

mismatch is still very big, and it is uncoverable. I was thinking it was going to happen in this way since last September. And unfortunately, I'm very unfortunate, that I'm tending to be right on this regard.

That a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is taking place, no question about it, but this humanitarian crisis is not of the scale that the Western community feels shame and rushes to do something for Afghanistan. Afghanistan is going to be left very much on its own. And by now, we have fully shaped the situation where there is a small group of countries which do not want the government of Afghanistan to ultimately collapse. This group includes, of course, Pakistan; also Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey; and Russia, China, and Iran also lean toward this group, though with some conditions, and maybe not fully. But clearly, these three countries [audio loss].

So, there is a group of countries which is sort of positively or negatively neutral.

But I think that there is a chance that there will be a group of countries that may become interested in the collapse of the government of the Taliban, to try to make Afghanistan a regional problem, a problem for Russia, China and Pakistan, first of all; maybe also for

Iran. And then we will have a very active regional competition. I think everyone understands now that, although Afghanistan is now a regional problem—we are living in a situation when problems are going to be mostly regional, no question about it—but, I think that there will come a time, for regional countries in particular, to choose: if the crisis is facilitated by outside places, whether to take all the consequences on themselves, or to help transfer some of these consequences to other countries. I don't want to go too deep into this, but I want to remind you of the refugee crisis which was so rudely developed on the border of Belarus and Poland, in November.

The consequences of the Afghan crisis will also exist, and I'm sure that if outside players try to manipulate regional problems of Afghanistan against regional countries, there will be opportunities to unleash consequences for the regional countries in a way that they reach not only regional countries, but go beyond the region. And I think that what was going on on the border between Belarus and Poland is a good example of how it may develop. But it's only one way; I'm sure there are other ways, so that the consequences reach everyone, ... [audio loss].

Dialogue

This is an edited transcript of the dialogue that followed the presentations by Helga Zepp-LaRouche and Dr. Andrey Kortunov, and the statements by the RIAC and Schiller experts at the seminar, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan: Toward a Long-Term Solution," co-sponsored by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Schiller Institute (SI) on February 10, 2022. Participating in the dialogue were Harley Schlanger (moderator), Helga Zepp-LaRouche, James Jastras, Graham Fuller, Ivan Safranchuk, and Temur Umarov. The full video of the seminar is available [here](#).

On the Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan

Zepp-LaRouche: We can start the discussion: Ivan, you said that you don't believe the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is of a scale that the West feels so much ashamed, that they will do something about it. That is actually not true. The actual, real humanitarian crisis is absolutely the worst one on the planet. The figures I presented in the beginning are all official figures from the UN, from the World Food Program, from UNICEF—

so, about the objective condition, there is no question.

The fact that it's not being reported on by the mainstream media since about mid-September is the main reason—they're trying to keep the lid on the situation because once you admit what the actual situation is, there would not be just a discussion about did Biden fail by pulling out in such a sudden way, leaving all these so-called auxiliary forces behind, and all of this discussion which occurred at the end of August. But the world population would be really upset, especially in the Islamic countries, in the so-called developing countries; and that is why the media are trying to suppress the information.

The whole purpose of Operation Ibn Sina is to awaken the world public to the dimension of the humanitarian crisis, and evoke this kind of Empfindungsvermögen, which is a German word created by the greatest German poet Schiller, for which I have not found a good English translation. "Empathy" is getting close, but it's more. It's the ability to passionately love humanity and not allow genocide to occur! I think it's not so accidental, because, as I said in my initial re-

marks, when the NATO forces pulled out and all the donor money was cut, everybody knew that this would collapse the Afghan economy right then. This was even mentioned by Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan at the Dec. 18, 2021 conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad, where he said that everybody knew that this was happening.

There is a Damocles Sword hanging over the Western countries. This will all hit them back with great force. In the Nazi period, it was asked, when did they know, what did they know? At the Nuremberg Tribunal, there was the question of what was known about the crimes going on. And right now, when you could very easily help by just releasing the funds which are held by the U.S. and European banks, there comes the question of guilt!

I know this is not very popular what I'm saying, but I think we have to be a bit more energetic, in not allowing something which is incredibly horrible. This is not a question of commenting on something; this is a question of mobilizing the forces internationally to remedy an intolerable situation!

On the Release of Afghan Funds in Foreign Jurisdictions

Safranchuk: I don't want to argue on the exact scale of the crisis, and how it is framed and characterized by the media and by the UN officials. I want to address your last thesis on releasing Afghan funds in the foreign jurisdictions. I think that the call for the release of these funds is probably the right call, from the juridical perspective; although from the juridical perspective, exactly, we cannot release them because Taliban is under international sanctions. Even if we try to push for it, it's a way to nowhere. Because from the moral perspective, nobody takes the Afghan assets in Western or Eastern banks as Afghan assets. This is money of Western taxpayers; this is donor money, which is just registered as if it were Afghan assets in Western banks.

So, I think there will be huge resistance to releasing this money because this is not actually Western money. When, for example, Pakistan's money, or Iranian money was frozen in Western banks, there was no question, that this was money of Pakistan and of Iran, money generated by their labor, by their resources, and so on. But in the Afghan case, how will you say this is Afghan money? Actually, this is money of the Western taxpayers given to the previous government. That's why I think there will be no release, no question about it.

I have another proposal that can be provided to Af-

ghanistan. There is money—there are hundreds of millionaires and multimillionaires, who became Afghan millionaires, being part of the previous regime. And it is very clear that most of the money they have—and they have money in Eastern banks, in Western banks—most of these millionaires have money actually stolen from Western taxpayers.

And I think that if there is problem of returning Afghan governmental assets frozen in Western banks, there should be no problem about going after corrupted officials and corrupted businessmen associated with the Afghan government of the previous regime—to go after them in Germany, in United Arab Emirates, in the United States, in Canada, in all the places where they have stashed this money, actually stolen from Western taxpayers.

And I think that exactly this money should be taken away from these people, concentrated in an international fund, and under international control being provided to whatever government of Afghanistan—Taliban government, non-Taliban government, but whatever government of Afghanistan.

On Engagement with the Taliban

Schlanger: Danny Dellinger from University of Innsbruck asks: “What do you think is the appropriate level of engagement with the Taliban? Part of the reason for withholding funds is that people say they don't want to give it to the Taliban.”

Fuller: I think at this point we have to look at what the options and alternatives are. At the present time, there is no alternative to the Taliban being in power. Somebody earlier on mentioned that they had been a terrorist organization. I think that's not a fully accurate description of the nature of the Taliban. This was part of a longstanding, 20, 30-year civil war within Afghanistan, within which the Taliban represented in particular Pashtoon nationalist feelings, not all Pashtoos by any means, but largely Pashtoon.

That war is over. Any alternative would be fairly dreadful organizations that several of the speakers have already mentioned, al-Qaeda or ISIS, or any of these groups. And furthermore, to even think in these terms suggests a search for alternative forces, means really reopening the civil war yet again! I don't think there's any benefit for anybody in reopening it, or that somehow we will find a wonderful pro-Western government that believes in all the so-called values of the West, to be put into practice there. I just don't think there are

realistic alternatives at the moment, and we have to live with this.

What litmus test we can apply to Afghanistan or other regimes in the world becomes very problematic if it becomes too ideological.

Umarov: We should think about our goals. We want to solve the humanitarian crisis as soon as possible, or we want to reach some kind of fairness or justice here. If we talk about justice, yes, of course, we should not give any kind of money to the Taliban, to wait and hope that the Taliban would become some kind of fair, inclusive government, but it will not solve the crisis right now. We should choose from several evils, and the lesser one, and the most effective way of solving the crisis is to give the Taliban the money that is already there in the banks, just frozen.

Yesterday, of course, this is the money of Western taxpayers. But the finances that were stolen by the corrupt administration of [President Ashraf] Ghani is also the Western taxpayers' money, but it's really difficult by now to make them give this money to the Taliban, or, in any way, to take this money back from them. So, if we really are talking right now about solving the crisis that is unfolding as we talk, we should choose the instruments we have at hand.

On the Role of Regional Countries

Schlanger: Jim, do you see this policy of withholding funds, and the continuing sanctions, as part of continuing the war?

Jatras: Yes, absolutely. It's hard to talk about what we can do for Afghanistan until we stop doing these things *to* Afghanistan. It's not just a failure to do something for the people of Afghanistan. Graham and the others have pointed out that the neighboring countries all have one interest in common—whether we're talking about Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the Russians, the Chinese, the Pakistanis, the Indians, the Iranians. If they have any sense at all, they will want to see Afghanistan as stable, and not a problem for the neighborhood.

It seems to me that the SCO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, is the proper venue for the neighboring countries to think about the best way to manage the question of Afghanistan. What are the American and British interests in Afghanistan? Zero! Zip! Zip! We have no interests in this part of the world. But unfortunately, the people making policy in the West see an interest in trying to disrupt any kind of agreement on sta-

bility for Afghanistan. And I think inflicting humanitarian crisis on Afghanistan, as Graham pointed out that we do with respect to Yemen, is simply seen as a policy tool. It's a form of siege warfare that can cause a lot of misery, a lot of instability, give a hot-foot to the neighbors by creating this mess there, or perpetuating this mess, and stopping these countries from coming together in a humane way.

Helga and Ivan were kind of disagreeing on whether or not there's a humanitarian crisis that will shame the Western countries: Well, you can't shame the shameless. You simply keep a lid on it and try to ignore it, what we've done in Yemen and other places.

Before you can talk about a positive agenda, what can you do? You can lead, you can follow, you can get out of the way. And what the Western countries can do right now, is get out of the way, release the funds, accept the fact that we lost. Some people we don't particularly like are in control, but they're somebody else's problem right now, the neighboring countries' problem. They shouldn't be our problem anymore and we shouldn't be trying to make the problem worse, which is what we are continuing to do, in my opinion.

On a New Paradigm in International Relations

Schlanger: Jim, you brought up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: I'd like to ask Helga about this proposal that came from a Chinese military analyst Sr. Col. Zhou Bo. He said it's now time to bring Afghanistan in as a full member of the SCO. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Zepp-LaRouche: I think the SCO is a very good framework to integrate Afghanistan. In any case, the only sign of hope right now, is the fact that the OIC, [the Organization of Islamic Cooperation] for example, plans to have another regional meeting in the beginning of March on the development of Afghanistan. Also, when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was just in Beijing, they discussed Afghanistan, and there will be a regional development conference in Beijing, also in the beginning of March. So, I think one can see that the neighbors all have a very clear interest to stabilize the situation, and the SCO would be the larger security and economic framework to do that.

That part is good. But I still maintain my initial point, that first of all, if the United States and NATO occupy a country for 20 years and conduct war, they have a moral responsibility—including the idea that the money is now in the U.S. and European banks, is

Western taxpayers' money—well, if you are for 20 years in a country, and when you leave, still 80% of the budget is coming from donor money, you did something wrong! I mean, they should have built up the country and left a prospering nation and not a field of rubble! So, I think there is a moral obligation to release this money, because you can't just—I find this extremely upsetting, the idea that this is Western taxpayers' money.

The other thing is, as I said, if we can solve Afghanistan in the small, in getting all the countries to cooperate, it may be a stepping stone to defuse the large strategic crises which we see right now, especially over Ukraine, and in a different way, with Taiwan. I'm not giving this up, because I still believe we have to arrive at a new paradigm in international relations, of cooperation instead of confrontation. So, for me, I'm not just looking at Afghanistan. I'm looking at Afghanistan both in terms of the humanitarian crisis, but also as a hopeful way to build bridges in the large domain.

On the Possibility of Consensus

Schlanger: What you just said reflects another question we just got in, from someone who raises the issue, “Could there be cooperation in Afghanistan that could affect the broader picture, including Ukraine and Taiwan?”

Safranchuk: I'm pessimistic. I support all the calls for that, but I don't believe as Jim said, that shameless people will suddenly change their mind.

Already for a while, I usually make comparison between Afghanistan and Syria. Actually, the attitude of Western countries to Syria is even more hypocritical and unfair than it is toward Afghanistan. At least in Afghanistan, you can say the Taliban, its leaders, are on the international sanctions lists; there may be discussion whether they are terrorists, or they just assisted some terrorists, and so on and so on. But in Syria, you have a legitimate government, internationally recognized. You have the U.S. troops which occupied part of this country in the north, and control a big part of the oil resources of this country, and deprive the country of the oil revenue.

I do not believe that suddenly, in Afghanistan, some countries will play in a more fair way than in Syria. That's why I think that it's quite unrealistic. In internal debates in these countries, the question will be raised: “Look, why do we cooperate with the Taliban if we are so much pressing [President Bashar] al-Assad in

Syria?” [Whetn asked] whether Taliban is better than Assad, everyone will say, of course, “No.”

I don't believe that soon it's possible that there will be some positive international agenda on Afghanistan, even on humanitarian issues, let alone on reconstruction of the country. I think the best we can now achieve, is avoiding a serious competition, when foreigners, when far-away countries will really impede efforts of regional countries to stabilize Afghanistan. That is something that we still can avoid. Even this will be very hard. But a big international positive agenda on Afghanistan, with involvement of various countries? No, I think that this is very difficult at this point in time.

Umarov: I also do not see Afghanistan as a place where the big, great powers will find a consensus. We're in the middle of a pandemic. In the very beginning of it, it seemed that it was the perfect enemy for the countries to cooperate [against], something even more perfect than the pandemic, could be aliens coming to the Earth. But even the pandemic could not make big powers cooperate. I don't think Afghanistan will be the exception.

On Overcoming the West's Drive for War

Schlanger: Let me go into a slightly broader question, then, for all the panelists: To the extent there seems to be some pessimism. In Ukraine right now we see a real danger of a confrontation, largely as a result of this continued Western war drive. How do we overcome this? President Putin has called for a new security architecture, based on guarantees of security. I know Helga's written a lot about this. I want to hear from Helga on that, but let's see who else has some thoughts on this. So, Helga, you want to take that?

Zepp-LaRouche: We are in a very fast-changing situation that will also impact the situation in Afghanistan in ways which have not yet been touched upon in this discussion so far. Look at the [historic agreement](#) which was just made between President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin in the context of the Olympic Games, very far-reaching partnerships in economics, and even touching on military questions. That has actually started a new dynamic, because there is right now a clear counterpole to the previous insistence on the unipolar world. And many countries are feeling attracted by what is offered by this combination, in terms of the Belt and Road Initiative, in terms of actual models to overcome poverty and underdevelopment.

I'm an optimist. I'm not an optimist because I be-

lieve in tea leaves; I'm an optimist, because I believe in actively organizing for a vision one has. We are in such a period where many people know we are on the brink of potential extinction. If you look at the insane conceptions of the "Global Lightning 22" exercise which just took place, many people are waking up [to the fact] that we need a new paradigm. Discussion of a new Helsinki 2.0 is now occurring very actively in Germany, the idea that you need a new European security architecture which includes Russia.

I have added to that this Russia-China agreement, because we have to have an international security architecture which includes every country, including Russia, China, the United States. And it can be only made on the basis of joint economic development, because a security architecture which is not based on joint economic interests, has no chance of being durable in existence.

Rather than despairing about unsolvable crises and so forth, I think there are so many processes in motion, so the question is how to influence them. On the argument that the shameless cannot be shamed into changing, well, I'm happy to say that even in Germany, or in Europe, or in the United States, not everybody is shameless. Operation Ibn Sina appeals to those people who feel that they're humanists. There are some people who think that the human species should be behaving in a human way!

So, I just want to spread some optimism. If you have a clear idea where mankind should be, and you mobilize forces to go in the direction of realizing that, you are adding something positive to the cause of world history, and not just sitting there being pessimistic.

On Support for Universal Human Values

Schlanger: On that note, we had a message of greetings to this event from Alessia Ruggeri, from the Comitato per la Repubblica [Committee for the Republic] in Italy. She sends her greetings and raises the question of the Italian government, which is this problem of not recognizing the Taliban, using the issue of women's rights. She writes that this seems to be a pretext to starve the whole population.

I'd like to ask everyone to comment on this. You see all these people talking about "oh, the plight of women," and yet, withholding aid means women and children are starving. Can we use this hypocrisy to move governments, and in particular the European governments?

Jatras: I share and agree with what Helga's saying. If she were Secretary of State, I think we'd be in much better shape than we are. Unfortunately, we've got Tony Blinken. And I agree with Helga that there are a lot of people in various countries, maybe more in Europe than in the United States, who would want to respond to these, what we might call "universal human values" that have a human content. Unfortunately, those are not the people who are running things! They're institutionally locked into a mindset that looks at the world in terms of a geopolitical zero-sum game; their interest in Afghanistan is to disrupt Eurasia; their interest in Ukraine is to stop Nord Stream 2, is to block Europe's, and especially Germany's integration into Eurasia.

I hope there are people in Italy and Germany and places like this, but it ultimately comes down to the vision and courage of the leaders, especially in Europe, to finally be like a gerbil and jump off the treadmill. Or they'll just keep doing what they've been doing, that's gotten us into this mess in the first place. As Helga says, we're getting very close to the clock ticking toward midnight, and the people who need to grab the levers of power are just not the right ones to get us out of this.

Fuller: I agree with all that's been said in this regard. I don't have a great deal of hope for a sea change in U.S. policies or outlook, for some time to come. But I do have more hope for Europe, Western Europe in particular, that can begin to help unfreeze the rather frozen zero-sum political vision that dominates the United States right now; particularly Germany, classically close to Eastern Europe, closer to the realities of Russia and the politics of that area than almost any other country. And also, more powerful at this point to do that.

I'm hoping that, although there's all this drumbeating right now for NATO unity and all of this, I think many observers have the feeling that NATO is really a dying force. It served its purpose very well, when you had a Soviet Union that was perhaps bent on changing the game in Europe, especially back in the days of Stalin—but those days are long gone, and one can argue that a force like NATO is actually creating greater confrontation than almost any other force.

I'd look especially to Germany, but also to France. Forget about the U.K. The U.K. is very much a wannabe American Tony Blair lapdog, or whatever you want to call it. But I certainly think most of Western European nations have a clearer view and need to speak

out and get itself out from under the pressures of singing all from the same NATO hymnbook. Because that's not going to get us anywhere; that's going to take us in the wrong direction.

On Breaking the Afghan Logjam

Schlanger: Let me offer Ivan a chance to comment on the general discussion: Besides being somewhat pessimistic about the West, it's clear something has to be done. Do you have some idea on how to break the logjam?

Safranchuk: On Afghanistan, or more generally on Ukraine and the standoff between Russia and the West?

Schlanger: Well, let's take Afghanistan, since this is the subject of our event.

Safranchuk: I think that the United States will be not positive—more positively engaged with Afghanistan if there is no regional partner for the United States to impede regional efforts. Because, still, the United States is far away and usually when we see the United States and European countries operating in some way in Eurasia, usually a local partner is very much needed.

Right now, we have two dissonant voices in the region about Afghanistan:

Tajikistan, which is far more cautious on the Taliban government than its neighbors. I want to stress that Tajikistan has good reasons to be very cautious. Although we now say that the Taliban should not be pressed too much, we still should admit that actually the Taliban established a regime within which none of us would like to live. I can hardly imagine that anybody from this panel would like to live in the social conditions which they established in their country. And the old rule that if you are aggressive inside the country, you may finally become aggressive to your neighbors and outside your country—that rule is not gone. That rule is based on the history of Europe and the world from the middle and the first half of the previous century. That's why Tajikistan has reasons to be very concerned with the government of the Taliban, and to be cautious; no question about it.

India is also ambivalent on the government of Taliban. They take it as reality, but they definitely do not like this reality.

If regional countries fail to reach regional consensus—and there will be regional countries who are ready to help far away foreigners with some destructive

agenda—that will be an opportunity for a destructive agenda of outside powers. And that's why, although now, a lot of attention is paid to positively re-engaging the West in Afghanistan, unfreezing Afghan assets, and taking other efforts, once again, I do not believe that this is going to succeed.

I still think the most critical is to have a regional consensus, if not full consensus, then at least a big level of regional common understanding. This will be a good hedge against destructive activities of outsiders.

On Reestablishing a Functioning Economy

Schlanger: We have a comment from Dr. Shah Mehrabi, who's an economist from the Afghan central bank. He writes: "The long-term solution to the current economic crisis, entails not only addressing the humanitarian crisis, but economic and banking paralysis. The immediate release of Afghan frozen assets to stabilize prices and reduce volatility, is essential. Development aid and involvement of regional powers, as well as multilateral assistance to address the development needs of the country should be given immediate attention."

Now, with all that's been said, Temur, do you have some thoughts on the importance of getting a breakthrough on this. I spoke to a Pakistani journalist who spends a lot of time in Afghanistan, who told me that it's not only that there's no food available, but people have no money.

Umarov: Concerning the humanitarian crisis, we can of course speculate on whether it's a catastrophic situation, or not catastrophic enough, but I think there is a consensus among us that the situation with Afghan society is not good, and something should be done with that from the point of view of international society, but also it's just a pragmatic way to not let the situation get worse, so that it will impact the neighboring countries.

Unfortunately, it seems that we're in the situation where the Afghanistan people are being left on their own, and no country around Afghanistan has enough instruments to help Afghanistan cope with this; and other countries that do have enough resources are not willing to spend them on the Afghan crisis. My observation here is that the situation in the short term will get even worse, and there is nothing to be expected from the international community, very unfortunately.

Schlanger: Well, that paradox sort of puts the ball back in our court, that we have to mobilize to create the incentive, for Western governments—and larger

powers—to get involved. I would like to get short final comments from Graham and Jim before we go to the closing statements.

Fuller: I think a lot has been said here, a lot of very important things have been said, and I agree with almost all of it. I view, as was clear from my remarks, that the U.S. in particular, and maybe Europe, but NATO in general, has tended to maintain this Cold War mentality, that prevents viewing Afghanistan in Afghan terms, or viewing any country—Yemen, or Syria, or others—in terms of their own problems, not just humanitarian, but in terms of maintaining stability, which ultimately helps prevent broader clash and confrontation, military and otherwise, internationally.

The United States is undergoing a period of huge psychological trauma, of having to come to terms with the fact that it is no longer now able to dictate, or mold, the opinion of all the rest of the world and expect it to follow it. It's painful for it to acknowledge that there are other major states in the world that have

an increasing voice in this.

Here is, again, where I come back to Europe. Because Europe is viewed as obviously friendlier territory to Washington than, say, Central Asia, or East Asia, or whatever, Europe is in a position to help America face this transition to an acceptance of a much more multilateral world, in which, ultimately, not every country has to be viewed in terms of what does it mean for the grand international struggle. The point of my beginning my remarks in Russian, was to say that it's incredible to think that Russian should have been more on my mind as an intelligence officer in Kabul, even back in the '70s, showing how much the true domestic issues were not viewed as important. It was the Great Game, which as we all know, goes back a very long time.

So, I look to Europe for help in nursing the U.S. through this very painful psychological period—Germany, above all else; but France, Italy, and other countries; but it's going to be primarily Western Europe that can facilitate this American psychological transition.

Seminar Closing Remarks

This is an edited transcript of the closing remarks of Andrey Kortunov and Helga Zepp-LaRouche to the seminar, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan: Toward a Long-Term Solution," co-sponsored by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Schiller Institute (SI) on February 10, 2022. Mr. Kortunov is the Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche is President of the Schiller Institute (SI). The full video of the seminar is available [here](#).

Andrey Kortunov: I think that our discussion suggests that the humanitarian dimension of the Afghan situation remains a very important challenge to the international community; and unfortunately, the community is not united on these issues, and it's not likely that we will have consensus on what's going on in Afghanistan, and what we can do about Afghanistan. Nevertheless, that should not prevent us from uniting in trying to render humanitarian assistance to the country. I think there are many technical issues here that we have to address, in terms of how this assistance can be rendered, and how the situation in Afghanistan can be managed, without compromising the

principles and the demands that the international community might have regarding Afghanistan.

I do believe that it's important to continue our dialogue. It's important to keep channels of communications open, and I do hope that specifically, we are talking about the Russian-EU interaction. There are ways to come to some kind of common denominators, of what can and what should be done, in terms of continuing the humanitarian assistance to the country, and a concerted list of demands or suggestions that the international community might have, regarding the Taliban leadership.

In my view, this year is likely to be critical in terms of the ability of Taliban, or the inability of Taliban, to consolidate its power in the country. And my personal conclusion is that any alternative is likely to be worse than the current regime of Taliban. Therefore, it is in our common interests to make sure that Taliban succeeds, not fails. Later on, we can consider other demands or other suggestions that might guide our policies towards the government in Kabul, but for the time being, I think the humanitarian considerations should take the priority above all other considerations that we might have about developments in this country.