

Speakers Debate the Big Issues for Seizing the Afghanistan Opportunity

At the Schiller Institute all-day conference “Afghanistan: A Turning Point in History after the Failed Regime-Change Era”, most of the dozen speakers, besides their presentations, debated among themselves for several hours the means of taking hold of the brief, but extraordinary opportunity for development and peace in the South Asia region in which Afghanistan is central.

To supplement the four panel presentations published in this issue, we publish here half a dozen major topics of that discussion, in the form of excerpts and exchanges among some of the experts. This will give readers additional insight into the most significant problems and potential solutions.

Taking part:

Schiller Institute President Helga Zepp-LaRouche;
Russia’s Deputy Chief of UN Mission, H.E. Ambassador Anna Estigneevea;

Afghanistan’s Ambassador to Canada, Hassan Shoroosh;

Dr. Wang Jin, Fellow of the Charhar Institute, China;

Dr. Walter Faggett, former House of Delegates Speaker of the National Medical Association, US Army Lt. Colonel (ret.);

Major General (ret.) Peter Clegg, US Army;

Hussein Askary, Schiller Institute Southwest Asia Coordinator;

Prof. Pino Arlacchi, Former Executive Director of the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, and former European Parliament Rapporteur on Afghanistan. Professor Arlacchi successfully organized opium poppy eradication with the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1997-2002;

Dr. Stephen Fischer, American physician with the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team in 2012-13.

The moderator is Dennis Speed of the Schiller Institute, who organized this discussion following several sets of panel presentations.

Dennis Speed: You’ve seen a kind of dialogue that’s completely unavailable to most Americans at any point. And I want to thank everybody who has participated.

Helga, let me just ask you if you have any reflections at this point.

A Modern Healthcare System Central to Afghan Solution

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: I think the dynamic must be changed, and that obviously requires to put a development perspective on the table which will be difficult to refuse for all participating forces inside Afghanistan, including the Taliban.... I think that given the fact that we are in the middle of a pandemic, and Afghanistan has a very poor health system, what if all the international forces—Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, and the European nations and the United States—would agree that they work together to put up a modern health system in all of Afghanistan?... Because as long as we don’t have a health system in every country, the danger of mutation is great. We see this now with the Delta variant spreading, and there’s already a Lambda virus. So, what if we would put on the table that in that one area, it is the common interest of all the Afghani groups—the Taliban, the government forces, the different ethnic groups—and international cooperation to build a modern health system? Modern hospitals like it was done in Wuhan, where hospitals were put up in one week for 1000 beds. And also starting a training program for Afghani health workers, doctors, to start a concrete action on that point.

Ambassador Hassan Shoroosh: In terms of medical infrastructure, of course our infrastructure has been very much under-developed. In terms of also financial resources, there is need for further international support. Of course, we have been implementing a well-developed national response strategy, and the government has been very much dedicated in this context. We have made extensive and intensive efforts to respond to this pandemic, but there is need for greater support from our international partners in terms of delivering more and more vaccines, in terms of for instance providing more medical supplies, especially when it comes to ventilators, which are very much important.

Dr. Wang Jin: China has found something: we have



Discussants: From left to right, upper row: Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Amb. Anna Evstigneeva, Amb. Hassan Shoroosh; middle row: Prof. Pino Arlacchi, Dr. Wang Jin, Hussein Askary; bottom row: Maj. Gen. (ret.) Peter Clegg, Dr. Stephen Fischer, Dr. Walter Faggett.

to know that China is now facing a little problem of the reemergence of the Delta coronavirus spread, and especially in the recent days. But actually, even against such very critical times, China has donated about 700,000 doses of vaccine to Afghanistan.

Ambassador Anna Evstigneeva: The thing is that Afghani powers get close to business and try to find the solutions. And what Helga was asking, she emphasized the issue of development of Afghanistan and also putting new initiatives on the table that can help development. Yes: That’s true, the humanitarian situation and the situation with COVID-19 consequences are atrocious, and it’s important to focus on it, but there is no use to focus on it, unless we have this minimum denominator.

Dr. Walter Faggett: I want to quote Franklin Delano Roosevelt: “The success or failure of any government in the final analysis must be measured by the wellbeing of its citizens. Nothing can be more important to a state than its public health.” To Helga’s point.

The state’s paramount concern should be the health of its people, and stopping COVID is the top priority of the world at this point. Thank you.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: I’m absolutely convinced that we as a human species have reached the point where we earnestly start to see the poverty of every country has to be overcome; that in the face of a pandemic, every single nation needs to have a modern health system, which means modern hospitals, modern medical personnel, doctors, nurses, and in order to have that you need clean water! You cannot have a modern health system with 2 billion people with no access to clean water; more than 1 billion people have no access to electricity. I think 800 million of them are in Africa alone. . . .

So I think if we start to look at the situation in a completely different way and say that this pandemic will mutate and threatens to make even vaccinations obsolete, which we already are seeing signs of; then why don’t we start to focus on offering Afghanistan a modern health system, including putting it in front of the entire population—including members of the Taliban? They

want to survive. And if all the neighbors, if all the big powers would work together in putting tough conditions and stop the geopolitical maneuvers among themselves, I think that would be a leverage which could start to change the situation. Naturally, not only in Afghanistan, but it's a very, very good place to start.

Is the First Priority Peace and Stability, or Launching Economic Development?

Ambassador Hassan Shoroosh: We do agree that there's no military solution [to] the conflict in Afghanistan, as experience shows, and that's why we have put so much resources, energy and time behind a peace process. And the government is even — we are not part of the Doha agreement, but we, as a show of good will, we will release over 6,000 prisoners of the Taliban, Unfortunately most of them return to the fight.

But we do believe that the solution is only through peace and development....

I think it's very important to maintain our counter-terrorism capabilities, or collective capabilities, in and around Afghanistan. And one effective way would be to continue supporting, as Ambassador Evstigneeva said, Afghanistan National Security and Defense Forces, which is a wiser national institution now; it's very much respected among our people.

Dr. Wang Jin: The Chinese point of view [is] that the country, that if they want the people to be prosperous, want the people to be at peace, stability must come first, because without stability, any construction would be destroyed easily, and any foundation of the country will be destroyed easily. The stability is determined not only by the war, not only by the [end of] conflicts, but should be determined by the willingness that is set up through the negotiation table, because this is a way that can ensure that people's security in the midst of the war, it's a way that they can easily have a framework and a mechanism for the future of the country. So I think that's why international society should encourage, through the concentrated focus, and help to push for the negotiation there to work, and to bridge the gap between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and other political and military blocs in the country.

Ambassador Anna Evstigneeva: I wanted to make a small comment ... about the integration in Eurasia and Central Asia and South Asia: We are consistently

promoting integration of the region, and you know that President Putin suggested the idea of creating a Eurasian partnership.

And we have organizations there that are really relevant, and I thank the previous speaker for emphasizing the role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization and we work there with all partners that are present there. And some of them really do have some contradictions in between them, but they still work together, sit together, and discuss common threats and common opportunities for cooperation. And so these suggestions on different fronts for transport infrastructure, economic regional connectivity, bring new vistas for the region, that's for sure. But it's very important that when we can boost the investment process and economic development, that it's fundamental for the ordinary people.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: You have the refugee problem; you have the terrorist danger; you have the drug problem; the need to solve the COVID pandemic by providing a health system, also emphatically to Afghanistan.

So I would suggest that out of this group and other groups working together, that a concrete plan is being made — using, as Mr. Arlacchi was saying, a tiny fraction of the money which was spent for the military before — for actually these concrete development projects. And then, such a joint program is presented to all sides in Afghanistan. I think if the United States, Russia, China, India and all the other neighbors would work together, and the Europeans, naturally, and the United States, and present such a common strategy, I think it could work! But it does require the will for cooperation on all of the countries outside of Afghanistan.

And that would be my suggestion: That such an initiative is formulated relatively quickly.

Dr. Stephen Fischer: Once we built the infrastructure, we noted that communities would evolve around the areas where we had built roads; so for example, over the course of years, including during my stay in 2012-2013, we had demand to build schools in areas where we had built roads just several years prior. In an almost Adam Smithian way, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, once we had built roads, people had built businesses along the roadsides, and then villages and communities had emerged, and

people had families, and there was a request to the Provincial Reconstruction Team to help organize funding to build schools, in the locations where we had built transportation infrastructure.

So, in that way, some of the things that we did were really encouraging that we were catalyzing economic growth and development. But we were also concerned that it was not sustainable, that NATO's training mission in Afghanistan and the NATO-led international security forces had not achieved the goal of helping the Afghan government plan a sustainable budget and sustain the infrastructure that was built. And now, I'm concerned that the Afghan government, whether it's federal government, provincial government or district government, is not in control of critical infrastructure at all.

Hussein Askary: If you build a road, suddenly you have economic activities and communities popping up all around the road. That's natural law. This is what LaRouche thought. This is physical economics; it's like natural law. That's what the Chinese say: If you want to get rich, you have to first build a road.

But the approach which is described is—the NGOs, the aid organizations in Africa, you cannot have piecemeal solutions to their very large problem. And therefore, in Afghanistan, like in Africa, or anywhere else, you need a national development plan, which as we propose, that all the parties agree on, and that this becomes the first item in the peace negotiations, not the last one!

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: What we are proposing is a much, much larger, and much more fundamental approach, because, also if you look at the history of industrialization of every single country—whether the United States in the 19th Century, whether it's Germany, Japan during the Meiji Restoration, or Russia under Count Witte—in each case, you can actually see that the industrialization starts with infrastructure and that the building of infrastructure at the beginning, always is not recognized as important; people always have fears that if the train goes more than 30 km/h, you will die—there were all these myths and fears. But if you look at the history, you can actually see that it is the building of infrastructure which has an incredibly civilizing effect on the respective populations.

So if you want to have a transformation to a more modern kind of society, it cannot be done without large-scale infrastructure. And I can only say again, if only a

fraction, as Mr. Arlacchi was suggesting, only a fraction of the money spent on the military which was pretty much wasted—look at the unsustainable military equipment. Now that the U.S. and NATO are gone, the Afghan air force, for example, is left equipment they don't have the repair parts for. They can't sustain it, and this is a big crisis right now.

So our suggestion is, if you want to end the endless wars in Afghanistan, in particular, but also elsewhere, you have to shift the economy away from a purely military production, more and more to nation-building, to economic reconstruction, and that is on the table. And that needs a completely different thinking than these small projects.... We are really talking about a large transformation. You know, the living standard of the Afghan people, why should they not be like that in Italy in a couple of years? I think that's what we mean.

Prof. Pino Arlacchi: I worked in Afghanistan during all my mandate, from 1997 to 2002, in the UN; and then I continued to work in the country, when I was in the European Parliament, in the subsequent decade. I was in Afghanistan several times, and what I now believe is, the narcotic issue can be part of the national plan for development, and I agree entirely. Because I heard many, many very, extremely good proposals for the future of the country.

The development of Afghanistan going from, as you say, a geopolitical issue to a geo-economic issue, is the key for the future. But what we really need to understand, until then, is that Afghanistan ... is a regional country in a region that is developing quite well and quite fast. In the last 20 years, all the countries surrounding Afghanistan got very good development processes, with a rate of growth of GDP quite respectable.

Afghanistan, not. Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries of the world, in which the main problem for the population is not the war. It is not defined between the Taliban and the government, or the fight here against the United States. Afghanistan is still a country in which you have a couple of hundreds, maybe a thousand, millions killed as a victim of the civil war factions, but you have still between 15,000 and 20,000 women dying every year just for delivering a baby! For an Afghan person, this is, in terms of a problem, you have still a country in which the life expectancy is still 30 years less than other countries! A 28-year-old man is considered middle aged.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, has a potential for

development which is huge. Infrastructure, of course, but raw material, natural resources, agriculture, you have a potential in Afghanistan for agriculture that is astonishing. You have saffron, for instance, which is a traditional product in Afghanistan: If saffron production could be developed into a national plan, saffron profitability is much more than opium! It is an extremely profitable production. And there is other production—pomegranates. There are also natural resources.

Work with the Taliban *and* the Government?

Ambassador Hassan Shoroosh: In terms of working with them, the experience of the peace process I think shows that the Taliban cannot be trusted, and they have not been able or willing to deliver on any of their commitments that they make under the Doha agreement with the United States. So, it's quite clear. Also, in terms of the recent campaign of violence. They were supposed to reduce violence, and they have not been committed to this very important principle from Doha.

Ambassador Anna Evstigneeva: Unfortunately the reality is such that the Taliban movement now controls 80% of the territory. And as I said in my statement, it's fundamental that we don't have a military solution, though, unfortunately, we face it right now, on the ground. We need a political solution, and that is reached by all Afghan parties, all major ethnic, political groups. So that we at least make the first step to the stable Afghanistan. And we work hard on restarting the talks, that the government participates and talks deter the Taliban movement and others.

Major Gen. (ret.) Peter Clegg, US Army: I do not feel that the Taliban can be relied upon to bring about anything good in Afghanistan. I agree completely with the point of view expressed by the Afghan Ambassador [Shoroosh] to Canada. All of his remarks coincide completely with my own view of the situation. I believe that it is in the interest of the United States, Western Europe, and China and Russia, and all the neighbors of Afghanistan, that—our interests are the same: We want to bring about stability in Afghanistan, so that the progress that we have enabled through military security can continue to take place. Now, I fear that the military security will not be there any longer, and therefore, it will not be possible to bring about any economic development or progress, because I do not believe that the Taliban has

that as their significant interest. Their interest is to bring about population control in Afghanistan for their own ideological reasons.

Prof. Pino Arlacchi: We have to start with this acknowledgment! After 20 years, the Taliban are there! And they are virtually the winner! If there is no agreement between the Taliban and the other forces in the Kabul government, a kind of national unity agreement in the government with a long-term plan for reconstructing the country with support from the international community, we go nowhere.

Hussein Askary: I don't really think that the Afghani government is the good guys and the Taliban are the bad guys—I mean, you have many different colors and shapes of people both in the government and in the Taliban. You have the warlords. The Taliban are not a uniform [movement]; it has to survive through making alliances with warlords, with tribes, with different terrorist groups or whoever, to expand their power. The government has its own methods, but it has relied too much on U.S.-British-NATO support.

Which Nations Must Be Involved in the Solutions?

Ambassador Anna Evstigneeva: But Afghanistan issues, one of the problems we are working really hard—relatively, I must say that, effectively—with all these rivals previously mentioned. Russia, U.S., China, Pakistan; we have to include India in this forum, though there are evident difficulties. We have to include Iran, as well, although we know the difficulties they have with the U.S., and the U.S. has with Iran (better to say). So this can be a turning point, and a very good forum for cooperation, because our goals are the same. It's important also to have a common strategy, and to build on trust, and work together to reach a stable Afghanistan. But I'm also very pleased to see that it happens, and it will happen in the nearest future, and this issue was touched upon between President Biden and President Putin in Geneva, and I hope it bears fruit.

Prof. Pino Arlacchi: We need a small fraction, not even 1% of the money that has been wasted in this horrible and stupid military adventure in the country, to reconstruct Afghanistan.... We need that all the countries that wasted 20 years' money in Afghanistan, commit to stay in Afghanistan for the recon-

struction of the country, committing to a small part of it, I would say 10% of the money that has been used by the Italians, by all the European countries to accompany the American invasion. A small part of that money can be used to reconstruct the country. And you can be sure, if there is a credible plan for the reconstruction of the country, that all parties in Afghanistan would agree....

And I believe that discussions like the one that we are doing, can be very, very important and very productive. So I praise the Schiller Institute for this activity.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: Why cannot, then—since everybody agrees, the opium production will kill many Russians, many Europeans, many Americans (mostly [heroin] from Latin America, but a certain amount also from Afghanistan); and terrorism is a threat to everybody—why can not, then, a separate forum be set up, where all the people who have an interest that these problems be solved, like the Europeans, the Americans, the Russians, the Chinese, the Pakistanis, the Iranians, the Indians, and whoever else is affected, they form a discussion group, and that they work out an investment fund for the industrial infrastructure, agricultural buildup of Afghanistan?

If Mr. Arlacchi says it's only 1% of the military expenses, that should be possible to raise. And then present a national plan for the reconstruction of, or actually building up the economy and agriculture in Afghanistan, and then tie that [to] no opium production, no support for terrorism; and then present such a joint program of all the international forces—who then can no longer say, "You can't work with this group or that group," but that such an international initiative is agreed upon among all the outside forces—and that is being presented then to the different Afghani groups?

Prof. Pino Arlacchi: What we need is to some way stop talking about—or talking less about what Russia or the United States could do, in talking about Afghanistan; or you Europeans could do in Afghanistan. We should talk much more on neighboring countries. First of all, the right of Afghanistan to decide what their destiny is, economic and political authority, and you will see that the conflicts will decrease, if you leave Afghanistan on their own. It is not true that if we withdraw our NATO and U.S. forces, we will provoke a new chaos. It is difficult to imagine more chaos—Afghanistan has been in chaos for 40 years!

The withdrawal of troops and leaving Afghans to an effort to solve their own problems will improve the situation. Most of the reports of these dangers to civil liberties and so on, are extremely exaggerated. Taliban and the government forces will find a way to go ahead with a peace process, will find an agreement. But they have to be left to decide for themselves.

And maximum, regional players that are interested, of course, in the stability in the future of Afghanistan. Central Asia—or Afghanistan is considered the Middle East or Central Asia, according to different critics—that region is not in an unstable, conflict-ridden region. The neighbors of Afghanistan are countries that are relatively stable, that are not on bad terms with Afghanistan, and also are in a very good mood for development.... The issues there—the issues that I saw, fortunately, in this discussion—talking about water systems, talking about infrastructure, talking about the way to develop, this is the main issue of concern in these countries.

How To Stop 85% of World Heroin Supply?

Ambassador Anna Evstigneeva: And on the drug problem, what Helga touched upon about stopping the opium threat and drug threat from Afghanistan and having an international agreement on that. Unfortunately, I just cannot keep silent. For so many years we were talking about this threat, and trying to quiet it. With the partners that agreed, we're still working with France and Japan. But, for example, we saw in the Security Council that many countries tried to diminish the threat.

So, for a long time, we had this attempt to diminish the problems and challenges that exist in Afghanistan. Even the UNSC was pressured not to reveal the real situation. We were waiting for the opium survey. We asked for the UNSC to brief the Security Council. But there were very clear attempts to diminish this problem, and in a sense, I am glad that we have started to talk about this problem again, and it resurfaced, because it's a major threat to my country, for our friends, and for the whole world.

Prof. Pino Arlacchi: Twenty years ago, Afghanistan was like today, the provider of most of the heroin consumed in Europe. They turned it around, not more than \$100 million. The last turnover was about \$150 million some 20 years later, and this is a negligible figure for any victim of Afghan heroin, a negligible

figure. It means \$70 million a year for five years, 20% reduction a year to eliminate production. Even for an Afghan standard, it's not more than 2% of the Afghan GDP. So it's an issue that, in terms of figures, in terms of possibilities can be solved by any kind of government of Afghanistan, even with little legitimacy. But this is the point, to start: We have to focus on the issue, to find a solution. And I say, again: It's a small part of the overall reconstruction process of Afghanistan.

Ambassador Hassan Shoroosh: And just very quickly, if I may, on narcotics: We believe that the need for a holistic approach — only by law enforcement or punishments [we] will not be able to basically counter narcotics. There should be an integrated strategy, that could include law enforcement, alternative development, awareness-raising. And also, without being attentive to the regional dimensions of the drug problem in Afghanistan, we will not be able to address this problem. So, as I said, there is a growing link between terrorism, narcotics, and organized crime, and this needs to be taken into consideration, which is very important.

Hussein Askary: The British have played a terrible role. In Helmand ... in 2010, the British troops in Helmand—which they controlled, where most of the opium is produced—they banned the cultivation of corn [maize]: Imagine! Why? ... You can find it on the Internet now. It's in the *Guardian*, Tuesday, April 13, 2010. It says, "Why Corn—not Opium—Is Afghanistan's Deadliest Crop." [kicker] "British troops struggle against plant that hides insurgents and their homemade bombs."

So the maize, plants that are tall, they hide terrorists and bombs and therefore they should be banned in Afghanistan. Instead opium, which only grows to the waist, should be encouraged. So you shouldn't get the British in any such situation.... I'm talking about British intelligence and their leadership and the City of London people, who benefit from the opium. Mr. Costa, who Mr. Arlacchi knows, in an interview with our magazine *Executive Intelligence Review*, he said the banks need the opium trade—that most of these banks are British banks—to survive. The money from the opium keeps the banking system running, especially with British banks like Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp. (HSBC), which were caught red-handed many times.

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