conflict arises and from what sources these conflicts have sprung. HNT points out that conflict emerges when inherent human needs (Hume) are not met or there is a mismatch between these needs and the social norms and institutions for their realization. For resolution, unmet needs must be satisfied in terms of what Thomas S. Kuhn calls a sustaining myth or paradigm by which a new equilibrium can emerge.³² In today's Afghanistan, the dearth of people's livelihoods, such as food, clothing, housing, education, and medical care, which are essential needs for human survival, is causing them to become violent. String together six sub points and one sees how hard it is to prevent violence. People's behavior can be predicted: a considerable part of the Islamic movement will become actively hostile, and a whole other section will sit around and then unexpectedly change into guerrilla fighters. The Afghan people's basic needs are also frustrated by this political system. If the global actors and the new regime do not satisfy those needs of the Afghan people, then, as we have seen in this regime, street riots will quickly develop into armed rebellions, which are very likely to lead to another bloody war. Although a negative peace has settled over Afghanistan after more than forty years of continuous war, unsatisfied human needs such as food, jobs, and medical care have set off a human security crisis. In case their immediate needs are not satisfied, the Afghan people have no human security, a situation that can readily develop into resumed armed conflict. Afghanistan's human security situation is so bad that people find it difficult to meet the basic needs necessary for their survival—for example, neither quality food, unpolluted drinking water, nor access to medical care is less than two hours away from them. In order that further violence might not develop, basic needs for the Afghan people must be satisfied; otherwise, when frustrations pile up, people will resort to aggression.³³ Sustainable peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved if all people's basic needs are met—and that means a

²⁹ Earl Conteh-Morgan, “Peacebuilding in Africa: The Post-Conflict State and Its Multidimensional Crises,” (2022): 2186–2187.

³⁰ John W. Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism & War: The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems* (Australian National University Press, 1979).

³¹ Ibid

³² Muhammad Abbas Ashraf, *Peace Building in Afghanistan Post U.S Withdrawal: A Human Security Approach* (MPhil thesis, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2023) p.19.

³³ Muhammad Abbas Ashraf, *Peace Building in Afghanistan Post U.S Withdrawal: A Human Security Approach* (MPhil thesis, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2023) p.20.

lot of peacebuilding is involved. Without international organizations and worldwide participants, peacebuilding cannot be done. Peacebuilding is a succinct conception of "human security," but it also embodies something called Human Needs Theory, so these two ideas should be interconnected. Human Needs Theory first: hunger and frustration lead to belligerence, and therefore, in order to solve a war, it is important to create an environment where people's human needs can be satisfied.³⁴ Security for humans (human security), as Burton's Human Needs Theory suggests, is a formula for sustainability. What is meant by the concept of human security? It is that in security studies the focus should be on human safety as desirable peace. It out and out denies narrow state-sentimentalism about what constitutes security. The human security approach holds that people are secure, not just from dangerous physical calamities (freedom of fear), but also free of the far greater harm that comes with hunger, disease, unemployment, and avoidance of all other basic needs as well (freedom from want). In other words, the human security view argues that failure to satisfy those important human needs is a serious lack of security. The two concepts are interlinked because the real goal is durable peace.³⁵

Peacebuilding is the concrete realization of human security. It creates a framework in which every person can meet his basic needs without threat or opposition. No matter how wise we are or how much we try, some prevention work cannot be done without the participation of outsiders, in other words, international organizations or great powers. Peacebuilding takes a long time. It is a protracted struggle that aspires to establish peace that lasts into the future and from which all parties-- sides take something. To summarize, peacebuilding is in essence a process of carefully constructing an environment where all individuals manage to meet their basic needs and can be free from danger and poverty.³⁶

1.2.2 Analysis: Human Security Crisis in Post-Withdrawal Afghanistan

Years of conflict, displacement, hunger, and viral diseases have made "hardship" a familiar word in Afghan society. In other words, this country has been mired in a grave crisis of human security for the past forty years.³⁷ Despite the international community's efforts to enhance this situation, it continues to worsen every day. The U.S. injected a total of billions of dollars into socio-political development, but the human insecurity problem was never really changed. According to the latest statistics from international organizations, even before the American evacuation of Kabul, the human security situation in this country was the worst in the world. Before the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan, there were already nearly 18.4 million Afghans in need of humanitarian assistance. Put differently, almost a fifth or nearly half (48%) of the entire population required such aid. Furthermore, over 70% face food insecurity, and more than half of kids under five years old are affected by acute malnutrition.³⁸

However, after the US withdrew and handed Afghanistan over to the Taliban, the situation has gotten worse: not only human security but also its isolation from international society, along with a collapsing economy, all combined to amplify an already dire legacy of politics.³⁹ In order to keep the Afghan Taliban under control, the United States has frozen all the money in its name and stopped paying for anything belonging to them. However, these sanctions have made it the ordinary people who are suffering. Since Afghanistan's economy was built mostly on US grants and Western government development loans (both tied to austerity measures),

³⁴ Muhammad Abbas Ashraf, *Peace Building in Afghanistan Post U.S Withdrawal: A Human Security Approach* (MPhil thesis, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2023) p.22.

³⁵ Christina Goldbaum, "Facing economic collapse, Afghanistan is gripped by starvation." *The New York Times* 4 (2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/04/world/asia/afghanistan-starvation-crisis.html>.

³⁶ Nilofar Sakhi, "The Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan and Security Paradox." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2022): 383-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970221130882>.

³⁷ Secunder Kermani, "Afghanistan: What Has Changed in 20 Years," *BBC News*, September 10, 2021.

³⁸ Christina Goldbaum, "Facing Economic Collapse, Afghanistan Is Gripped by Starvation," *The New York Times* 4 (2021).

³⁹ Ahmad M Siddiqi, "The West is getting Afghanistan wrong – again," *Aljazeera News*, 12 September 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/12/misunderstanding-afghanistan-and-the-taliban>.

the recent sanctions, one would expect, have crippled the economy.⁴⁰ The Afghan central bank has no good money and cannot maintain a normal cash flow; as a result, people are unable to live on markets any more. Furthermore, inflation is rising every day, and food prices have doubled. Then, because the Taliban government does not have enough resources for salaries and employees to maintain their work, all these factors make for even worse humanitarian conditions. The human security situation in Afghanistan is still the worst on earth and shows no improvement. According to the World Food Program, famine or at least hunger affects nearly 92% of the Afghan population; some three million children do not have enough food for healthy growth. The loss of jobs and rising costs of living are causing hardship for many households; there are less than U.S. \$1.9 (or actual purchasing power equivalent) per day per Afghan, as per the 2007 World Bank. The UN predicts that in 2023 over half the country's people will be without food due to their country's situation.⁴¹

Afghanistan remains the least secure in terms of human security, and there is no optimism on the horizon. Nearly 92 per cent of Afghanistan's population are estimated to lack adequate food supplies with some three million children in the country malnourished and not receiving their proper share of healthy foods, reports WFP. The unemployment has been rising at least with prices that reduces level of living condition expectation at residential homes, for now every Afghanistan receives less than 1.9\$ a day as per World Bank record.' The U.N. has estimated that over half the country's population will be experiencing acute food insecurity in 2023.⁴²

1.2.3 The Socio-Political Situation Thwarting Human Desires

In a variety of ways the current social circumstances continue to worsen daily. The Taliban takeover of Kabul poses a significant threat to the country's recent gains in social rebuilding, those made under U.S. management during its 20-year stay there. What is more, the U.S. and its NATO alliance have done a great deal for women's rights and girls' education. The country's freedom of expression, freedom of the press—in other words, its civil society—had also been reformed by them. However, women's rights and girls' education have been restricted since the Taliban takeover, and women may return to living as of yore, similar to that under the first Taliban regime in the 1990s.⁴³ Vanity of vanities, it is that all these iniquities are done under heaven. Taliban tyranny infringes upon the basic rights of women, which negatively affects the society's entire advancement. Peace and prosperity cannot be built upon gender inequality.

Worse still, the Taliban has severely curtailed freedom of expression and of the press. Satellite television stations, which were open to private media, have been shut down since early September, even though the Taliban says it is just “temporarily suspending” them now. What are Iranian students trained to do? Taliban restrictions have meant a major cutback in both financial means and manpower for the health sector.⁴⁴

1.2.4 Afghan Women and Girls: Deprivation of Identity and Self-Determination

The first term of the Taliban government was the darkest for Afghan women from 1996 to 2001.⁴⁵ International media reported that the Taliban was involved in war crimes against Afghan women. Afghan women were forbidden any basic rights, among them education, freedom of speech, and other socio-political rights. They weren't even allowed to go out to the market unless accompanied by a close male relative. Afghan women were coerced into their own clothes. People who violate Islamic law will be whipped. In short, with a few

⁴⁰ Mohammad Essar et al., “Devastating Earthquake in Afghanistan Amid a Humanitarian Crisis: A Call for Action,” *The Lancet Global Health* 10, no. 9 (2022): e1244–e1245.

⁴¹ Muhammad Abbas Ashraf, *Peace Building in Afghanistan Post U.S. Withdrawal: A Human Security Approach* (MPhil thesis, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2023) p.25,26,27.

⁴² Muhammad Fahim Khan, Asad Hassan, and Aamer Raza. "Humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan: Changing global dynamics and Pakistan's policy choices." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* (2023): 12-33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911221148520>.

⁴³ Arwa Ibrahim, “Are US-led sanctions worsening Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis?” *Aljazeera News*, 29 November 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/29/holdaresanctions-to-blame-for-afghanists-humanitarian-crisis>.

⁴⁴ Mohammad Essar et al., “Devastating earthquake in Afghanistan amid a humanitarian crisis: a call for action.” *The Lancet Global Health* 10, no. 9 (2022): e1244–e1245. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(22\)00318-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(22)00318-7).

⁴⁵ Maryam Jami, “Testing the Limits of Human Rights' Dynamism: A Comparative Study of Afghan Women's Rights Under the Taliban Regimes (1996, 2021),” *India Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2022): 602–616.

exceptions, such as sitting in front of an old neighbor chaperon, they only went out of their homes.

When Kabul fell into the hands of the U.S. and coalition troops, a historic opportunity to restore the self-confidence of Afghan women and girls came about. The U.S. Congress and international community found that it was possible to give them basic human rights. Over a period of more than 20 years, the US ran programs aimed at improving the status of Afghan women by reforming socio-political institutions and promoting awareness and openness.⁴⁶ This freed them from inferior manna and taught them to talk back as equals. Afghan women made great strides in education, health, and also their own political life.

But, after the Taliban's new government was established on August 15, 2021, restrictions have been placed on Afghan women. They can not go to school, find employment, or exercise their socio-political rights. The Taliban are slowly reimposing the old laws, undoing progress. They say they have changed, but their behavior contradicts the claims. For example, in September 2021, the Taliban banned schools for girls and women in the marketplace. Women were told to quit their jobs in the media.⁴⁷ As a result, Taliban policies are undermining the U.S. and international community's drive for equality of the sexes. They are directly thwarting human needs for identity, individuality, and ware.

1.3 Journalism and Media: Suppression of Identity and Security

In the Taliban regime that existed before that, journalists were very limited and faced a tough time. A USIP report from 2015 records that between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban forbade secular radio and television.⁴⁸ They destroyed media infrastructure, called media anti-Islamic, and even ordered their own radio stations to broadcast the entire news flow (according to National Public Radio). This forced many Afghan journalists to leave the country as refugees.

The international community helped the media industry grow again after the Taliban was overthrown. For example, from 2002 until 2021, USAID budgeted \$220 million on media-related activities just to get news out there free of charge. From 2002 to 2021, independent news and entertainment TV channels and radio stations were established, which now offer everyone easy access to information and entertainment on airwaves.⁴⁹ In short, with the Americans and the global community playing a critical role, open media thrived.

But news organizations and journalists now face real danger when the Taliban take power again on August 15, 2021. The Taliban have enforced strict limits, putting media under aggressive censorship restraints as they did in 1996. For example, in September 2021 the Taliban issued new rules for journalists and media working in Afghanistan. There are details in the rules that are designed to restrict media freedom.⁵⁰ For example, the new media rules forbid transmitting or publishing items that the Taliban consider opposed to Islam. Both electronic and press media must seek permission before any article goes to press. In addition to censorship, news media suffer from the fact that their international funding dried up quickly after the country's economic collapse and there is no advertising revenue to be had. According to international media accounts, over half of the 51% of the country's media had to close shop during this period. Many experienced news workers went to neighboring countries where they could protect themselves from Taliban repression and violence.⁵¹ This is a direct attack on the establishment of security and identity.

1.3.1 Education and health: the disintegration of well-being

Afghanistan's literacy rate was the lowest in the world; according to a 2001 UN news report, almost two-thirds of the population at that time was illiterate because it lacked educational facilities and infrastructure. In a survey

⁴⁶ Antonius Verheijen, Atiqullah Ahmadzai, and Richard Hogg, "Through the Looking Glass," (2022).

⁴⁷ Belquis Ahmadi et al., "Can the Taliban's Brazen Assault on Afghan Women Be Stopped?" United States Institute of Peace, January 12, 2023.

⁴⁸ Afghanistan Analysts Network, and Ehsan Qaane, "Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What Has Happened to the Afghan Media?" (2022).

⁴⁹ Masom Jan Masomy, "Afghanistan's Media Developments and Challenges in the Past Two Decades: A Short Glance at Media Freedom," Reality of Politics: Estimates-Comments-Forecasts 19, no. 1 (2022): 64-77.

⁵⁰ Lee Yee Ling, Wong How Yee, and Nabeel Mahdi Althabawi, "Freedom of the Press: Rights and Liberties."

⁵¹ M. Yoserizal Saragih, "Women Journalist in the Middle of Taliban Power," Konfrontasi: Jurnal Kultural, Ekonomi dan Perubahan Sosial 8, no. 3 (2021): 142-151.

by UNESCO that same year, 29 percent of boys and less than 1 percent of girls were enrolled in primary schools during the first Taliban regime.

For two decades, the U.S. focused on building educational infrastructure; at the retreat, this became the highlight of 31 well-formed letters. According to a USAID report, educational development in our country since 2002 has been sponsored and thoroughly assisted by the U.S. The Taliban returned to force restrictions on education in response. In a recent USAID report, the Taliban are turning public-school teachers (midwives) into madrassas (religious schools). People at schools are forced to change professions because of unpaid wages from foreign funding cuts. Once again, the education sector faces severe restrictions and dangers that undo all progress made over the last twenty years only to spur on our/common people's desire for well-being and freedom.

1.3.2 Education and Health

The health sector becomes a matter of course with the Taliban's takeover; as international funding ceases, hospitals find themselves faced with shortages of people or facilities. All of the hospitals are running short on their essential life-saving drugs, and this is aggravated by infections spreading rapidly throughout society. The lack of women doctors and nurses has made matters worse; with unpaid wages for many years as well as having to live in difficult circumstances both economically and security-wise, lots of professional people working in healthcare left—and the health service collapsed completely. Compared with human beings' basic need for good health, this is really miserable. failure.

Afghanistan's literacy rate was the world's lowest; a UN news report states that in 2001, nearly two-thirds of the population was illiterate due to lack of educational facilities and infrastructure. According to UNESCO, only 29 percent of boys and less than 1 percent of girls were enrolled in primary schools during the first Taliban regime in 2001.⁵²

During twenty years, the U.S. focused on educational infrastructure development; at withdrawal, advancement in education was a greatest achievement. A USAID report states U.S. sponsorship played a vital role in educational sector development since 2002.⁵³ But the Taliban have enforced restrictions on educational institutes after their return. A recent USAID report states the Taliban are converting public schools into Madrassas (religious schools). People employed in education are changing professions due to unpaid salaries from foreign funding cuts. Once again, the educational sector faces severe restrictions and risks, undoing progress of the last twenty years, thus frustrating the need for well-being and self-determination.⁵⁴

The health sector is affected by the Taliban takeover; due to cut international finances, hospitals face shortages of physical and human resources. Hospitals lack basic lifesaving drugs, complicated by viral and communicable diseases spread.⁵⁵ Taliban restrictions on women doctors and nurses worsen the situation; lack of salaries and uncertain economic and security situations forced many professional healthcare workers to flee, collapsing the healthcare system. This represents a critical failure to meet the basic human need for well-being.

1.3.3 Conclusion

The withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the establishment of the Taliban's new regime in Kabul ended decades of armed conflict but so adversely affected human security. Recent research shows that since the U.S. and NATO withdrawal, the human security situation has been vulnerable. Food insecurity passed its threshold. Food insecurity under economic collapse and the sudden halt of U.S. funding and foreign aid aggravated. When freezing foreign exchange reserves and sanctions tied the Taliban's hands, leaving the

⁵² Razia Arooje and Nina Burridge, "School Education in Afghanistan," *Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia* (2021): 411.

⁵³ Ileana Citaristi, "United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization—UNESCO," in *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2022*, 369–375. Routledge, 2022.

⁵⁴ Ahmad M Siddiqi, "The West is getting Afghanistan wrong – again," *Aljazeera News*, 12 September 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/12/misunderstanding-afghanistan-and-the-taliban>.

⁵⁵ Karl Blanchet and Fouzia Shafique, "The Afghan Population Needs a National Health System to Survive and Continued Support from International Donors," *The Lancet Regional Health—Europe* 25 (2023).

government unable to control the humanitarian situation, they only made it worse. Their inability to negotiate with the international community about conditions for humanitarian aid further exacerbates the problem. Taliban constraints on the schooling and socio-economic activities of Afghan women help to increase human insecurities. The Taliban at first said that they would let girls go to school and give them socio-economic rights. But in actual fact girls could not go to school, so Afghan women were pushed into a state of insecurity they had not wanted. Taliban control of freedom of speech and the right to demonstration perpetuates censorship and restrictions; journalists flee to other countries, feeling menaced. The health sector, which relied on foreign aid and U.S. funding for support, collapsed after the Taliban's takeover. Having suddenly pulled the plug, hospitals were left without their basic supplies of life-saving medicines; healthcare workers went unpaid.

To sum up, after the establishment of the Taliban's new regime in Kabul, the situation of human security deteriorated. Weak spots grow in every aspect. Unemployment now far exceeds what is bearable in economic terms; food insecurity is mounting. That image is very negative; the more this happens, the more exactly international isolation and sanctions intensify the crisis. Should this situation continue, historical light will be shone—and Afghanistan will move in an even more disturbing direction, threatening the region and global society throughout. It will come to be a useful space for international terrorist organizations like ISKP. With global ambitions, they continue unabated, taking over from the Taliban and other regional groups before them. If human insecurities are not dealt with by the Taliban and regional countries/the international community, Afghan people themselves may turn to terrorist organizations, drug mafias, and transnational criminal networks as a way of finding enough food and the necessities for survival. Poverty and unemployment foster terrorist and criminal network recruitment. The world has seen the changed conditions of Afghanistan after the Soviet Union left; if these occur again with the U.S. departure, the consequences for international terrorism could be really staggering.

As a summary, the opportunity now exists to realize Afghanistan's stability after decades of armed conflict. It is crucial to address the humanitarian crisis promptly; the processes of developing peace for all stakeholders, from regional to international powers, should be as comprehensive as possible. The work of peacebuilding should reflect local concerns as well as socio-political and cultural factors. Only when feelings of human insecurity have been addressed starting from the bottom up can security be obtained for human life. A more scientific peace theory is needed than Burton's theory of wants and aspirations rooted in human nature. This desire for peace has not been sustained by subsequent fact because human beings lack these things when they are not secure. A sustainable peace requires that these needs be satisfied, acknowledging the essential connection between Human Needs Theory and the tangible aim of human security.

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