

Foreign Aid Frozen - The U.S. Is Destroying the People of Afghanistan

Sunday 21 November 2021, by [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date first published: 20 November 2021).

When the U.S. left Afghanistan in August it also froze almost all foreign aid to the country.

It has now come to light that the major part of the economy under the U.S. military and its puppet government was completely dependent on that foreign aid.

In other words, the U.S. invasion destroyed the Afghan domestic economy, which was only kept afloat by aid from outside.

The U.S. also froze the \$9 billion reserves of the Afghan central bank held in U.S. and other Western banks. That caused banks to fail across the country. The currency tumbled.

By pulling the rug of U.S.-created of foreign aid out from under has left the economy in shambles.

The result is what UN agencies say is a looming humanitarian crisis including mass starvation of 23 million Afghans in the winter that has begun.

These actions by the United States come on top of hundreds of thousands of Afghans (the real number is not known) killed as a result of the U.S. invasion, more maimed, and many scars left.

One of these scars is the estimate by international health officials that two-thirds of the Afghan people suffer mental illness.

Washington, with full bipartisan support, is making the people of Afghanistan pay for its humiliating defeat in the 20-year-old war.

A November 16 discussion conducted by Democracy Now hosts Amy Goodman and Juan González with Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, gives greater detail on the looming U.S.-caused catastrophe.

Barry Sheppard

Here are excerpts:

JAN EGELAND: I was recently in Afghanistan and I sat down with the mothers in these displacement camps around Kabul. I asked them, "What about the future? What do you think of the future?"

They told me very clearly, "We believe we will starve and freeze to death this harsh winter unless there is an enormous aid operation coming through and unless there is a public sector again that is able to provide services."

It is as acute as that. Forty million civilians were left behind when the NATO countries went for the door in August.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Jan Egeland, the NATO countries not only went for the door, they took all of Afghanistan's financial reserves with them as they left. They froze the assets of the Afghan government. Could you talk about the role of this issue of all of the money in Afghanistan essentially being held hostage by the Western nations that left?

JAN EGELAND: Yes. There is a lot of issues over these last 20 years, and one of them is that there was an enormous aid dependency. Seventy percent of teachers, nurses, doctors, water engineers, garbage collectors, public workers were on the payroll of Western development donors. That was cut overnight.

I met teachers who were eager to restart girls' education and boys' education [but cannot].

We, Norwegian Refugee Council, cannot transfer money to our colleagues in Kabul through the local bank system, not even to get money there to pay salaries for our 2,000 aid workers that did not go out the door, who are there to stay and deliver — because of this freezing of the economy.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Could you talk about the role of Iran and Pakistan, which have basically shouldered an enormous refugee population, estimates of three to four million Afghans in Iran alone, and the failure of again the West to assist these countries in their efforts to assist the refugees?

JAN EGELAND: Yes, indeed. Ninety percent of Afghan refugees—and there are many millions of them—accumulated over 40 years of fighting since the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan 40 years ago — are in two countries, Iran and Pakistan.

They are not in Europe. They are not in North America. They are not in the rich countries. They are in these two neighboring countries. In Iran were I was, refugees are getting education and healthcare and so on, but the Iranian host communities are not getting much international assistance at all [because of U.S. sanctions against Iran].

Now that 4,000 or 5,000 are coming over the border every single day, 320,000 since the Taliban took over, it means that the Afghan refugees in Iran are very afraid of the future because they think that the little they have has to be divided in even smaller portions for all of those coming over the border.

There has to be an investment in hope inside Afghanistan but also in the two neighboring countries.

AMY GOODMAN: I want ask about the conditions in the health centers in Afghanistan. This is an excerpt from a France 24 program which features Hasseebullah Barakzai, an administrator at a hospital in Kabul, where patients have to buy their own medicine, gloves and syringes. The clip begins with Masood, a nurse in the hospital.

MASOOD: [translated] You see, we don't have any medicine here. We used to have antibiotics, painkillers and vitamins here but it is empty now. In this cupboard we had medicine for heart patients. Now we don't even have a tablet left."

This water cooler doesn't work anymore. Look, we don't even have water to wash our hands.

HASSEEBULLAH BARAKZAI: [translated] We don't have enough food for the patients. Winter is here and we don't have enough fuel for the heating system.

AMY GOODMAN: Afghanistan was already suffering from decades of war, drought and economic collapse prior to the Taliban takeover, but now U.N. officials have been warning of a much worse humanitarian crisis in the country with 23 million people facing hunger and nine million on the brink

of starvation.

Children are bearing the brunt of the crisis. The U.N. warned that if urgent humanitarian assistance is not provided, more than a million children will die from malnutrition. The BBC spoke to a mother whose two severely malnourished children were hospitalized.

MOTHER: [translated] The pain that he is suffering, I also feel it. Only God knows what I go through when I look at him. Two of my children are facing death because we don't have any money. I want the world to help Afghan people. I don't want any other mother to see their children suffering like this.

AMY GOODMAN: Just some of the voices of Afghanistan. Jan Egeland, to those countries that are saying, "We will not support the Taliban so we will not give money," what do you say to them?

JAN EGELAND: I would argue that nobody should want an implosion in Afghanistan where 40 million people say "I have no hope here. I need to leave."

Hundreds of thousands have now assembled at the Iranian-Afghan border on the Afghan side with the intent to get over. Iranian refugees I spoke to said, "All our relatives have started to wander." They want to come to Iran and they want to wander towards Europe.

AMY GOODMAN: I'd like to turn to Hassan Esfandiar of the Iranian Red Crescent, who spoke to Al Jazeera about the difficulties of providing assistance to the thousands of Afghans you just described arriving at the border every day.

HASSAN ESFANDIAR: Due to the current situation of sanctions to the country, unfortunately we are not able to receive the international donations assistance because the banking channels are blocked and then we are not able to receive the humanitarian donations.

So far, the Iran Red Crescent has tried to provide its own resources for the Afghan displaced populations who are approaching the border.

AMY GOODMAN: Jan Egeland, of course the U.S. has sanctions against Iran, so how can Iran be helped in dealing with this number of refugees that are crossing the border, 4,000 or 5,000 every day? What is getting the West's attention is what is happening in Eastern Europe.

Earlier today, Polish border guards firing tear gas, water cannons at hundreds of asylum-seekers trying to push their way through a razor-wire barrier erected along the Poland-Belarus border. That's 4,000 to 5,000 refugees there altogether.

What's happening in Iran is every day. If you could address both, from Iran to Poland-Belarus border?

JAN EGELAND: As a European, I'm ashamed at what is happening in our part of the world. What Belarus is doing by using vulnerable migrants like chess pawns in some kind of a power play, and then Europe basically saying, "We're not going to hear any asylum applications at all" in violation of international law. "We're going to throw everybody out."...

In Iran, we have between three and a half and four million Afghan refugees at the moment. Three and a half to four million. I think that has to sink in— and 4,000 or 5,000 more per day, and a very small international aid program.

Again, the United Nations is there with UNHCR. They're a refugee agency. NRC is there. We can do

more. We need more funding. We also ask for more freedom of operation from the Iranian authorities so we can win this race against the winter on both sides of the border, inside Afghanistan but also in Iran and in Pakistan.

It has to be understood that a lot is at stake. It is not a small catastrophe. It is 23 million people who have no more food. They will leave, and hope to get to Europe. I would go if I was in that situation. I would also wander to where I could get food for my children.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Jan Egeland, the particular role of the United States in all of this as being the primary power that led the war in Afghanistan for so many years and then the Biden administration suddenly pulling out—what would you urge the Biden administration to do now?

JAN EGELAND: The U.S. should lead in the humanitarian relief operation. Unfreeze the assets that are necessary to get the public sector going.

The World Bank sits on funds. When I wrote to the World Bank president, the answer back was, “Well, we’re willing to do things if the member states on our board, the U.S. and others, tell us to release money. We can’t release money.”

Also, enable us as organizations to really work effectively and efficiently on both sides of the border. Sanctions on Iran are making it difficult for us to work. The Norwegian Refugee Council couldn’t even transfer money for a full year after the Trump administration started these sanctions.

There was no bank with a backbone strong enough to transfer aid money to our people because they were so afraid of one day being brought to court in New York because of breaking these sanctions. It is paralyzing for us who are on the front lines of humanity.
