

Pino Arlacchi

A Successful Strategy for Eliminating Opium Production in Afghanistan

This is an edited transcript of the presentation of Pino Arlacchi 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. Arlacchi is a former Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna, a former Executive Director of the UN Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention, and Member of the European Parliament, and a former EU Rapporteur on Afghanistan. Currently he is a sociology professor at the University of Sassari in Italy. The seminar was moderated by Tom Gillesberg.



Schiller Institute

Pino Arlacchi

Thank you very much to the Schiller Institute for the invitation, that I accepted with enthusiasm. Talking about the subject that I'm dealing with for three decades, now, Afghanistan, that I dealt with in a couple of roles. First, because Afghanistan is the main producer of narcotics crops in the world, producer of most of the opium and heroin that is consumed in Western Europe, and my role at the time was that I was the Executive Director of the UNODC [UN Office of Drug Control]; and then, as a Member of the European Parliament, I dealt again with Afghanistan, as the author of the strategy for Afghanistan for the European Union. It is a report that has been approved largely by the European Parliament in 2010, and then ignored by the European Commission in the subsequent years.

So, Afghanistan is in my heart, not only as a student of political affairs and a sociologist, but as a country that has plenty of meaning and symbols for all of us in Europe and in the rest of the world.

Last Summer, we had evidence about it, the issue of Afghanistan seemed to become the number one priority in the world. Just two months later, a complete collapse in interest about Afghanistan and all that is related to it. I am struck, these days, about the radical shift of the inter-

est in financial and public opinion, both in the media and politics, about Afghanistan. Once the last American soldiers left the country, after almost all Western people evacuated the country, suddenly a curtain of silence fell over Afghanistan. In the last two weeks, I read in Italian papers, just one article about Afghanistan. No one now seems to be particularly interested in the subject.

And this is, unfortunately, confirmation of an attitude that we in the West have, about whatever does not fit into our vision of the world. As

Hussein [Askary] said before: We have a completely new paradigm in the world order, and in political affairs, that is now showing more and more clearly, from one day after another. But this paradigm did not start with the Afghanistan crisis. It started several decades ago, and what is happening now is just that we are being aware of this new configuration of the world.

But let's go, first, phase by phase.

My Plan Eliminated Poppy Production

My interest in Afghanistan was about drug control, and when I got my job at the top of the UN, I thought it was an opportunity to put into practice what, as a student, I had elaborated several years before: The fact that the problem of heavy drugs, both heroin and cocaine consumed in the West, has its origin in the country that produces the drugs. Not only by physical—obviously, these are natural drugs that are produced elsewhere, not in Europe—but also from an economic and social point of view.

So, the best strategy was not to attack the problem here, in the final stage of the drug trade. The best way was to go at the source, for one main economic reason: The fact that at the source, the opium problem is very small, in economic terms. The opium issue, the heroin issue, drug addiction becomes a big problem at the end of the chain. What always struck me about the figures of heroin production in Afghanistan: 10 kilos of opium

poppy is transformed into 1 kilo of heroin: 1 kilo of opium poppy in Afghanistan does not cost more than \$10 or \$20. The price of 1 kilo of heroin in Afghanistan, at the farm gate, does not go for more than \$100, \$200, \$300. 1 kilo of heroin here, in Copenhagen, costs around \$40,000, \$50,000, \$60,000. So strategically, it was much more reasonable to intervene at the source.

The farm gate production of opium poppy in Afghanistan when I started to deal with the country, was around \$100 million a year. Last year, 2020, it was \$350 million, all the production of opium poppy in Afghanistan. It means 90% of the world's heroin: So, \$350 million becomes \$15 billion here in Europe, and almost the equivalent in the United States.

I was not the first to think we could drastically intervene with a very small amount of resources, at the source, simply eliminating the production of opium poppy, providing Afghan farmers a viable alternative in terms of crop substitution; or, we elaborated the concept. We did not speak any more about simple crop substitution, [but] integral economic development.

I developed the plan to eliminate opium poppy in Afghanistan in 10 years—this was the year 1997. The plan was very simple; it cost \$100 million—\$20 million a year for five years to eliminate the production—20% a year—and then, another five years to consolidate the result. I presented this plan in Vienna to all member states and I got substantial approval. I remember very well, particularly Denmark and Sweden: They were the only countries that pledged immediately around 10% of the figure, trusting just the plan that we presented then. But I got a substantial OK by all member states, and *even* by the Americans, who were at the time on very good terms with the Taliban.

The Taliban in that year, basically, had control of 80% of the country. They were the government of Afghanistan. And even, particularly the United States told me, “Green light. Go there. This is a country that we are not particularly interested in anymore, so Europeans work there. We will support you, the program, and everything”—even if they never believed in two-crop substitution.

The only countries that believed in crop substitutions were northern European countries—Scandinavian countries—and Italy, and Germany. They were supportive of the idea. Many other countries never supported that, either because they didn't have any idea about it, or because the Americans always supported

the idea of destroying the cultivation by burning the crops, and they were always very skeptical about any alternative process.

So, I, at the time, during the Clinton administration, convinced the Americans that they should at least look at the results of this program and then see. So, they did not oppose it. We are talking about a unipolar moment of the world; at that time, the United States was really the only superpower on the stage, so you could never do anything at the UN without their OK.

I went to Afghanistan, where the UN had a quite huge intervention; not only humanitarian programs, but also my program which was a middle-size program in the family of the UN programs. [We] had a sizable amount of people, particularly, we had a couple of hundred people doing a survey of the opium poppy production in Afghanistan. We did every year a terrestrial analysis, province by province, area by area, of all opium production. The other source was the U.S.A. government, particularly the CIA, which at that time was the only owner of the satellites, which did the aerial survey of opium poppy production.

Then at a certain point, we clashed, drastically, on the results, because our people on the ground were mostly agronomists. I recruited basically all the agronomists, with an agronomical degree in Afghanistan—all the local people, with other people, that were around for a couple of months, in Afghanistan at the time of the crop—to determine, with very substantial detail, the production. And then, there were these satellites by the CIA, who were very frequently wrong, because they could not detect many areas in which opium poppy was cultivated on hills, or not plain areas. In this case, satellites can make huge mistakes; or, when opium poppy was cultivated close to other crops and so on, that was a big mistake. And also there was a sample survey: They did not survey all of Afghanistan. They surveyed some areas and then [deduced] the result with a very ample margin of interpretation. That, too, was subject to a lot of discussion with us.

Since—at the end of the story, they were the dominant power. Before me, I mean, there was a delegation of CIA coming to Vienna, with our experts who discussed the result. At the end of the story, there was a kind of agreement on a middle ground, on figures about what was the production of opium poppy, and also coca production in Latin America, in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia—same story.

I stopped this good cooperation, or, I said then that

the party was over. Our survey *is* the survey that must be taken into account, because it comes from an independent source, which is the United Nations. The survey is funded by several countries, including the United States, and then the satellites are not reliable and sometimes they suddenly change the result.

For Colombia, for instance, suddenly the result by satellite, funded by the CIA, and the result by the ground survey in Colombia, done by us, and funded by the State Department—the same American government funding and so on—diverged completely; to the point that Colombia was put on the blacklist—of course, the CIA prevailed. Colombia was put on a blacklist of countries against *our* opinion, the opinion of the State Department, and the opinion of all the other countries that funded the subject, which detected a decrease in coca production in Colombia, which would not put Colombia on the blacklist. But, that was a parenthesis.

Negotiating with the Taliban

Then I went to Afghanistan with this blessing on my head. And I met the Taliban leaders of the time. The Taliban Prime Minister at the time came to the meeting. He told me at the beginning of the meeting, “You want to eliminate the opium poppy production in Afghanistan in 10 years?” It was \$250 [million], the figure, the correct figure. “Why do you want to wait 10 years? You give us the \$250 million, and we will do it in one year.”

I interrupted the negotiation to consult with my people, because this was a huge thing. And then I said to him,

No, it’s not feasible. First, I don’t have \$250 million, and I have to ask donors to do it. Donors will never give me even one dollar because of your reputation on the issue of women, and the issue of narcotics. You have no credibility whatsoever in the international community.

So, first, you go ahead, show that you are credible, and then I can tell you that I will do whatever is in the power of the United Nations to support you on the issue of finding alternatives for the peasants. Of course, you don’t want to use force or violence against the peasants, and so on.

They told me, yes, they did not like the answer....

“But, first,” I told them, “you have to prohibit opium cultivation, because you never did it.” They were playing with the *Quran* interpretation about “intoxicants.”

The *Quran*, according to them, was not clear if intoxicants, which is alcohol and so on, included opium.

So, we involved some big religious experts on their side, Sunni experts, about *Quran*, who concluded—we funded also the study of these experts—and their conclusion was that opium was an intoxicant. And they made a prohibition of opium poppy; we physically wrote the law, and then, they started to really say that they were going to enforce it.

Then we decided at the same meeting—the Prime Minister left—and the Governor of Kandahar stayed, negotiating with me a kind of experiment in the Kandahar area. They would eliminate opium poppy in the Kandahar area, and we would rehabilitate a whole factory which was inactive there, which would give jobs to more than 2,000 people, women included. It had been built by a German corporation decades ago, and was abandoned. But abandoned in very good condition. It would mean just providing electricity to this factory. We did the experiment, and the factory was working.

So, our proposal was: elimination of opium poppy in Kandahar area, and rehabilitation of the factory and jobs to the people, women included.

At this point, there was negotiation inside the Taliban, because, initially, they said “No.” Then they said, “OK, goodbye.” Then I said that I would make a statement: “You refused to rehabilitate the factory, which would give more than 1,000 jobs to your people, because of the issue of women who would not [be permitted to] work in the factory. At this point, the Governor consulted the Supreme Leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammed Omar, who was living just a few kilometers away, and at the end of the story, they said, “Yes, women can work in the factory, but in a separate area of the factory.” OK, no problem, but they will work in the factory like all the others.

They started to implement the agreement. At a certain point, the agreement stopped. We had started to work on the factory. They said, “No, no, you stop the factory, because we sold the factory to an investor, a foreign investor, who will take care of the factory instead of you.” I said, “Yeah, OK,” but then I discovered the name of the foreign investor, who was a certain man coming from Saudi Arabia, called [Osama] bin Laden, who was living just one village away from Mullah Omar in Kandahar at that time. We are talking about November 1997.

And when I went back, I told the Americans everything. I had a meeting with all the donors of the pro-

gram, and they said then what I'm saying to you now, about bin Laden included. So, no one can say that they didn't know about bin Laden and all the rest.

Anyway, then we started to have very uncertain behavior on their [the Taliban's] side, the following years, but we were pushing them continuously, maintaining always a degree of negotiation. I met them in Kandahar; I met them in Pakistan, where they had an important office; and they had also another very important office in New York, where they dealt with all countries, an office with two people, a man and a woman—a woman who was coming in blue jeans, a Taliban woman; I asked her “How can you do that? If I take a picture of you now here, and send it to Afghanistan, what will happen to you?” She said, “Nothing. I am here with the full permission of the government, they know perfectly. I am a diplomat, and I'm authorized to talk with you and anybody else, and to dress this way.” Well, well.

Zero Opium Production

Well, they started to be uncertain. In some areas they were cooperating with us, discouraging cultivators; the donors got quite disappointed and withdrew their commitment for the program. But I continued to pursue the program, but donors funded our limited program in part for Afghanistan, funded other parts of our program, but lost enthusiasm for the issue, until the Summer of 2001: In the summer of 2001, there was no opium production in Afghanistan, because they, under pressure from us, and also because they wanted to recover the trust that we lost for them because of their uncertainty in the following years; I also demanded some sanctions by the Security Council against them and so on. But we never, never ever lost track with them. We always had a positive negotiating relationship with them, also on many other issues on which I don't want to go into too much details.

Anyway, what happened: Zero production in Afghanistan. We could not believe our eyes—there was no production, zero! Because they had forbidden the cultivation in September/October, and there was no production of opium poppy in the country. So, we demonstrated that it is possible to not produce opium in Afghanistan.

Year 2001, Summer: 11th of September, same year. October invasion of Afghanistan by U.S.A., with the full support of the international community. We gave to the United States a blank check in post-September 11th events. They invaded the country, and we were hoping that would consolidate the result on our side, who were

dealing with the drug control.

I spoke with all the State Department officials responsible for narcotics. They told me, “Yes, yes, yes, we will tell all our military that we got this huge result, also thanks to your intervention,” and all the rest. “Rest assured that this result will be confirmed the following years.”

Well, what happened was exactly the opposite. The top American leaders, starting with the Secretary of Defense [Donald] Rumsfeld, they went to Afghanistan, and he personally made a set of agreements with the main warlords of Afghanistan, the enemies of the Taliban, the leaders of the Northern Alliance, on fighting together against terrorism, which was in large part not an alliance, or outgrowth; in exchange—not a written exchange and so on—but they put aside the narcotics issue, basically giving a *de facto* green light to cultivation, so that the next year [poppy cultivation] jumped again to huge levels.

At the end of the same year, we had discovered, by data that Russian intelligence gave us, a full set of deposits of heroin on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Forty deposits of heroin, for a total of 100 tons of heroin. 100 tons of heroin is the demand of all Western Europe for one year. So, traffickers built this set of warehouses, where they were stocking huge amounts of heroin. We had the picture of these deposits, and I went to the [UN] Security Council asking for an intervention.

The U.S., the Security Council, and the EU Sit on Their Hands

First, I spoke, of course, to the Americans, and with others, the five permanent members of the Security Council. The Americans were extremely embarrassed; they had a big meeting of all the U.S. agencies involved, and the conclusion was they would be neutral. They could not corroborate and support our intervention to destroy these laboratories, and they would not oppose it. The reason was very simple, a top State Department official told me. [Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright. The reason was that they could not admit that they had not discovered it; that we did it.

If we go to the Congress and we say that your agency which has a \$70 million budget, did this, they will immediately ask to destroy us and all others, because we spent in the area several billions of dollars in intelligence in everything. “How much did you pay for this?” I told them that it was Russian intelligence that gave us

the data, and they asked, “How much did you spend?” I told him, “Around \$200,000.” “If I go there [to the U.S. Congress] and say that you, the UN, with [only] \$200,000 did this, and we had no idea about this, so many people will lose their jobs.” The final result was neutrality.

I went to the [UN] Security Council with the data, with the maps. We showed them the maps, with the laboratories and so on, and we had several options for what to do. The simplest thing was a very simple intervention, destroying—the Russians at the time had 10,000 people on the border of Tajikistan. They could do this with nothing, with an extremely small—we had a lack of everything at the time. We could finance—with a very small amount; I could do it also with my personal funds, as director of the program.

We would do it immediately, as agreed. But, of course, we need a mandate by the Security Council. The mandate never arrived, because of the frontal opposition of the British. The U.K., first they told me that they thought I should not even talk about it. When I told them that I was working for the United Nations and not for the Queen of England, they said “You will pay for that.” And I paid afterwards. But the Security Council listened throughout this huge presentation, and the U.K. put a veto on continuing the discussion, and everything died this way.

What We Demonstrated

Just to conclude the story, about what we demonstrated.

We demonstrated that with a minimum investment of resources, with a close negotiation with the Taliban, you can get these results. We could get results again, and this is what I’ve just proposed to my country. I wrote to Mr. [Mario] Draghi, the Prime Minister, saying that the EU, and Italy in particular, should start proposing again to the Taliban to repeat what they did in the Summer of 2001.

Funding an alternative development program that would cost not more—doing it immediately, not in five years or ten years—now Afghanistan is not the same as 20 years ago, this can be done, really, in one year, with the modest investment of less than \$100 million a year, and for not more than three or four years. The answer of my Prime Minister was, “Oh, yes. The proposal is very good, it makes sense a lot. But it is the UN that should do it.” I told him: “Look, the UN is not the world government; the UN is an association of states. *We* are the

UN.”

They said they will talk about it in the EU Council and all the rest.

Why am I saying this to you now, because I believe this is still feasible and the chances of success are much bigger now, than 15 or 20 years ago. Because ... the Taliban are basically the same. They’re not new or old Taliban and so on, but basically the same. But of course, as a government of the country, they have to deliver things, and the most important thing from the European point of view that they could deliver is the elimination of narcotics production, that struck directly 1 million in the heart, young Europeans, men and women. So, this should be the number one priority, within a humanitarian intervention that my colleague Hussein [Askary] already explained in great detail, and that would be, at minimum cost from the European Union. In my report, I demonstrated that the EU spends every year €1 billion, in non-military intervention in Afghanistan. €1 billion are enough, *if they get into the hands of the Afghan people*; enough, to sustain a process of change and to develop Afghanistan.

The Obstacle of ‘Legal Corruption’

But the main obstacle in this case is another one: It’s the fact that out of €1 billion—I discovered in the investigation I did for my report—out of €1 billion, only 20% arrives in Afghanistan. I collected all the figures of the member states, and it’s €1 billion. But when I went to Afghanistan and I saw the data from the Treasury and so on, the real money that arrived from the EU, was about €200 million. I calculated that out of this €200 million, 50% ends up in the pockets of Afghan ministers, President and all the rest. So, to the people of Afghanistan, one-tenth of this figure arrived.

You ask, “Where is the 80%?” Eighty percent is what I call “legal corruption.” It’s not corruption, it’s waste. Sometimes, it’s corruption, sometimes waste, and so on, which is a huge amount of money that stays in the donor area. The EU [alone] spends between 15-20% of every project in consultancies—consultancies, feasibility plans, consultants, visits, and so on. The data that they give to me is 15%. Then you have a huge amount of waste into the channel: this money goes to some NGO, which in turn puts the money into the hands of another NGO; or, then you have not only NGOs—NGOs are the best part of the story. Then it goes also to specialized companies, technical companies, and so on, that overcharge: Everything they do in Afghanistan—

so a road that would cost €1 million is written in the books as €10 million. Whatever you do in Afghanistan is charged between 5-10 times its real value.

A school in Afghanistan—I was in Herat, and I saw the Italian Army was there. Herat was quite a safe area in Afghanistan, and so the army had nothing to do than do some social work projects, a couple million-dollar projects, that the government of Italy gave them. I researched all projects. The army was outside the chain of international aid; it was an army. Very simple. I researched this and I discovered that the school cost \$100,000. A hospital cost a couple of million dollars. When I saw the books of the regular international intervention, a school cost \$1 million and a hospital cost \$20 million.

At the time I was there, there was just one pediatric hospital in all of Afghanistan, a country at that time with less than 30 million people—one pediatric hospital, and 20,000 women died in delivery every year, 20,000! So then, the real problem was not the war. The war had casualties, much inferior to this. The real problem then was health, and so on. I measured this huge amount of waste that must be absolutely reformed. Fortunately, now after 20 years, you have a much better program of assistance. There are international experiences that show that with this money you can have a much better effect delivering money directly, like Brazilian experiments demonstrate; the Chinese experiment with poverty elimination is probably the best in the world, in obtaining effect.

So now, the chain of delivery is improving. This is why I'm saying that the EU should not make any special effort for Afghanistan. It should simply deliver the international aid, delivered in the last 20 years for non-military purposes, [but] in a better, more efficient way. Narcotics is just one part of it, not the biggest. And for sure, for sure, this can be a very strong argument of negotiation with the Taliban. I can guarantee you that in negotiations with the Taliban, putting on the table the recognition of the government and a serious program of international aid, the government will capitulate on the issue of women. I'm sure. Because I know them. I know them.

The issue of women for them is—and I don't like this of course, this is just the substance of negotiations—they do it to raise the price of negotiation. They know perfectly what we think about them and women; they know perfectly what we think! And they do it for a purpose, these restriction policies on women, because they know that this is a very hot issue for us, on which

they extract power, money, and recognition.

We Must Not Do Nothing

But this is an operation that must be done. What other way is there, other than that described by Hussein [Askary]? Do nothing and the country starves, people continue to die, Taliban collapses, and again instability, terrorism, and violence, and whatever Afghanistan got in the last 40 years returning on the stage. It's not very difficult to make this prediction. If the Taliban collapses, the country goes *again* into complete chaos!

It is possible to talk to them. They are extremists, they are not, I mean, normal people. They won an independence war. They are radicals. It's natural. You never saw a movement that fought for 20 years, arriving to power, and being like the government of Denmark. I mean, people project in relation to the Taliban! They order them to be tolerant, inclusive, respecting of everybody's rights and so on. I mean—I met these people. They fought for 20 years, with a Kalashnikov, a cup of tea, and a piece of bread. They now have power, and they don't—the issue is, if they are not helped, if they are not pressed, they can make mistakes. They are not up to the job. This also is quite normal.

When I went to South Africa, after the end of apartheid, immediately after the big war of apartheid, the government of South Africa was made by people who were so incompetent. I have to say, I have always been supportive of their fight, since the beginning, so I went there with a big idea about it. The first thing I did, I went to Soweto, and I saw a terrible situation, terrible! In Soweto there was plenty of violence, drugs—drug consumption all over, and so on. I talked with all the ministers and so on, and they were totally inadequate for their job! They had a very vague idea about what to do. Because they were fighters, they were not administrators.

This process of transforming fighters into administrators is very long, difficult, but many other countries did, with different results. Algeria is another example of a total failure. The Liberation Movement that took power against a very strong colonial power, France, and the result was that they were incapable of building a modern Algeria. They are still trying to build it. So, these are difficult processes, that should be understood, before launching sentences and judgment and all the rest.

Maybe I'll stop. Thank you very much! [applause]

Tom Gillesberg: Thank you Mr. Arlacchi. I appreciate why Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the interna-

tional president of the Schiller Institute proposed that the Western countries should make you a special representative for Afghanistan to have a common approach for how to do this thing. And in that connection, I would just reflect, as a Dane, you say that when you first set up the program, Denmark was one of the main sponsors. You know, doing above its share of funding concerning how to get rid of narcotics. It's very ironic that later, we find the Danish troops being deployed in the Helmand province under the leadership of the British troops, and going around, year after year after year doing the fighting,

while the poppy seeds numbers were going up by 30-fold during this "liberation" by British and Danish troops.

And therefore, when the Danish government right now is sitting, thinking through what went wrong, they could actually go back to what we did then, and say, "We have a moral obligation to do this right again, and what better way than by helping out directly, funding and contributing to such a program. Now we want to get rid of the poppies, and we want instead to have real economic development." But that's just me, as a Dane, reflecting on this!

H.E. Ambassador Ahmad Farooq

A Perspective on Moving Afghanistan Forward

This is an edited transcript of the presentation of H.E. Ahmad Farooq, the Ambassador from Pakistan to the Kingdom of Denmark, 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. The seminar was moderated by Tom Gillesberg.



Embassy of Pakistan in Denmark

H.E. Ambassador Ahmad Farooq

Thank you very much, Tom, and thank you very much to the Schiller Institute for organizing this event on a very important issue: the future of Afghanistan and which way we would like it to move forward; and for giving me this opportunity of presenting Pakistan's perspective on this subject.

A Bit of History

I would like to begin by giving some context to what Pakistan feels should happen now with regard to Afghanistan, with a bit of history of how we see this situation has evolved over the last 40 years, because Afghanistan has been in a state of turmoil for 40 years, and not much is said [about the fact] that the conflict actually started in 1979, and not in 2001; and Pakistan, along with Afghanistan, has been facing its fallout for the last 40 years.

The withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1988, was

followed by a civil war that took place between the different factions of the Mujahideen, that were fighting the Soviets. And a key reason for that to happen was that once the objective, of expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan was achieved, the West and the U.S., they decided to walk away from Afghanistan. If they had stayed there, and had supported the peacebuilding process in that country, perhaps the history of that country would have been much different.

From this chaos of the civil war, we saw Afghanistan descend into the top drug producing country in the world. It became a safe-haven for the international terrorist groups, al-Qaeda in particular, and organized crime that was going on there. The Taliban, basically, they emerged from this chaos of the civil war, with the promise of bringing stability and peace to the country. What we remember, however, from their rule, is more the kind of human rights violations that were committed, especially against women and girls.

In the period that followed the September 2001 attacks, Afghanistan did make progress, at least from the outside, one can say; but obviously, as both Professor Arlacchi and Hussein [Askary] stated, and the facts that they have presented [at this seminar], actually there were serious problems that remained unresolved.

The conflict continued to linger, and the country