

II. Schiller Institute Conference—Afghanistan

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Afghanistan: A Turning Point in History After the Failed Regime-Change Era

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Pino Arlacchi

Eradicate Opium in Afghanistan, Develop Modern Agriculture, Build the Nation Now

Pino Arlacchi is the former Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, a former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, and a former European Parliament rapporteur on Afghanistan. This is an edited transcript of his prerecorded presentation to the Schiller Institute conference, “Afghanistan: A Turning Point in History After the Failed Regime-Change Era,” on July 31, 2021.



Schiller Institute

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eradicated particularly in Afghanistan, but also throughout the world. With us today to discuss this is Professor Pino Arlacchi. He is introduced by Claudio Celani, Vice President of MoviSol, and co-director of the *EIR Strategic Alert Weekly Newsletter*.

Claudio Celani: Good morning! We are here with Pino Arlacchi who is a legend in the fight against international crime. He has been Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, and in charge of the

Dennis Speed (Moderator):

The Transcontinental Railroad of Abraham Lincoln, which was the precursor to the Belt and Road Initiative of China, was Lincoln’s way of attacking the problem of slavery. His idea was to develop the interior of the continent of America, not merely simply to try to lead a raid to stop slavery militarily. Russia and China were great supporters of Lincoln, with Russia and its navy militarily assisting the United States, in fact, in 1862.

Today, the even greater slavery of drug addiction, through opium and heroin, is the topic of what must be

international fight against narcotics. He has continued his mission as a member of the Italian Parliament, and of the European Parliament, in which he was the rapporteur on Afghanistan. And he has also advised many governments in the world.

Pino, you have written a book, which I started to read. It’s in Italian. It’s called *Against Fear*. In this book you touch on several issues. One that concerns us today is Afghanistan. But we will go over many other points, if we may.

Let me start with saying that most of our audience probably does not know that when you were at the United Nations, you succeeded in eradicating almost the entire opium production in Afghanistan. Is that true? Can you tell us about it?

Having Eradicated Opium by 2001

Pino Arlacchi: Yes, it was the Taliban who did it, under our control and our pressure. When I started our mandate, I immediately went to Afghanistan and I tried to negotiate with them the elimination of the narcotic crop in the country—at the time, they controlled basically almost the whole country—in exchange for a long-term program of alternative development for the Afghan farmers. My proposal was a 10-year program. They proposed to do it in one year, in exchange for all of the money of the development plan, to give it to them immediately.

Then we started the long partner negotiations, in which there were different moments. At a certain point, I got tired of their behavior, because initially they accepted the formal prohibition of narcotic production, of poppy production, in the country. Then they started to balk a bit, and so on, so at this point I asked the UN Security Council to do some of the further sanctions, and we started to pressure them more seriously. We had basically a good relationship with them. They were much more reasonable than they were described in the press.

After intense work with them, helping them on one hand, and pressuring them on the other, we got to this result. In the summer of 2001, there was almost zero production of opium in the country, because they decided to enforce the ban that they'd previously done under our advice.

Unfortunately, the same year, in October, the United States invaded Afghanistan, after [the events of] September 11, 2001. And the first thing the U.S. did was, instead of continuing enforcing our work and our plan, and extending the agreement to the Taliban on alternative development, the U.S. decided to go in a different way.

Mr. Rumsfeld, who was at the time the Secretary of Defense, did the personal negotiations, not with the Taliban, but through the warlords. The U.S.A. was supporting them. And the content of the negotiations was that the United States would not care about narcotics production, in exchange for the support of the warlords for the so-called “war on terrorism,” not realizing that the same people were supporting terrorism where the

United States wanted to fight it. So, our plan disappeared, and in just two years, the production of opium poppy in Afghanistan skyrocketed to a huge level and continued with a different momentum, until today.

Q: How effective was the plan that you implemented with the Taliban government?

Arlacchi: The first move of the plan was to enact a formal prohibition of opium poppy. Because they were playing a bit with words in the *Koran*, we got some experts in Islamic theology involved, who pronounced a clear verdict against poppy production.

Then we basically wrote the prohibition ban. And then we started to pressure them on the implementation, using some funds that we had to help with the implementation, first in a small area, just to test their ability, in Kandahar and surroundings. This test worked not badly. And then we continued to do this, and we did the same work with their enemies—with the group of militias, aided by the great commander of the Northern Alliance. So, to our surprise, also—because we did not think they would ever implement our plan all over the country—they did it!

So, this was the premise. If there would have been sufficient international aid, which was not too big a figure, at the time we are talking about, a very, quite small figure—my initial plan was priced at \$100 million, in five years—for the elimination of opium poppy: \$20 million a year. If there was even a small engagement of the international community in implementing the development plan, there would not have been any opium production in Afghanistan. The market would simply disappear.

And this happened, partially, the same year with Europe, which was the main client of opium poppy—90% of opium poppy, of the heroin production, narcotic production of Afghanistan goes to Europe. There was an effect on prices and so on, which was, in part vanished by deposits that they created, the traffickers created, on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. There were almost 100 tons of narcotics hidden in deposits on the border.

But we discovered that also, through our cooperation with the Russian space agency. We did a very precise map of these deposits of narcotics that were scattered, mostly in Tajikistan. And I also involved the Security Council in the authorization of an action against these deposits, action that was not allowed

by the firm opposition of, first the British government.

But the overall lesson is that it is possible to eliminate opium production. This is not really very expensive. And now—we're talking about 20 years ago—and now the situation is exactly like it was 20 years ago. The Americans now have been obliged to negotiate and make an agreement with the Taliban. The Taliban control again most of Afghanistan, and opium poppy production is a bit more than it was at the time.

Can It Be Done Again?

Q: Do you think your plan can be implemented today? How does the situation in Afghanistan today compare to 20 years ago?

Arlacchi: The situation is basically the same, internally. The Taliban control, again, most of Afghanistan. Internationally, maybe it is a bit more favorable. There are more players involved. Twenty years ago, the role and the weight of China was quite negligible. Now, China is a major player in the area. The weight of the United States has been drastically reduced by the withdrawal of troops, and by the basic failure of the Afghanistan invasion. There are other players, such as the Russians and the other actors in the area—the countries that border Afghanistan—that are making plans on the future of Afghanistan.

With the Russians, I tried to enact, or to implement, this plan, after my work in the European Union, my work in the European Parliament; the Russians had been fully cooperative. I had developed, along with Viktor Ivanov, who was, at that time the anti-drug czar of Russia, a plan, the implementation of the plan. The Russians had agreed to implement it and to fund it, even if they were not enthusiastic about alternative development. But I convinced them it was the case. They wanted an agreement with the EU to implement the plan together. But the EU simply did not care about it. Ivanov came to Brussels; we spoke with the EU Commission, the Parliament, and so on. In the Parliament there was a basically positive attitude, but the Commission simply didn't care about this proposal, which could have been effective.

With the Belt and Road Initiative

Q: You mentioned China. Do you support the role of China's Belt and Road Initiative in the future of Afghanistan?

Arlacchi: I fully support it. I'm sure of that, since the Chinese New Silk Road Plan is serious. It's been implemented now for a number of years. And since the development philosophy of the plan is strong, I believe that there are many more chances of success now, than when I was there. The issue is to be enough focussed on it, not to dilute this plan into an overall big, bigger plan for Afghanistan. This is the main point, the main condition of this success.

Q: Afghanistan must be connected, both with its neighbors as well as with the rest of the world, through economic development corridors. You mention in your book the positive effect of the Belt and Road Initiative promoting connectivity. With respect to Afghanistan, can the Belt and Road Initiative transform Afghanistan into a positive cultural crossroads?

Arlacchi: Yes, because it's not just connectivity. Infrastructure development means creating that base for development, which should be done in parallel with development plans. This is the reason why it should not be diluted. Better roads can work very well in Afghanistan, because Afghanistan is a classic transit country for all trade between the East and West. But narcotics production is a very specific issue, that occurs in very specific areas. So, the Belt and Road is OK, but it should be accompanied by a very precisely focussed development plan—elimination of narcotics/opium production, and so on, in the area where this production occurs. It means particularly the area of Kandahar and central-south Afghanistan.

Development Assistance—Not Money

Q: How much would your Afghanistan plan cost to implement today?

Arlacchi: I estimate that it would not be much more than it was then, if it is to be effective. The issue is how much we prize this plan here, and how much of this investment actually arrives in the areas concerned? This is the main point. Because what I learned doing the plan with the EU strategy for studying both sides, I learned how the development money for Afghanistan goes, and how it is implemented, and the effects of what they do.

What I learned is that most of this money—let's say 80%—does not get to Afghanistan, that it does not get to the target. Most of this money is lost. Lost not simply on the huge corruption of the Afghan government. This

is the usual story. It may be true, and we learn about this all the time. But what is not said, and what people do not know—and I tried in my plan to put in the foresight—is that 80% of this money does not reach Afghanistan. The EU spends more or less €1 billion a year for development aid in Afghanistan, the United States, a bit more. But not more than \$200-\$300 million gets really into construction of schools, roads, facilities, and so on.

Then you have corruption of the Afghanistan government, which is, let's say, not more than 40% or 50% of this figure. So, the real money that arrives there is very small. So, any implementation of this plan means an agency of implementation, a system of implementation responsible for that, that eliminates most of this counterindication.

'Big Lies' About China and Russia

Q: In your book, you identify the main roadblock to peace and development as what you call “the Big Lie.” China and Russia are targets of this “Big Lie.” Can you expand on that idea?

Arlacchi: The main misconception about China—the main lie—is to describe China as an aggressive power, a superpower, which wants to do much as the U.S.A. did in the last 60 years. So, China is [described as] the new United States, as the new dominant superpower, which is not China's intention, and which is completely outside of their culture, politics, and even economic profile.

This is the main mistake that they make. They believe that China, being soon the number-one economy in the world, will build a big military industry, will start to repeat basically what the U.S.A. did. Reaching an equal relationship based on military force with most countries of the world, expanding their culture, their facilities, their interests all over the world—which is not the plan of China. China is not an expansive power. Its long history shows that China is concentrated basically on China itself, and its area of concern is Asia. As to the rest of the world, China wants to live and coexist with other world powers in a multipolar world.

China has a strong alliance with Russia, which also is a victim of the same misconception. Modern Russia is the product of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The end of the Soviet Union was not accompanied by attempts to expand its former power, the Communist power, in Eastern Europe, and in neighboring countries. It was accompanied by an informal pact of peaceful co-

existence, according to which NATO should not expand east toward the border of Russia, and Russia would gradually become a partner of the European Union, of European countries.

There was a moment, not more than five or six years ago, when Russia was joining NATO as a friendly country. At a certain point, this peaceful project of building a better and permanent, peaceful new relationship between Europe and Russia, turned into its opposite! NATO—contrary to all agreements—and the mistake the Russians made was to not end up with a formal treaty of non-aggression and of a peaceful cooperation after the fall of Communism. It was informal. NATO expanded east, and threatened Russia, which, of course, reacted accordingly. And the peak of this crisis was the Ukraine crisis in 2012-2014, in which we had a big clash with Russia, which was completely unnecessary, which was completely unjustified in terms of international law, and politics.

Ukraine had been a part of Russia, with the Ukrainian language—but a good part of Ukraine is Russian speaking. Ukraine is a country that was Russian for a long time in its history. Going there, and trying to interfere into what is a regional issue, and mounting basically a coup d'état against Russia, with [the ousting of] a democratically elected President who was obliged to flee Ukraine, installing a government heavily influenced by extremists of Nazi, fascist background, and continuing to provoke Russia on its border, through a big country like Ukraine, was really a huge political mistake, that the EU is continuing to do, under pressure from the U.S.A.

The Minsk agreement stopped—froze—this situation, but we are still in an extremely precarious equilibrium, in which there is no interest on the part of the European Union to continue to follow an irresponsible policy of attacking Russia, not respecting facts, instead of doing what should be in the long-term interest of the EU and Europe, which is a unification, creating a unified space of trade and possibly, in the future, also politics. Many thought that one day Russia should be part of a larger union, which includes Europe and Russia; here we are talking politically. These were dreams of the past, that maybe should be revived, and may completely reverse policy towards Russia.

Mackinder's Geopolitics and Ukraine

Q: You identified the motivation behind the “Big Lie” as geopolitics, especially British geopolitics. You

specifically identified Halford Mackinder in your book. Can you tell us about him?

Arlacchi: He was a great scholar from a colonial background, so his main interest was how to preserve the British and the Western domination of the world. But he was extremely acute and intelligent. He identified the main point, the main obstacle to the continuation of domination by the Anglo-Saxon and the Western power: Which was to create a division, a firm division between Western Europe and Russia. He said: “Who controls Eastern Europe is controlling the world,” which was a metaphor, meaning that the unification, or the integration, of this part of Eurasia should be impeded at any cost, by particularly Anglo-American power. Why? Because this will marginalize the United States, this will marginalize the power of the United Kingdom, and will put to the forefront what is a long-term tendency, which is Eurasian integration.

Eurasia is a mega-continent that has been one continent for thousands of years. That was completely fractured after the Second World War, and even before. But the time has come to go in this direction again and I believe that the best minds in the world, in Russia and in Europe, will agree with this idea, which I care about very much.

Fake Opposition Through Fear

Q: You have called for a revival of Socratic thought in international affairs. One of the greatest minds in line with the Socratic thought is Nicholas of Cusa who created a method to overcome political conflicts. He called his method the “Coincidence of Opposites.” Essentially, he argued that conflicts can never be solved on the same level they originate.

This method has become the leading concept of an international committee founded by the head of the international Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche. Do you agree with this coincidence of opposites method?

Arlacchi: Yes, I agree, but we have to define what is the reasonable opposition? Most of the current opposition is fake. There has been a creation of enmities that should not exist. After the end of the Cold War, this has become the most important problem that we have in international politics: The creation of enmities that

have no reason to be. Why is there enmity against China and Russia? In the past they were Communists. There was the opposition of the systems that was total, and comprehensive, and so on.

But after the fall of Communism, and after the opening up of China to the rest of the world, economically and politically, and so on—why? Why, because they need an enemy. There are very powerful interests that create big enmities—and I have identified the two major concentrations of these enmity producers. First, the military and security complex and industry, particularly in the United States, but also in Europe and other countries. And, secondly, the media complex, which needs fear to sell newspapers, or to have an audience, and so on. They live upon fear; fears that are invented, or exaggerated, or are simply brought back to life again to reanimate all sorts of problems.

I quote in my book three or four, main senses of this exaggeration and unmotivated fear. One is terrorism. The real impact of terrorists on national politics, and also for personal and collective security, is enormously smaller. But the fear is very good for the military industry, and is very good for everybody who speculates politically on fear.

Immigration in Europe is a huge fear. Immigration compared to the real issues, its real impact, is nothing. The impact of immigration on crime is not what the newspapers and the government describe; there is huge evidence of that. Small criminality is decreasing all over the United States and Europe, in spite of the huge expansion of immigration. I quote many other sources showing that there is an overall decline of violence, a decline today of not only international violence, international war, but also violence and homicides.

There is an historical decline, due to the tendency of progress of humankind, over a very long-term. It’s a millennium-long tendency, which is increasing very much. So, we live in a world that can be changed for the better; and whoever is fighting for that is on the right side of history. It’s not just the voice of a preacher in the desert; it’s not just what we call an *anima bella* who believes in the good things and is happy with that. *No, we are the people who believe that we can build a better, more decent world.* We are on the right side of history. But this fact contrasts with very powerful interests—those are the interests creating and building enemies, and fear about these enemies.