Extended Oasis Plan

Afghanistan Pursues Agro Progress Even While in Food Emergency

by Marcia Merry Baker

June 19—Afghanistan, bordering both Iran and Pakistan, has been hit hard by economic shocks from the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, coming on top of an economy already reeling from 40 years of foreign occupation, and continued economic warfare—sanctions, asset seizure, bans—from the United States and the West generally. With a population of 45 million, the nation has taken in 5.7 million returnee Afghans from Iran and Pakistan just since 2023, with hundreds of thousands returning in recent times, fleeing the bombing and chaos in Iran, and because of conflict with Pakistan.

Some 17.5 million Afghans—over a third of the population—do not have enough food, with millions of them experiencing acute hunger and malnutrition. From the start in Fall 2021, after the U.S.-NATO exodus, the Taliban government has conducted disaster and humanitarian relief while trying to rev up the economy, but resources are severely limited. Afghanistan ranks in the top 13 nations designated as "hunger hotspots" by the biannual UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)/World Food Program (WFP) "Hunger Hotspots" report issued this month.

Moreover, the nation has been slammed by the disruptions and price hikes resulting directly from the restriction of the Strait of Hormuz. Just since March, for example, fertilizer prices have soared. At the same time, the normal delivery corridors for WFP humanitarian aid have been blocked by conflict. Therefore, deliveries of relief supplies—already smaller in volume—have been rerouted, taking weeks longer. The WFP published on June 9 the results of a case study of Afghanistan and how the Iran war has affected its population.

The map here (**Figure 1**) shows the nationwide food emergency, with yellow indicating the areas in the category of "stressed" in regard of food availability, and orange indicating the condition of food "crisis." (These are categories two and three of the five-level hunger index commonly used, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.)

Fortunately, the May-June wheat crop harvest has begun, and may come in larger than last year, although lower than the five-year average. The harvest relieves severe food shortages in many localities, but not all. Up to the 1970s, Afghanistan was self-sufficient in food; wheat is the staple. But since then, the nation has become more and more import-dependent.

Back the Extended Oasis Plan

These selected facts are merely indicative of the deep humanitarian crisis situation that could be relieved, despite the many obstacles, if the strategic economic context were favorable. Now there is an opportunity to support both humanitarian aid and the momentum for economic development in Afghanistan and throughout the region, given the opportunity provided by the June 17 memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States, for the U.S. and Israel to stop the warfare.

To be sure, no one is expecting leadership at this time to come from Washington for economic improvement in the region—the basis for security—but there is a realignment of nations underway internationally toward pro-development, pro-peace initiatives, with leadership from the Global South. It is in the interests of the trans-Atlantic nations to recognize, and to participate in this epic shift.

The critical intervention at this pivotal moment, is to pursue an "Extended Oasis Plan" approach in Southwest Asia, and in the greater region from the Mediterranean eastward to India, furthering projects for water, power, transportation, food, agriculture, and industry, to the mutual benefit of all nations there.

The Oasis Plan concept was put forward in the 1970s by American economist-statesman Lyndon LaRouche (1922-2019), and is now in widespread circulation, promoted by the Schiller Institute and International Peace Coalition, as the critical element for creating collective security in the region, and applicable on

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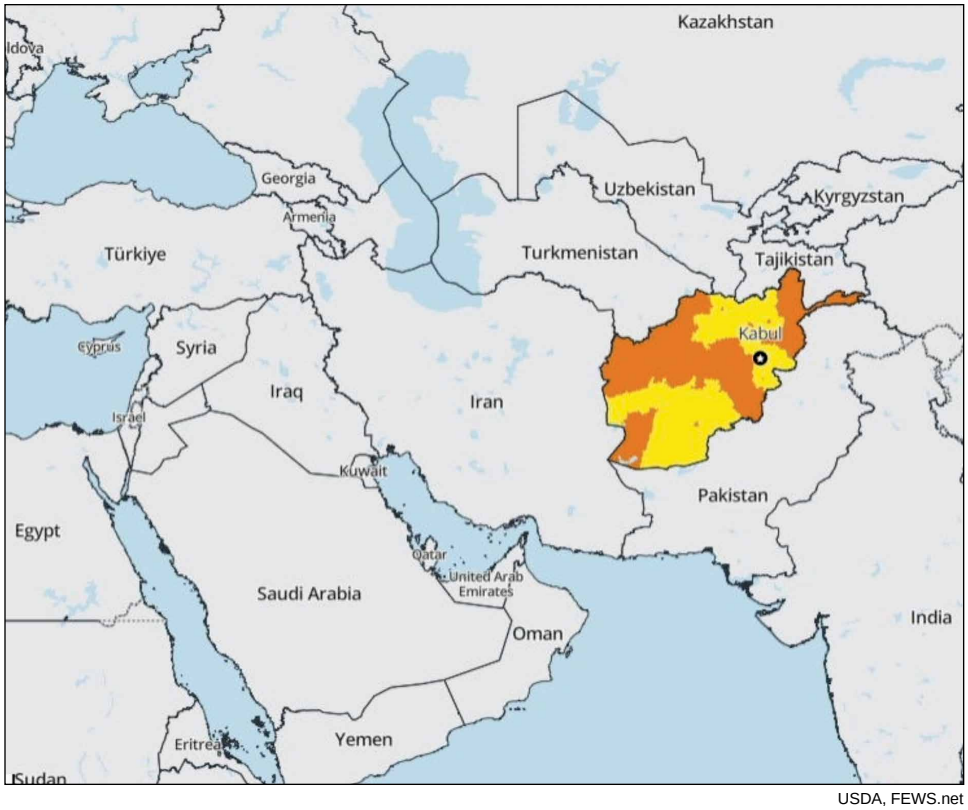
other continents to other situations of conflict, resource scarcity, and economic insufficiency.

Seeking Economic Development

The government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has been continuously active toward the goal of national development, despite severe limitations, building and repairing infrastructure, working on relief programs, and undertaking priority projects. In November 2023, a remarkable conference was held in Kabul on national economic development, initiated by the Ibn Sina Research and Development Organization (ISRAND), with the participation of government ministerial-level figures and the Schiller Institute. It was titled, "Operation Ibn Sina: The Coming Afghan Economic Miracle."

FIGURE 1



USDA, FEWS.net

This map of Afghanistan indicates the general location of subgroups of the 17.5 million people, over a third of the entire population, lacking sufficient food. In the yellow areas the food situation is described as "stressed;" in the orange areas, as "crisis," in the terms commonly used for food relief planning, from the five-level index called the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC).

Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute, in her message to the conference, elaborated on the idea she first put forward in October 2021 for an "Operation Ibn Sina"—named after the philosopher-physician Ibn Sina, known also as Avicenna (980-1037), from the northern Afghanistan/Uzbekistan region. Zepp-LaRouche spoke of the need for an Oasis Plan effort throughout the entire Southwest/Central Asia region.

ISRAND has continued activities in Afghanistan, ranging from arranging visiting medical specialists, to workshops on education, to work on national energy planning. For example, on June 20, ISRAND is hosting an online conference on agriculture and proposals for upgrading farmers' skills and productivity in Afghanistan. It is titled, "From Education to Innovation, From Innovation to Employment, From Employment to Economic Growth and Prosperity."

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), begun in March 2002 with a mandate to further stability and economic development, has functioned continuously since then, though with varying degrees of positive, sometimes negative, effects. On June 15, the UN Security Council voted to renew the UNAMA mandate until 2027. While UNAMA and other recurring mandates of the UN can devolve into neo-viceroy roles, never truly contributing to sovereignty and prosperity, this devolution reflects the degraded condition of Western geopolitics, and need not continue.

At the UN Security Council discussion June 15, Anna Evstigneeva, Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN, said at the time of voting on the UNAMA extension that Russia welcomed the inclusion in the resolution of provisions relating to Afghanistan's economic development. She said this contributes to laying the foundation for the nation's self-sufficiency. Evstigneeva also took note that China will be the UN facilitator, or "penholder" for UNAMA this year.

The Taliban seek investment and partnering with neighboring countries, the UN, and any willing nation and private enterprise anywhere. Afghanistan Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi conferred by phone on June 17 with Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, on subjects including enhancing the humanitarian aid delivery process.

Afghanistan has participated in many regional events and consultations on projects, ranging from plans for rail construction, to trade, water resources, and health care. For example, at the June St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) in Russia, IEA Ambassador to Moscow Gul Hassan Hassan led a delegation.

National Development Corporation of Afghanistan

The Qush Tepa Canal under construction.

Russia was the first nation to fully recognize the government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, though China was the first to post an ambassador in Kabul, after the formation of the new Afghan government in 2021. Several other nations have since also posted ambassadors.

At the SPIEF conference, this year's dialogue was most auspicious for Afghanistan, given that Central Asia and Eastern Africa were featured, in effect, as two of the world's new centers for economic growth. Russian President Vladimir Putin in recent years has been highlighting the concept of new regional growth centers as the reality to be supported by the world's nations. Representing Central Asia, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev spoke at SPIEF about his country's development plans, including nuclear energy, but also posed a vision for all of Central Eurasia. Uzbekistan, with 37.7 million people, and its immediate neighbor Afghanistan, with 45 million, are by far the most populous of the six nations of Central Asia. As the impetus and means for productivity spread, they could see vast economic development. Tashkent and Kabul have been collaborating in many basic areas.

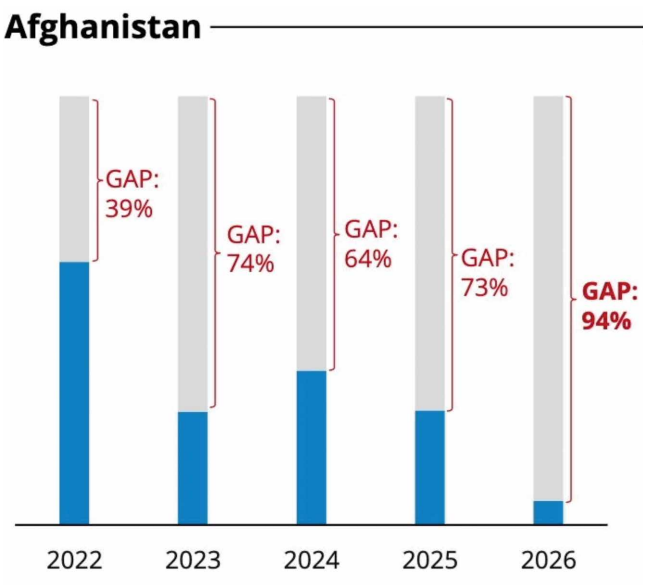
Qush Tepa Canal

The flagship agriculture infrastructure project for Afghanistan is the Qush Tepa Canal, started in 2023 in the north of the country, and now nearing two-thirds completion. Long planned but never built, as were many projects during the U.S.-NATO years, the trench is to run 285 km across three provinces south of the Amur Darya River, from which flow will be diverted for irrigation. The canal's width is 108 meters, and depth is 8.5 meters. The National Development Corporation, a state agency, is conducting the work.

Once the intended 550,000 hectares are irrigated for crops, this one project can allow the nation to be self-sufficient in wheat, its daily staple. Traditionally, Afghanistan has ranked first in the world in share of daily calories coming from wheat consumption. Until the 1970s, the country was self-reliant in wheat cultivation. In recent years, of the needed 6-7 million metric tons of wheat required for annual consumption, 2-3 million tons have been imported. Depending on per-hectare yields, the new Qush Tepa Canal project can potentially fill this gap.

Even before this, the tonnage of wheat and other food commodities can be significantly increased with support for Afghan farmers who, as of the 2022-2023 crop cycle, ceased growing opium poppy, in accordance with the Kabul government's national ban. Opi-

FIGURE 2



The worsening gaps in World Food Program funding for its Afghanistan food and humanitarian relief operations.

um poppy output in 2023 fell by over 90% from the year before.

The Kabul government's commitment to the Qush Tepa Canal, and other important projects for electricity, health care, education, transportation, and other basics, show the orientation to the principles of security and peace through development embodied in the "Extended Oasis Plan" approach to all Southwest Asia.

Meet Emergency Food Needs

In the short term, emergency food and humanitarian needs must be met. The World Food Program provided summary information in its report in early June, "Food Security Under Pressure; How the Middle East Crisis Is Impacting Vulnerable Countries." **Figure 2** shows the dramatic increase in the funding gap for World Food Program operations in Afghanistan, from 2022 to 2026. The WFP appeal for funding for the nation has gone unmet. The agency estimates that, without intervention, 2.3 million additional people could fall into the ranks of the hungry in the coming months in Afghanistan directly because of the follow-on impact of the Iran War.

The WFP states in its report: "Supply chain disruptions have been severe in Afghanistan, with WFP external transport costs increasing by 2.5 to 5 times and delivery times going from 10 days to as much as 75 days when using alternative corridors."

Figure 3 from the same report provides a snapshot of additional pertinent aspects of the Afghan situation. Under the heading "Import and Export Dependencies," the graphic shows that 60% of Afghanistan's exports have gone through Pakistan, which has also been the traditional route for delivery of humanitarian supplies into Afghanistan. However, since September 2025, border crossings with Pakistan have been blocked, due to the flare-ups of conflict between the two nations.

The graphic also reports that Afghanistan has relied on Iran for 60% of its exports and 50% of its imports, which since March has been a disaster.

The dimensions of the crisis are summarized by the new joint report from the WFP with the FAO, "Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity, June to November 2026 Outlook," cited above. The report states: "From April to September 2026, 13.8 million people (28 percent of the population) are projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3), including 2.9 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), a significant deterioration compared with May-October 2025."

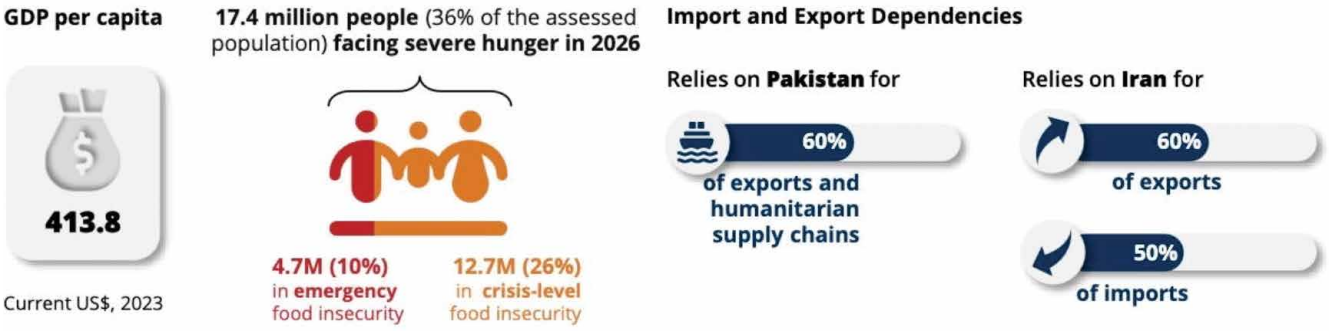



FIGURE 3