



## How the Financial Insecurity of the Youth in Afghanistan Impacts International Insecurity

— by FAHIMA AMINI

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**Civil society as a liaison between government and nationals should actively work with the youth and involve them in decision-making processes.**

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### Abstract

**I**n recent years, financial insecurity has become a serious international dilemma. People living below the poverty line may contribute to a nation's financial insecurity and financial insecurity keeps populations living in poverty. This vicious cycle is now increasingly linked to terrorism and global national security concerns. Through the emergence of the Al-Qaeda Terrorist Network (Al-Qaeda) and, more recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Afghanistan has faced a surge in violent crimes including but not limited to murder, torture, kidnapping, and self-inflicted suicide. The influx of terrorist groups has caused not only emotional, physical and financial insecurity for victims and their families, but also world fear and uncertainty on a larger scale.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS are actively functioning in Afghanistan and their terroristic activities pose numerous risks to peace and stability in the country. Terrorists have taken advantage of Afghan youth because their financial insecurity make them vulnerable and easy to attack. United Nations resolutions and reports have raised the question of insecurity,<sup>1</sup> and prior studies have offered analyses of fundamental causes of such insecurity in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, some surveys have been conducted to determine the percentage of insecurity in different areas of Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> However, the impact of unemployed youth on security within Afghanistan or outside its borders has not received sufficient attention.

In this paper, I will first describe the condition of financial insecurity in Afghanistan. I will examine the existing national and international data on insecurity and poverty in Afghanistan as well as data related to the insecurity of Afghan youth. Then, I will address the impact of financial insecurity on terrorism and drug trafficking. Finally, I will conclude my paper by proposing alternatives for combatting

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the major evils, primarily insurgency and drug trafficking, influencing impoverished Afghan youth. My recommendations are both national and international in scope.

## Part 1: Youth Financial Insecurity Empowers Terrorism

Afghanistan is one of the most impoverished nations in Asia with 36% of its population living below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> The poverty levels in rural areas are significantly higher than in urban centers –

76% of the Afghan population lives in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Poverty sends many young people into insurgency,<sup>6</sup> which is an occasion when a group of people attempt to take control of their country by force.<sup>7</sup> It is commonly known that poverty provides prime opportunities for insurgent groups to recruit people into fighting and illegal activities.<sup>8</sup> The average age of a suicide bomber is 23 years old, and during the riots in the summer of 2006, the majority of individuals participating in violent mobs appeared to be youth.<sup>9</sup>

When such a large segment of the population lacks productive channels to direct their energy, a country runs the risk of widespread apathy, discontent, resentment, and disillusionment. Unlike other countries, the youth in Afghanistan are geographically, socially, and economically fragmented on a unique scale due to ongoing insecurity and conflict. They lack the means of communication available to the youth in other countries because of the low literacy levels, geographic remoteness, lack of infrastructure, and limited internet access. Fundamentally, the Afghan youth lack a consistent and universally moderate communication.<sup>10</sup>

Heightened by a closed-off environment, many members of the youth community in Afghanistan adopt the ideology of extremism when they cannot cope with the difficulties of life. Young people tend to be adventurous, and to search for purpose, meaning, and status in their lives. They have the energy, passion, and physical and mental capabilities to seize opportunities to improve their lives and their surroundings. If the government and society in general fail to channel these energies into positive actions, young people look for other sources that can provide them with a sense of purpose.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the financial insecurity impacting Afghan youth, ISIS is gaining momentum in Afghanistan and its success in recruiting members has been a key factor in its development. Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, acknowledged that ISIS posed a serious threat to its national interests.<sup>12</sup>

The existence of such terrorist groups is not only a threat to Afghanistan's peace and stability, but also to the international community as a whole. Security specialist Neil Fergus writes that "The digital outreach program of ISIS has impacted many impressionable or disturbed Muslim youth around the globe. Similarly, there is no doubt that many of the foreigners that have been motivated to emigrate to Syria (and Afghanistan) to join ISIS have been significantly influenced by the material they accessed on the internet."<sup>13</sup>

The number of foreign fighters in Afghanistan has expanded rapidly in recent years. According to Fergus, "It is now estimated there are nearly 20,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries in Syria and northern Iraq. To put the figure in context, during the Mujahideen struggle to eject the Soviets from Afghanistan—from 1980 to 1992—it is estimated that 5,000 foreign fighters were involved in the conflict. It has been well-documented that Osama Bin Laden had access to the details of most of the foreign fighters who went through the Mujahideen's training camps, and used them as the basis for creating the Al-Qaeda global terrorist network."<sup>14</sup>

If we consider the damage that Al-Qaeda has inflicted upon international security over the last 20 years—empowered by its ability to draw on the 5,000 or so foreign veterans from the Afghan conflict—it begs the question: what might ISIS be able to achieve if it is able to draw on the 20,000 foreign fighters who have been trained and bloodied in the current conflict in Syria and Iraq?<sup>15</sup>

## Part 2: Youth Financial Insecurity Empowers Drug Trafficking

Beyond insurgency and the danger of ISIS, the youth in Afghanistan are used by criminal gangs, warlords, and drug-lords. The United Nations reports that "Based on UNODC<sup>16</sup> data, opium poppy cultivation was greater in each of the growing seasons in the periods between 2004 and 2007 than in any year during Taliban rule. Also, more land is now used for opium in Afghanistan than for cocoa cultivation in Latin America."<sup>17</sup>

In 2007, 92% of the *non-pharmaceutical-grade*

opiates on the world market originated in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> Today, Afghanistan has the world's largest opium poppy cultivation (209,000 hectares in 2013). Opium production in Afghanistan accounts for 80% of the global opium production (5,500 tons).<sup>19</sup>

As a consequence of poverty, many people are forced to cultivate poppy because they cannot find alternative means to survive. Many youths are forced to abandon their education to assist their families in meeting their subsistence needs. Worse yet, many families, in their desperation for income, drive their children into forced labor or sell them to human traffickers.<sup>20</sup>

Many youths are involved in the trafficking of narcotics, functioning as carriers to neighboring countries, where the drugs are then smuggled to the West. Drugs smuggled through the south of Afghanistan reach Europe, via the near and Middle East and Africa, as well as directly from Pakistan and Iran.<sup>21</sup> The drug trade also exposes Afghan youth to drug use and addiction.<sup>22</sup>

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On the international level, it is estimated that in 2012, between 162 million and 324 million people between ages of 15-64, had used an illicit drug. An estimated 183,000 drug-related deaths were reported in 2012.<sup>23</sup> According to an United Nations report, “the global drug trade generated an estimated US \$321.6 billion in 2003. With a world GDP of US \$36 trillion in the same year, the illegal drug trade may be estimated as nearly 1% of total global trade.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and its illegal trafficking by the youth are not only a serious problem for the Afghan people, but it is a serious problem for the international community as well. Because of its terrible impact on the global economy, global insecurity and drug trafficking should be condemned universally. Yet while it has been condemned, the Afghan government has not been able to contain this problem.

### **Part 3: Proposed Solutions**

To confront the problem of the ongoing insurgency, and the rising power of ISIS in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan National Security Force (“ANSF”) needs to be properly trained and equipped to fight against terrorism. The ANSF need to learn updated fighting strategies set forth by the expert national and international instructors. New soldiers can be trained outside the country. With proper training, ANSF soldiers will become more proficient in their field of work, become more familiar with new weaponry, and will learn from soldiers of other countries the ways in which to fight for peace and security.

Moreover, the number of international troops must be increased in Afghanistan. Since 2014 and after the exit of most of the US military forces, ISIS openly declared its existence in Afghanistan and has taken credit for the damages caused by its existence. International troops, NATO, ISAF and UN Security Council should work with Afghan

agencies by harmonizing policies in order to deal with this international threat.

In addition, more equipment must be provided for the ANSF to secure the insecure areas and to be more powerful than enemies in the battlefield. Many soldiers have lost their lives because of lack of proper weapons, food, transportation, communication equipment, and facilities while fighting the war against terrorism.

However, preventing the youth from being tempted into insurgency or other illegal activities is more important than fighting them once they have strayed into such anti-social behavior.

In an effort to provide a broader solution to this problem, I make the following proposals:

- Employment and educational opportunities should be provided for youth in order to prevent their affiliation with insurgent groups or drug trafficking. Scholarship programs should be offered in order to give the youth a chance to increase their knowledge. By learning from other cultures with regard to their educational, legal, and political systems, students can analyze different points of view to determine what works in society. Serious policy gaps have been responsible for current unemployment of the youth, which needs to be re-organized in a way that the youth get the most benefit.
- An alternative source of income should be available as an alternative to work in the insurgent groups or poppy cultivation and international aid should be increased for the vulnerable people. For example, saffron cultivation is a good alternative to poppy cultivation, but it needs international demand and markets. International business specialists should work with Afghan businessmen and pave the way for entering Afghan products into the global markets.

- Anti-drug campaigns must be organized in areas with the most poppy cultivation and insurgency. Public awareness programs about the consequences of drug trafficking need to be better supported by the government and international community. The public must also be informed about the personal and social harms of involvement with insurgent groups. Drug traffickers and insurgents should be punished by the courts publicly. The public at large must recognize the consequences of the drug trade and insurgent activity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, strategies that need to be formulated to impair the functions of ISIS and drug traffickers in Afghanistan deserve reemphasis. It requires a considerable level of international cooperation and appropriate resources. The international community and central governments need to implement serious measures to ensure the security in the areas where ISIS is functioning, especially across the border of Pakistan. In addition, civil society as a liaison between government and nationals should actively work with the youth and involve them in decision-making processes. It is necessary to enhance both the capacity of the government and civil society institutions so Afghan youth can find a path that will direct them to peace, reconciliation, rule of law, reconstruction, and development. ■

## Author Biography

Fahima Amini joined the Fowler School of Law family as an L.L.M. student from Afghanistan. She is a passionate advocate for justice and accountability in and between the countries of the world. To further those goals, she has served with the United Nations Children's Fund in Afghanistan and as a legal trainer with the Afghanistan National Participation Organization. She is using her time at Fowler School

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