

sociology professor at the School of Political Science of the University of Sassari in Italy. Prof. Arlacchi participated in two recent Schiller Institute international webcasts on Afghanistan. On Sept. 5, Helga Zepp-LaRouche issued the recommendation that Professor Arlacchi be appointed by the international community to lead a global aid and development mobilization, with full support for emergency aid, and rebuilding of Afghanistan. His home page is available [here](#).

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stan's Security Council team during Pakistan's membership of the UN Security Council from 2012 to 2013. From 2018-2020, he was Director General (Counter Terrorism) dealing with counter terrorism at the United Nations and other multilateral forums. From 2008-2010, and again, from 2016-2018, he served at the United Nations, dealing with the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, Counter Terrorism, UN Peacekeeping and other political, and peace and security issues.

The speeches from the seminar, followed by the Chinese and Iranian embassy statements to the event, and excerpts from the discussion follow. We hope that they will give you a better insight into what we must do, now, to ease the suffering of the Afghani people, and chart a new course for the world's political, strategic, and economic future.

Hussein Askary

## End the Cynicism: The Cruel 'Great Game' of Empire Is Dead

*This is an edited transcript of the presentation of Hussein Askary to a seminar, co-sponsored by the Schiller Institute and the Copenhagen bureau of EIR, "Afghanistan: What Now? Peace Through Economic Development," held in Copenhagen, Denmark on October 11, 2021. Mr. Askary is the Southwest Asia Coordinator for both the Schiller Institute and EIR. He is also Co-Chair of the Belt and Road Institute of Sweden (BRIS). The seminar was moderated by Tom Gillesberg. Sub-heads and hyperlinks have been added.*



Schiller Institute/Michelle Rasmussen  
Hussein Askary

failed paradigm, as everybody could see for themselves.

I will be focussing on three parts in my presentation. The first one is on the humanitarian catastrophe; the second one will be on the failure of geopolitics; and then we will go more into detail of what we think is the solution, the way to go forward, concerning not only Afghanistan but all Eurasia and world politics.

### **The Humanitarian Catastrophe**

There is a very cynical game being played by the same forces who had occupied Afghanistan for 20 years, and then they left the country completely in ruins. After cutting all the financial aid to Afghanistan, the United States has frozen \$9 billion of the government funds of Afghanistan. It's not the money of the Taliban, it is for the government and the state of Afghanistan to be able to import food, electricity, medicine and all things. Then they say, "Look, the Taliban are incapable of governing, because there's

famine, there's chaos, hospitals are closed, there's no electricity, there is no food, there is no medicine: Look, the Taliban cannot govern!" That's a very, very cynical attitude which we have to reverse very quickly, because what is at stake is not the Taliban; what is stake is 39 million people in Afghanistan, whom very few people are talking about.

Now, some people try to blame everything on the Taliban, to cover for their own failure, [asking], "Why is it that a country, after 20 years and \$2.5 trillion spent, cannot grow its own food, cannot have hospitals, cannot produce its own electricity, and there is shortage of water, there is shortage of everything?" To cover for their failure, those forces are saying, "Look, the Taliban is a failed state. Afghanistan is a failed state." But I hope this will not happen, as I will explain.

Recently, international aid organizations, but especially the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program have said there are 14 million people in Afghanistan that are [food insecure](#). They're hungry already, but 4 million are threatened by famine; those people can perish, they can die if there isn't enough food sent to them. We have tens, maybe hundreds of small clinics, which were closed because international organizations were pulled out, abandoning their work there. These centers are closed. Although they are very small, they provided some services to the population.

We now have even the Food and Agriculture Organization saying that probably the time has been missed for the farmers in Afghanistan at the end of September to have sown the seed for their winter wheat crop (sown in the fall and harvested in early summer). The additional factor in this, is that the farmers need the seeds to come from outside the country, to plant.

Many hospitals will not be able to provide services, because guess what? Afghanistan imports 80% of its electricity from neighboring countries. With the freezing of the assets of the government, they cannot pay their electricity import bills to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, and they cannot pay for the food, which was coming from Pakistan, which is the biggest exporter of food to Afghanistan. So, the whole country is in a total disaster, and this has to be reversed immediately.

So, we should abolish the cynical view that, "let there be chaos so we can prove to everyone the Taliban have failed; and that the Taliban's neighbors have failed." But I don't think this is going to happen in this way.

I think that for the United States, for the NATO countries, and for the EU, there's a way back from that failure, by contributing to remedying this disaster, allowing the aid to go back, unfreezing the money which the Afghanistan government can use, and collaborating with Afghanistan's neighbors, with China, with Russia, with Pakistan, Iran—all these neighbors—to rebuild Afghanistan's economy, as I will explain.

Now, that's an immediate priority for both of us, the Schiller Institute, but it should be a priority for everyone to mobilize for that.

### Failure of Geopolitics

The other aspect of this is the failure of geopolitics. What Tom said, what Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche has said, this is not Saigon 1975, this is the Berlin Wall 1989, because we have an era which has ended, and hopefully the era of geopolitics which extended for 200 years, probably is ending in the same place where it was born. The "Great Game" was born in Afghanistan. A very valuable book on this—it's called *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*—was one of the first books I was given in the Schiller Institute in 1996, when I joined, and it details how the British Empire played Afghanistan as a buffer against Russia.

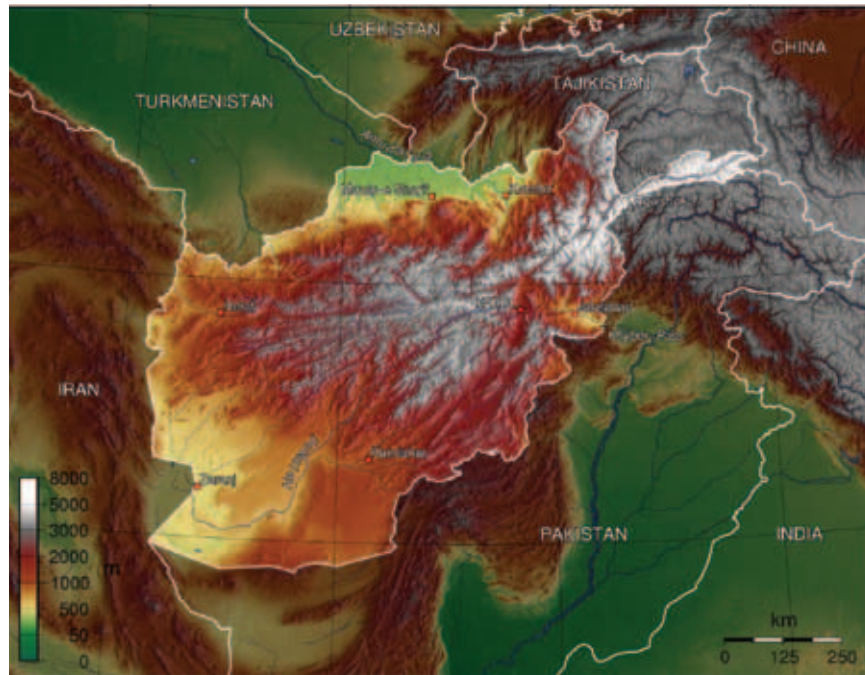
All Afghanistan's borders were created by British intelligence officers who made agreements with tribal chiefs in different parts of the region, especially in the area around the Panjshir River; all these borders were creations of the British, because they could not control Afghanistan: The British lost three wars in Afghanistan, in 1839-42, in the 1870s and in 1919. They invaded Afghanistan, but they could not keep it. So, they turned Afghanistan into a buffer, and if you look at the topography of Afghanistan (see **Figure 1**), it is a natural barrier between the north and the south. So, the British used that.

And the very person, the British intelligence officer who coined the term "Great Game," Arthur Conolly, he was beheaded in Bukhara, in Uzbekistan because he was disguised as a Muslim merchant, and he was caught spying there. He ended up being beheaded by the Emir of Bukhara.

My point is that the same place where the destructive geopolitics, or the Great Game started, can end now. That failure, we saw not only in the whole Soviet era, the mobilization of the so-called Mujahideen

FIGURE 1

**Topographical Map of Afghanistan**



against the Soviet army in the 1980s, which also had catastrophic results; but then we had a civil war as a result of that in the 1990s, the Taliban coming in; and then now, we have had since 2001 a catastrophic, new page in that history of geopolitics, which we hope, we believe, it can end now.

I usually don't like to talk about numbers of victims, but it gives an idea about the enormous suffering, which was created since 2001, both in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq and other countries that were "regime changed" in a sense. We have these numbers, from a [project](#) at [the Watson Institute of International & Public Affairs at] Brown University in the United States, called "The Costs of War." I have written an article about what these wars have cost. It's massive suffering of the civilian population in Afghanistan. Now, some people have told me these are conservative numbers, but these are documented: Since 2001, we had 270,000 civilians directly killed in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, because Pakistan also suffered from this war. We had 73,000 Afghan soldiers killed; we had 2,298 [American soldiers killed in Afghanistan from 2001-2018] and 3,394 American so-called "contractors"—these are mercenaries[—killed]. But then, look at the massive, 30,000 American soldiers or vet-

erans who committed suicide after going home. You can also imagine the enormous suffering of their families, of the community where they lived.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, since 2001 there have been 2.5 million refugees from Afghanistan in neighboring countries, mostly in Pakistan and Iran. I think this is also a conservative number. There are also 3.5 million people internally displaced because of the civil war and conflicts; people had to move, especially to the big cities, creating even more misery.

And then, we had the financial cost of the war in Afghanistan: \$2.2 trillion! This is an enormous amount of money, and there was nothing built in Afghanistan all these 20 years! All this money was used on fighting, on

weapons, on soldiers, and also on fostering corruption in the community. But totally, since 2001, all the wars the United States was involved in cost \$10 trillion.

This is incredible—I tried to quantify in my head what you can do with \$10 trillion. You can build 17 times China's high-speed railway network, 30,000 km. You can build 17 such networks with that \$10 trillion. You can build 322 Three Gorges Dams in the world, producing 6,400,000 MW of power. This is what the world needs, actually! 6.4 million MW of electricity, this is what you need to cover every person on the planet, that they would have electricity in their homes. This is what these wars have cost. But none of this was used.

I wrote an article about the cost of war and the cost of construction: I compared all the disasters the United States and NATO have been involved in, to China's Belt and Road Initiative. With less than \$1 trillion, China built thousands of kilometers of railways, power plants, ports, airports, agricultural projects, industrial zones and so on and so forth, with less than 10% of what was spent on these wars.

In this sense, we have come to—this is the third section of my presentation—as Biden said, "this is the end of an era." What is coming after that era?

## A New Era of Peace Through Development

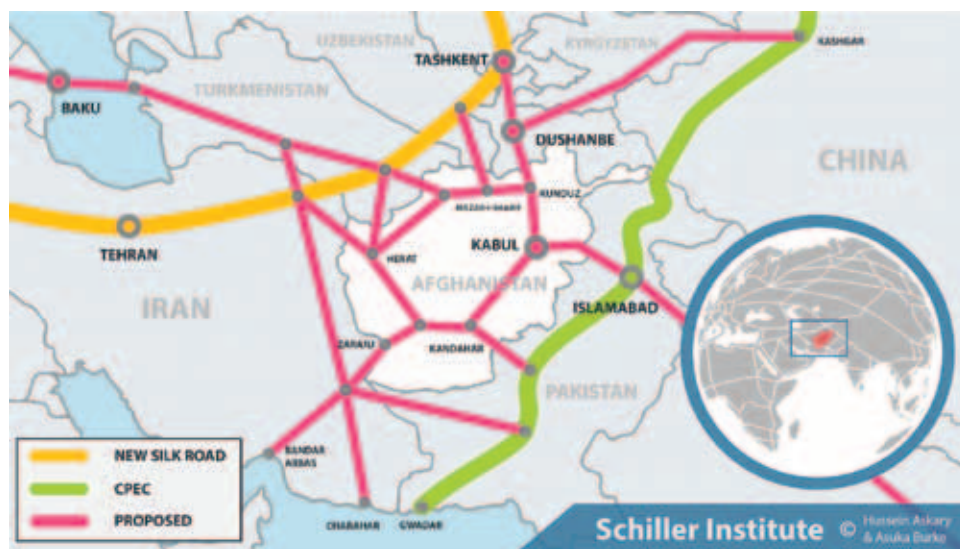
As Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche has said, it's the era of peace through economic development. And the best model we have is the Belt and Road Initiative, because that thing works; it has proven it works. China's own massive economic and industrial development is a proof of the method of how to finance and build infrastructure and pull people out of poverty. China pulled 800 million people out of poverty in the last 30 years!

In any case, this idea of connecting the *whole* world, not creating two camps, where one is China/Russia, and one is the West—this has been the concept of our Schiller Institute since the 1990s. So we are not analyzing things, we are campaigning, we are lobbying to change the world policy, and therefore, all these years, we have produced all this material; we have been in dialogue with governments, we have been in dialogue with think tanks, with engineers, with companies, and so on and so forth, to make sure that people both understand the importance of connecting nations, regions and continents, for their own economic prosperity; but also as a means to establish peace among nations.

The map of Afghanistan in the context of intercontinental development corridors (see **Figure 2**), shows green lines for the Belt and Road Initiative—the different corridors proposed by China, but the other lines, including the Belt and Road, are our ideas for how to connect these continents and include every country in that development.

In the past 20 years—people ask me, how can you know that the Taliban have changed? I've said, I have no idea if the Taliban have changed; I'm not a Taliban expert. What I know is that the world around Afghanistan has changed! That's what I know, and that's what I've been working with. Because if you look at the region around Afghanistan, especially look at the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and how it is creating an economic revolution in the country, although people are in a hurry to harvest the benefit and

FIGURE 2  
Integration of Afghanistan into the BRI



Schiller Institute/Hussein Askary & Asuka Burke

say, “OK where is it?” It is a massive development program between China and Pakistan just south to the border of Afghanistan. To the north of the border, you have the New Silk Road, the Iron Silk Road, but also there has been a very big shift in the Central Asian countries to work with Russia and China, but mostly with China, and become the bridge between East and West.

Many of these nations in Central Asia and the Caucasus had been told, if you don't work with Russia, if you don't work with China, if you don't work with Iran, we will help you get your oil and gas, somehow, shipped somewhere to the West. It didn't happen. There's a physical, geographical reality, and you cannot jump over that reality.

Now, therefore, Central Asia is oriented toward Asia; even Iran is oriented toward China with this strategic agreement they signed last year, and the new President of Iran has also indicated very clearly that going East is the aim.

But all these years, all these things have been happening, but Afghanistan is not touched by it. No development inside Afghanistan, under U.S./NATO control. The country was almost sealed away from its natural environment. And what happened is like exactly what also happened in Iraq: you had the failure of Western politicians, not only in grasping strategic issues, but also in understanding economy.

They told the Afghans, “OK, you need electricity?”

Here's some money, you can buy electricity from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and Iran. You need food? Here's some money, you can buy food from Pakistan. You need medicine? Here's some money, you can buy medicine from China." So, they think they controlled everything with money. But what happens when the money is not there?

Why not get the Afghans build power plants in their country so they can produce their own electricity? There is a lot of hydropower potential, there is coal and so on. Why not build some power plants in Afghanistan, using a little tiny bit of the war budget? Why not allow the Afghans to grow food, instead of opium? I'm not going to discuss the opium question, because Professor Arlacchi is going to discuss it. [See Mr. Arlacchi's presentation in this issue.] But all these years, while things were happening around it, Afghanistan was left behind in this process.

Another thing which has happened, which very few people in the West have grasped, is the orientation to the East—but it's not really just an orientation to the East. Last month, there was the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was preparing for the U.S. and NATO withdrawal a long time; they were prepared to step in, in case the United States and NATO completely abandoned Afghanistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was initially a security cooperation organization, has now become a security, but also an economic cooperation organization; and last month, Iran was admitted as a full member.

So you have a physical bloc, a geographical bloc, going from China, including Russia, including India, Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia all the way to the borders with Turkey. Though Turkey is a NATO member—the Turks are getting more and more frustrated by the U.S. and the West, and they are moving slowly to reorient towards Russia or China. You even have the Caucasus. So you have a huge, uninterrupted bloc of nations where you don't have British intelligence spies or American troops in between them. This is very, very important: Those nations can now work freely to establish a stronger economic unity, but also use that to secure the situation.

### **Build the Economy, Then Comes Security**

Now, people say, "well, first you have to have security, then you can build the economy." Wrong! You have to build the economy, to be able to stabilize the

security situation. In Pakistan, you have many attacks on the Chinese companies and the Pakistani engineers who are building the infrastructure in the CPEC project. But the Prime Minister decided to go ahead; you cannot stop building the economy, because if you stop it, then the terrorists will win. You prove that it works. What the Pakistanis are doing is, they are saying, terrorism will not stop us; we will not wait until the situation is "stable," because the economic backwardness is a big source of instability and terrorism, and it can be used by intelligence forces to finance extremist, separatist groups and so forth.

So then, we come to our vision of how this new paradigm, what to do with Afghanistan. Now there are many internal Afghani things. We are not interested in micromanaging the Afghan society as the EU or the United States were doing, telling people how to dress, what to eat, how to treat their children. You cannot do this to another nation! What you can do from the outside, is you make an offer they cannot say no to, by saying: We will help you integrate your economy into this Belt and Road process. We can build infrastructure, we can help you immediately with the humanitarian problem; if you respect us as neighbors, if you work with us on security matters, we can also help build your infrastructure—it's important for you, but it's also important for us. So, everybody wins. This is the win-win concept.

In that sense, we try to take ideas from different sources, including from the Afghan former Foreign Ministry. One important thing about our work is we don't play geopolitics. Because there are many infrastructure projects proposed by the United States, for example, the so-called TAPI pipeline, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline. The idea—and we said at the time this will never be built, because there's a geopolitical intention behind it; it's not to help people. The idea was to make sure that Turkmenistan, which has a huge gas reserve, does not work with Russia or China. So you can take the gas directly through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to India, our allies and then to the international markets. They wanted to prevent Iran and Pakistan and India from building the "Peace Pipeline," to export gas from Iran to Pakistan and India. That was stopped, too.

But reality asserted itself and now Turkmenistan is exporting almost all of its gas to China. And Kazakhstan and other nations are dependent on Russia to export their gas. In our idea, all these projects would be inte-

FIGURE 3

**Development Corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative**



BRIX

grated together, not to play geopolitics, but to integrate the economies of these regions. This is one of the ideas from the former Foreign Ministry, the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

Afghanistan joined the Belt and Road in 2016. Abdullah Abdullah went to China, signed the agreement, but nothing was done. Afghanistan also became a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to get loans for infrastructure, but that didn't lead anywhere for the obvious reasons—opposition from the West, but also corruption inside the country. But they had very brilliant ideas for connecting the major cities of Afghanistan, and also connecting Afghanistan to its neighbors. What was missing were the connections to Pakistan and China. They didn't want to have that included, because the Afghan government had problems with Pakistan.

So now we want to remove these kinds of differences, and there is no reason why the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline should not be built. It will benefit everybody; it will ease the tension among these nations, and make sure that India is working with China, with Pakistan, with its environment, rather than playing a bad, geopolitical role. The ideas are there, the plans are there, many agreements were signed, but they were never implemented. So that should become a priority for discussion, now, not later, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization inviting Europe and the United States in too, with the SCO saying, we want you here, but we want to talk about this. We don't want to talk about war against terrorism, we don't want to talk about fundamentalism, or chang-

ing the culture or changing the regime. We want to see whether you can contribute to this, can you help finance and build projects?

There should be a global dialogue for all these projects. There are also old Russian plans; we have those in our first [report](#), *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge*, in 2014. The Russian Academy had designed plans for connecting Afghanistan to

Central Asia and northern Siberia.

**The Enormous Potential of Afghanistan**

We have enormous potential in Afghanistan, most importantly the human potential, the human resources. You have 39 million people, but more than 60% are below the age of 30. People who are above 62 years in Afghanistan are only 2% of the population, because the longevity has gone down because of all these wars. But you have a *huge* young population. If they are provided with education, with the resources, the infrastructure, then they can become the most important wealth of the country.

Everybody has heard about all the great minerals that are in Afghanistan, worth \$1 trillion. You have the copper mines, iron mines, but also lithium and rare earth minerals—all over Afghanistan, which is true! But it is not the focus on the money, because otherwise, it's "\$1 trillion, \$1 trillion." These can actually be used as an asset to establish a national bank of development, using their natural resources as a guarantee for issuing credit for development—but that's another discussion.

The United States Geological Survey did a fantastic job—this is one of the few things they did well; they surveyed the whole surface of Afghanistan, including remote sensing, satellite imaging; they had sent geologists, and they had covered every part of Afghanistan, to find out the non-oil-and-gas minerals in the country. And this is a report, interestingly, after the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, the site disappeared which has all the studies. You click on it, and it doesn't open up... That huge database is no longer available,

since the United States withdrew. All the regions of Afghanistan were studied—the Mes Aynak major copper mine. I will come back to this, because there are certain things which we have learned from Lyndon LaRouche about physical economics which have nothing to do with money, have nothing to do with these things: There is a physical reality that people have to pay attention to.

For example, one of the reasons the Chinese company which took the contract for the copper mine, did not fulfill the contract, is because if you want to extract any mineral, especially lithium, but also copper and iron, you need huge amounts of fresh water. You cannot take the iron from the ground and sell it on the market: It's mixed with other things. You have to crush it, you have to wash it, and separate the iron or copper or lithium, and that takes huge amounts of water, and Afghanistan is a dry country. It takes a lot of electricity, and power; you need transport.

Afghanistan does have rivers; the problem is that most of those rivers depend on snow melting in the mountains. Also, these are transboundary rivers, they share it with other countries, and Afghanistan has only one agreement with Iran on transboundary rivers. They have no agreements with other countries; nobody knows who can control the waters.

Afghanistan receives 55 billion cubic meters of water every year, through precipitation and other means; it's as much as Egypt gets in the Nile area. But that water is spread all over the place; it's not used. To do that, you need to build dams, you need to build management systems, you need all kinds of modern infrastructure to save the water and to use it in the right way. So, this is one of the big problems that has to be solved, and that will help also to utilize the minerals in the country. Without water, you cannot do it.

The lack of electricity is a big disaster which was left in Afghanistan. Afghanistan produces, as I said, only 600 MW—that's a small power plant in Denmark. The rest, they import from other countries, mostly from Uzbekistan. But Iran, which is under harsh economic sanctions, not only produces electricity for its own people, it [also] exports part of it to Afghanistan and exports part of it to Iraq, which has been under U.S. and Western control all these years! It's a big irony.

For all these years, nobody thought, why not build some power plants in Afghanistan? In Pakistan, in the last 5-6 years, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects planned and produced 17,000 MW of power—

hydropower, coal power, and including two nuclear reactors being built in Karachi. And everybody's attacking China, but nobody's saying anything about this disaster we have in Afghanistan.

I make jokes about the geopolitics of pipelines, because they never happen. But if we have a new paradigm of relations, there is an irony to understand: geopolitics doesn't work, but geo-economics does work. The reality today is that Central Asia's major gas and oil market is China. It's not Denmark, it's not Brussels, it's not Washington. There is a physical, geographical reality which governs the new situation here, and all nations around Afghanistan, I think they have realized this, but the important thing now is to avoid that Afghanistan descends into chaos, because what you will have is, if the current government collapses, if you have famine, you'll have refugees everywhere, but then you'll have terrorist groups taking over the country. It will spill over into the neighbors, and it might have international implications.

Therefore, I'm very sure that the neighboring countries—and they are already—are responding with humanitarian aid going from China, Pakistan, Iran. I was in Iran recently; there are regular flights from Tehran to Kabul. So, there is a certain normalization. All the countries now realize, around Afghanistan, I think they have plans, to help normalize the situation in Afghanistan, no matter who is in government.

Our job is to make sure that Europe and the United States, instead of cynically sitting here, hoping to see the Taliban collapse and the country going into chaos, to prove the fact that the Taliban are no better than us, they should join in. There is room for atonement. There is room for changing your way of doing things, and joining the new paradigm, by opening a dialogue with the neighbors of Afghanistan, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and seeing what kind of projects the United States and Europe can contribute to. The United States, under President Franklin Roosevelt in World War II, already had many plans for the development for Afghanistan, development of African nations, and even for China. There was a different mindset governing the policies of the United States, and people can go back to that, and Europe can go back to its humanist traditions and contribute to something, to not pay for all the sins, but to create a new situation whereby these old mistakes are not repeated.

This is what I have to say so far, and I am looking forward to the discussion.