

The Belt and Road and The Future that Afghanis Want

by Hussein Askary

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BRIX

Hussein Askary

I thank the previous speaker, my friend Shakeel Ramay, for the great insights he's providing us, from his standpoint and viewpoint. Obliging my friend and colleague, Diane Sare, I always present an optimistic view of things. This is not an ivory tower perspective; it's a scientific principle I learned from Lyndon LaRouche which says, it's the future which determines the present, because our view of where we want to be in the future, determines what we do today.

That's also what my friend Shakeel says: We should look at the future of this region of Afghanistan through the eyes of an Afghan child. What kind of future does this child want to have? And then to fulfill that dream, we can start planning and discussing things; not from the standpoint of the past—all the horrible things that happened, although we need to learn from the past, because that's important. But we need to look at the future through the lens of an Afghan child or an African child or whatever. For me, it has become a scientific viewpoint; because when I joined the Schiller Institute and the LaRouche movement in 1995, and met with Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, we were already talking about the New Silk Road, the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and it looked like a remote dream. But we worked very hard to make sure that *this* is what's going to be the future of mankind; where all nations can work together, and once and for all, we get rid of geopolitics.

The Afghanistan crisis now, lo and behold, is carrying within it, as the Chinese say, an opportunity to change

things—change the terrible things we inherited from the past, and build beautiful things into the future. That's what I want to share with you today, not much analysis. Of course, I disagree with all the horror reports that the Taliban are taking over the country, they are bringing down the Afghan flag, this and that. As Shakeel said, what we need now is to have cool heads intervening. Right now, there *are* cool heads intervening in the region. Probably we will see the end of geopolitics right in the place where geopolitics all started—the “Great Game.”

In his presentation, Harley Schlanger mentioned the book by Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, a wonderful book I got as a gift from our mutual colleague Michael Billington. Everybody should read it; it's a very good historical record of how the British used Afghanistan as a buffer zone against the Russian Empire—as a game. The very person—Captain Arthur Connolly [of the East India Company]—who coined the term, “the Great Game,” was beheaded in Bukhara by the emir there. So that's a very funny anecdotal aspect.

The ‘Belt and Road to Peace’

Afghanistan is literally a piece of rock. (See **Figure 1**.) Later I will describe it as a place where humans are living, but Afghanistan is a piece of rock; it's an extension of the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Himalayas. It separates Central Asia from South Asia, which was the pur-

pose of the British Empire. You can see Badakhshan Province, with the Wakhan corridor forming the panhandle. This was created by the British through treaties with the local tribal leaders, but the Russians also accepted it. This is the breaking line between the Russian Empire and the British Empire. Look around Afghanistan. You will see all these nations, many of which are flat, but Afghanistan is a huge rock. It's a very rugged country; it's also very dry. The British lost three wars there; that's why it's called the Graveyard of Empires. The Soviets lost there, too, and finally the United States and NATO now have to withdraw.

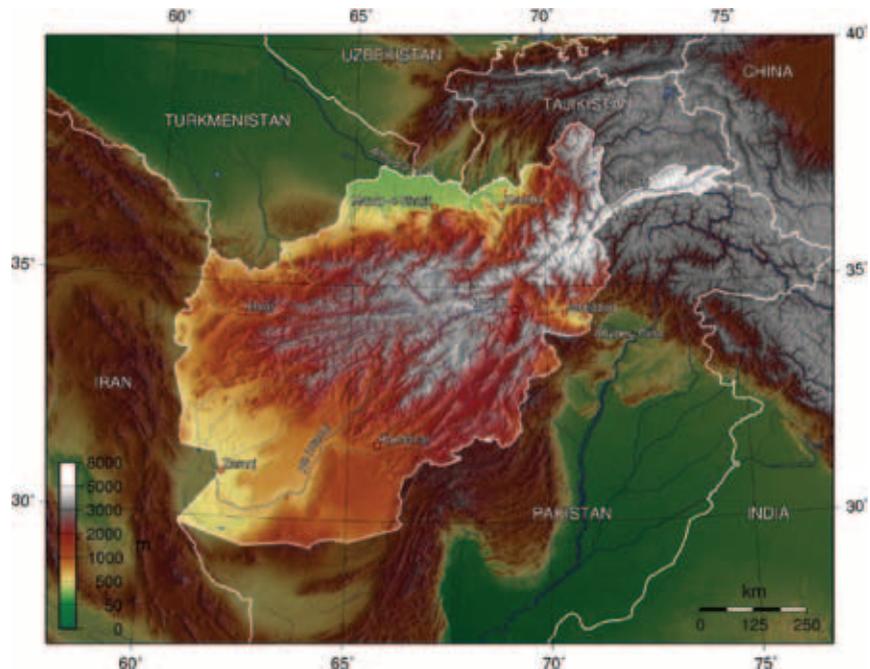
The purpose of invading Afghanistan, then and now, has been to use Afghanistan to destabilize the surrounding countries and split Eurasia. That was the purpose; not to control Afghanistan, but to use Afghanistan as a buffer zone and as a hand grenade to attack other nations. We know that the situation in Afghanistan, in terms of terrorism, has affected every single country in the region. There are terrorist groups in Pakistan, in Iran, in Turkmenistan, in Uzbekistan, in Tajikistan, and in China, which were born out of the Brzezinski/Bernard Lewis British/Anglo-American "Great Game" in the Afghan War against the Soviets. We also have in Afghanistan the growth of opium production since 2011, which has been used as an "Opium War" against Iran, Pakistan, Central Asian nations, and first and foremost, Russia. In 2019, for example, 18,000 Russians died of overdoses of drugs.

Afghanistan can now suddenly become a cradle of peace for all of Eurasia. What is required is to go away from geopolitics and get Afghanistan on what I call the Belt and Road to Peace, and my friend Shakeel agrees with me. If you look at the countries around Afghanistan, you have Iran, Pakistan, nearby India. You have China, the world's second biggest economy and the driver of the Belt and Road Initiative. You have Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Then behind them further, you have Russia, and so on.

We need to embrace Afghanistan, to envelop Afghanistan not with military force, not by sending drones to bomb weddings and funerals as NATO and the United States have done in the past 20 years. But to send a mes-

FIGURE 1

A Topographical Map of Afghanistan



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sage, "We want to help you rebuild your country." That should be the message.

There are many structures that can be used in achieving that goal. As Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the chairwoman of the Schiller Institute, has said, if we don't involve the major powers, especially the Permanent Five in the United Nations Security Council, we cannot have peace anywhere in the world. Therefore, if we have a mechanism which is enveloping Afghanistan, it does not include the United States. But if the United States wants to play a positive role, it can engage these nations in providing peace through economic development.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was created after the fall of the Soviet Union; it's a security organization. But if you look at the nations involved in the SCO (see **Figure 2**), it includes almost half of the world's population in a very sensitive area. China, Russia, and India—three of the four major powers. All of Central Asia, and Pakistan and India—supposedly enemies, are members of the same organization. In green, Afghanistan and Iran are observers in the SCO; and we have Mongolia.

Now, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, is visiting in person—breaking the rules for COVID—the member nations in Central Asia and all the Shanghai Cooperation Organization nations, to discuss what to do about Afghanistan.

FIGURE 2

The SCO Member Nations



The Shanghai Cooperation Organization comprises almost half of the world's population. Member nations are in dark green, Observer nations in light green, and Dialogue Partners in yellow.

Unlike the hysteria and geopolitical nonsense we hear in the media, actually former rivals are working together now to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. Iran, as I mentioned earlier, is hosting a meeting of both the Afghani government and the Taliban. For many years, the Taliban were the worst enemy of Iran, because when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, they went into the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 and massacred all the diplomats. The Iranians have never forgotten that, but now, they say, they have put that behind, in order to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Iran and Pakistan have high-level arrangements to maintain stability. India is involved with both Russia and Iran to get a discussion going. All kinds of diplomatic moves are going on there to stabilize the situation and make sure that the Taliban are brought to the negotiating table. As my friend Shakeel said, the Taliban are not like ISIS or al-Qaeda; they have a certain idea of themselves as a nationalist grouping, but also, they have support in the population. What is important is that what goes on in Afghanistan does not destabilize the rest.

Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and so on have a

collective military security treaty arrangement. But nobody is thinking about using military force. Not Russia; not China; not Iraq. Nobody is intending to use military force in Afghanistan. They have learned the lesson which the British, the Soviets, and now the Americans have learned the hard way. What I mean is, there are certain structures you can use to change the situation, and certain structures you cannot.

Corridors of Development, a Positive U.S. Role

Talking about solutions to things is where the future lies. Already in 1996, I was involved with other members of the LaRouche movement and the Schiller Institute in putting together the first-ever comprehensive New Silk Road/Eurasian Land-Bridge report. Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche was in China, discussing this. The Chinese, already in 1996, accepted the New Silk Road as an economic strategy, but it was not mature then. But in 2013, China's President Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative—from Kazakhstan, which is a Central Asian country; and also from Indonesia.

SCO

We put together the [report](#) in 2014, *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge*. Chapter 5 in this report contains a section titled, "Central Asia: Ending Geopolitics." There we have a thorough outline of all kinds of connectivity—power, water, agriculture, industrial projects in Afghanistan—because all the Central Asian countries were affected by the situation in Afghanistan. Also in that section of the report is an appendix from the Russian Institute for Demography, Migration, and Regional Development, a Moscow-based non-governmental organization connected to the Russian Academy of Sciences, providing its perspective on developments in Afghanistan and integrating it into the larger Central and South Asia by building corridors of development. That includes railways, power lines, gas and oil pipelines, water pipelines, and all kinds of things very thoroughly described there. That appendix goes through what the Russians already know; the Russians have very good geological surveys of many parts of Eurasia. It outlines where the minerals exist in Afghanistan and how they intersect the development corridors of Afghanistan.

We're talking about minerals, natural resources, and the role of the United States. I think the United States can play a role in achieving peace in Afghanistan and all Eurasia, not by military force, but by engaging its

scientific, technological, and industrial capabilities, which are part also of the military tradition of the United States. Instead of all these wars which benefit no one, we can have a win-win situation.

There is a study—this is the best thing the United States did in Afghanistan—conducted by geologists and engineers from the U.S. Geological Survey, published in 2011 under the title, “Summaries of Important Areas for Mineral Investment and Production Opportunities of Nonfuel Minerals in Afghanistan.” I happen to know some people who worked on that project from the European side, because it was a huge project. It explored the whole territory of Afghanistan to figure out non-oil-and-gas minerals in Afghanistan that can be used for economic development.

They made a thorough, fantastic study. I read the study when it came out. It was developed further. Reporting on it, the media said, “Oh, in Afghanistan they have \$2 trillion of minerals.” That’s what is wrong with geopolitics; they think only in terms of money, not in terms of how this mineral wealth would benefit the Afghan people and other people.

This [study](#) is available on the website of the United States Geological Survey, and it has been updated several times. It’s a fantastic study; it’s very useful. It shows that Afghanistan has not only some of the largest copper and iron ore reserves in Asia, but it also has the so-called rare earth minerals, and special minerals like lithium, chromium, tantalum that are crucial for modern industry, especially electronics, telecommunications, and so on.

The U.S. Geological Survey did a fantastic outline of where these exist, but they did not, of course, outline how these minerals could be used, because those who decide the policy in the United States are not engineers, they are not farmers, they are not teachers; they are geopoliticians like Zbigniew Brzezinski, who follows a British geopolitical scheme that the world is a fight of all against all. “If we don’t take these, the Chinese or the Russians or the Indians will take them. We will make sure that nobody uses these minerals.” Therefore, Afghanistan’s mineral wealth was never exploited.

Integration into Eurasian Development

Now, the Chinese came in 2017 and the government of Afghanistan said, “We have all this mineral wealth, and we want to use it.” So, they did an international bidding, and two Chinese companies won the bid, making the cheapest offer to invest in the largest copper mine in all of Central Asia, called Mes Aynak, for interesting historical reasons. Mes Aynak is located in Logar Prov-

ince in the eastern part of Afghanistan. But there is also the iron ore mineral deposit in Hajigak, in Bamyan Province 130 km west of Kabul. which the U.S. Geological Survey also identified.

The project never got off the ground, because the Chinese company’s personnel were attacked by terrorist groups when they were surveying that region. But there also were technical problems because, in order to extract the copper from the rock, a 400 MW power plant to melt the ore had to be built, and railways had to be built, to bring coal from the western part of the country to fire that coal plant and to ship out the extracted copper.

This area is interesting also because there are settlements there from the Bronze Age, prehistoric, but also Buddhist settlements. Some people used this area to mobilize against the Chinese companies. Therefore, a huge international, U.S.-EU-backed campaign was launched to save the historical artifacts in that area where the minerals are located. Of course, we have to preserve these historical things; but this was used as a way to attack the Chinese project and stop it. The Chinese themselves had technical problems, so the project never got off the ground.

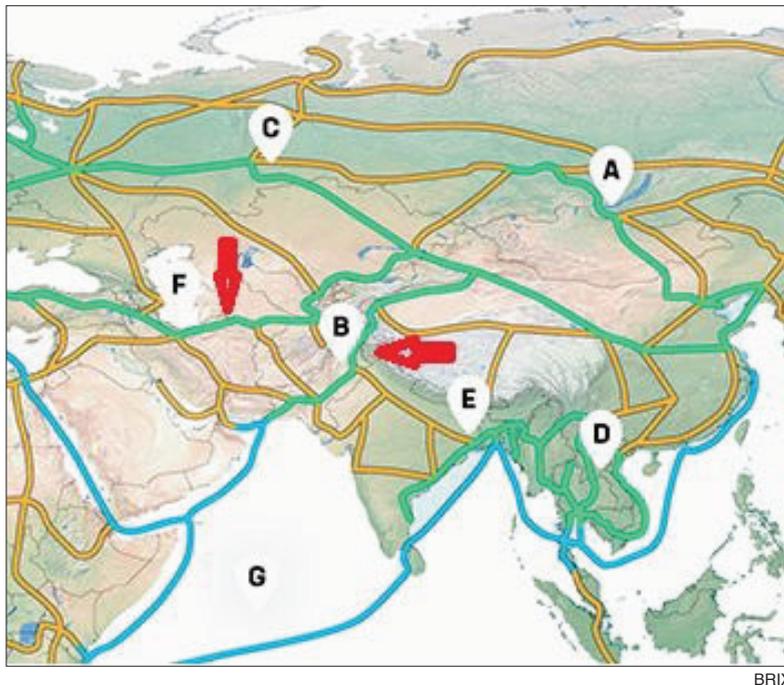
Concerning the integrating of Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative, the New Silk Road, Afghanistan is squeezed between two of the most important corridors of the New Silk Road or Belt and Road. (See **Figure 3**) One is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, shown as **B** on the map; and the China-Central Asia-West Asia route, the Silk Road, which goes from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China into Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and also into Turkmenistan and Iran, and then ends in Turkey. That’s outlined in **F**. Afghanistan is the missing link in this whole situation. It’s not connected. As I said earlier, Afghanistan is a piece of rock; it’s very rough to build things there. But it’s not impossible, because the Chinese have already built a 435-km high-speed railway connecting Nyingchi in Tibet and Tibet’s capital, Lhasa, in the Himalayan Mountains, through the most rugged areas in China. It’s possible to overcome these difficulties.

Afghanistan’s population is concentrated in the eastern part of the country, and also in the west. In the middle is very little population. Both the population and the mineral resources are concentrated in certain areas, making it necessary to bridge them with development corridors, infrastructure.

Interestingly, when I looked at the demographics of Afghanistan, it’s fantastic. It’s why I said earlier that the future determines what’s going on in the present. Of

FIGURE 3

Integration of Afghanistan into the BRI



Afghanistan is embraced by—and can be connected to—two of the most important corridors of the Belt and Road, indicated by red arrows: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, labeled B, and the China-Central Asia-West Asia route, labeled F. Proposed routes, in yellow, that cross Afghanistan show how it could be done.

Afghanistan’s 37 million people, 3 million are refugees outside of Afghanistan, but 34 million are in the country, and 46% of those 34 million are below the age of 15. Above the age of 65, is only 2.4% of the population. So, 97-98% of the population are below the age of 65, and most of these—80%—are below the age of 30. So the whole future is in front of them. What is needed is to provide those young people with the means to thrive, to use their creative potential, and build their economy and get into the future and integrate with the rest of the world economy along the lines of the New Silk Road or the Belt and Road Initiative.

As my friend Shakeel said, you cannot present ideas to the Afghans, because they are very stubborn, nationalistic, anti-foreigner people, for obvious reasons. They have been attacked the whole time. You have to ask the Afghans what they think about these ideas. What are their aspirations?

Therefore, I brought this document (see **Figure 4**) from the Afghani Foreign Ministry, which has a special think tank called the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). They have outlined a number of projects, and integrated regional ideas

into the reconstruction of Afghanistan, for example, by building the so-called Ring around Afghanistan railroad. There are railways built from all countries around Afghanistan up to its border, but inside Afghanistan, nothing. The reason is, we had NATO inside the country; NATO does not build railways. As Obama’s National Security Advisor Susan Rice told the African ambassadors, “We don’t do infrastructure.” So therefore, Afghanistan, of all the countries in the region, has never built infrastructure in the past 20 years of U.S.-British occupation.

As outlined by the Afghani government, and now as our friend Shakeel says, the Taliban now accept integration of Afghanistan’s infrastructure projects into the larger region, so that everybody benefits. Railways, the oil and gas projects from Turkmenistan into Afghanistan to Pakistan to India, the so-called PATI line, which the United States and Britain have been talking about for three decades, but it was never built, can now be connected. Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan can now be integrated; the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor from China can now be brought into Afghanistan.

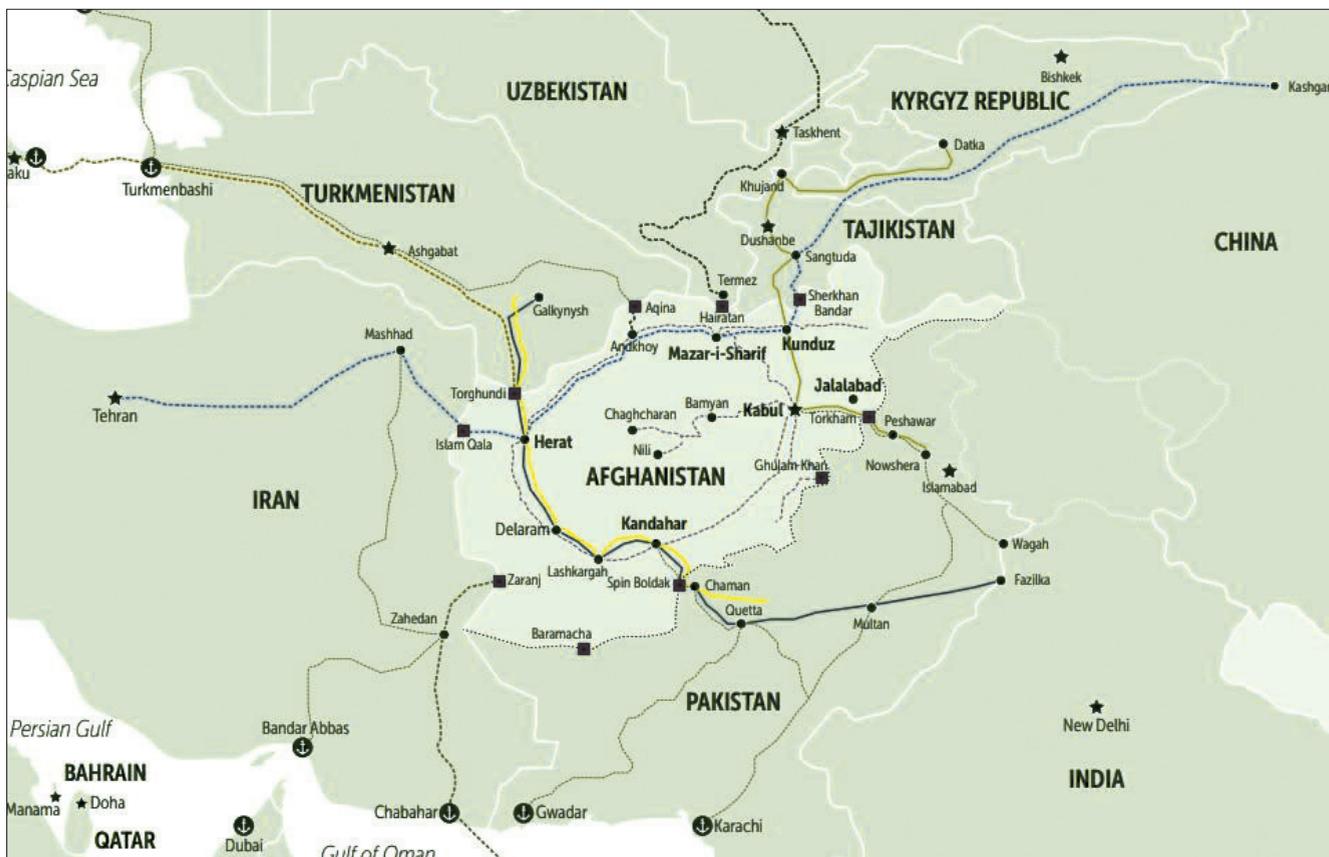
All these countries have said—I have documents, I don’t have time to read them all—that there are meetings going on between China and Central Asian countries. They are talking about the Belt and Road Initiative and integrating Afghanistan. The foreign ministers of Iran, Pakistan, and China, who met just last month, agreed that cooperation on the Belt and Road should intensify, and that Afghanistan should be brought into the picture.

This, then, is the kind of thing you need to do to get the Afghan people and their leadership—whoever they are—to see the future through the eyes of their children, to see how their country will look if they accept this offer. But somebody has to make the offer. There are intensive moves underway now; as I said. The Chinese Foreign Minister is in Central Asia. He will visit all the countries around Afghanistan. Pakistan is in advanced discussions with the Afghans, Iran, and China on the prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

First Comes Economic Development

But, as LaRouche warned about the Israeli-Arab peace process: If you don’t put on the table from the beginning the economic development you are thinking

FIGURE 4



Afghan Foreign Ministry/RECCA

The Ring around Afghanistan railroad, shown here as a dotted line, is one of the promising projects outlined by the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). At present, there is a Ring around Afghanistan highway, but not a ring railroad.

about creating, never discuss religious, political, and other “solutions”—or democracy, or state what kind of government you want. Start with the economic development. Show the Afghani people and their leaders how their country will look in the future. Show them your willingness to help them create that future. Then, they will say, “We take the deal.” You may have some crazy people who say “No,” but the majority will say, “That’s the kind of future we dream about, that’s the kind of future we want.”

I think the United States and Europe can be part of this.

Just to warn you, there will be people who are against this. The World Bank; don’t get the World Bank involved in this. Don’t get the EU involved in this. Don’t get the U.S. and Britain involved in this, unless they throw away all the economics books they have learned from, as LaRouche has told us.

I have just picked up this [study](#) for the World Bank, by a group of American so-called “economists”—certi-

fied idiots in the words of Lyndon LaRouche—about building railways in Afghanistan. They told the World Bank, “It is unlikely that most of them [the schemes for building railroads] should, or even could, be constructed. Many, even if constructible, may not be financially viable; instead, their construction would create a drain on the Afghan national economy.”

So, the ideology here in the West is, if you don’t have money, you cannot build railways, you cannot build hospitals, you cannot build schools, you cannot build roads, you cannot build dams, you cannot build power plants. This ideology should be thrown in the dustbin of history, together with geopolitics.

Economics should—once again as Lyndon LaRouche has identified—go back to its human cradle, its human origin, that all resources start from the minds of human beings who are creative and think about the future. When you look at this problem in Afghanistan, look always through the lens of the Afghani child who is thinking, “What is going to be my future?”