
II. Schiller Institute November 13-14 Conference

Afghanistan: Operation Ibn Sina

Prof. Pino Arlacchi

Avoiding the Coming Catastrophe in Afghanistan

This is the edited transcript of Prof. Pino Arlacchi's presentation to Panel 2, "The Science of Physical Economy" of the Schiller Institute's November 13-14 conference, "All Moral Resources of Humanity Have To Be Called Up: Mankind Must Be the Immortal Species!" Prof. Arlacchi is a Sociology Professor at the University of Sassari, a former Executive Director of the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, and a former European Parliament Rapporteur on Afghanistan.



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their money. The central bank of Afghanistan's money is frozen. At least \$4 billion is frozen by the Americans. And that's a substantial amount of money. Don't forget, the GDP of Afghanistan is just \$20 billion! So, the Americans are freezing a substantial part of Afghanistan's own money, their own money. And I hear some don't understand why they continue to do so. They don't want to give the money to the Taliban? But humanitarian aid can be delivered straight to the population. There are

many ways to not involve the government in that. And then, this makes, really, this action, almost a crime—this inaction, almost a crime.

I believe that UN agencies are telling the truth about Afghanistan today. The situation is tragic, because winter is very tough. You know the country; I know the country very well. And the Taliban are just there [as the government] since a few months. There are just a very, very small number of initiatives, in terms of humanitarian aid from neighboring countries, which are the only ones that I am aware of. The European Union (EU) committed to continue to invest around \$1 billion a year, in nonmilitary aid to Afghanistan, as the EU had been doing for a long a time. But I have not seen any intention, any plan to spend this in this emergency situation.

I don't know what the U.S.A. is doing because the Americans are completely silent. They are showing a lack of responsibility, regarding a country they occupied; they took care of for 20 years. Their behavior is really astonishing. They behave like they'd never been there. Outside of Afghanistan, on this issue, there is only this small flow of humanitarian aid from neighboring countries.

There are also other forms of relief that could be put in place: First of all, giving back to Afghanistan

The Outrageous Cynical Calculation

Question: *Do you think the sanctions imposed on Afghanistan will force the Taliban to rely on opium sales as a source of money?*

No. I'm a bit skeptical. Whatever they do on the issue of drugs is too late. It means that they have to wait at least until April, to get something to sell in the market. And if they decide not to, it's also too late to stop the sowing, the cultivation, planting the opium seeds, it's too late. I mean, they have to wait anyway, until they have a crop, and they can sell it. In the meantime, we have had a humanitarian disaster in the country.

I don't believe this is a real danger, for the moment. The real danger, as I see it, is the total indifference, and the cynical calculation, to starve the population in order to change regime. And this is the *worse* hypothesis, the worst. I'm afraid that it can concretize. To have a collective punishment of a people, is one of the most horrible international crimes, according

to international law. You cannot punish a population because they have a government you don't like. Even in extreme situations in the past, for instance North Korea. The international community was able to organize, when it became a big problem: Fifteen years ago, there was a lack of food all over the country, and the international community intervened, even if the government, the North Korean government, was a complete outcast.

I'm really badly surprised by what is happening now. If there is not a humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan. It establishes a very bad precedent. It will be the first time in which a big, humanitarian crisis is *not met* by the international community.

Interventions To Help

Question: *Do you think anything good can come out of these international conferences among the neighboring countries?*

It is at least something that is moving on. Maybe it's positive, because Afghanistan should be treated as a regional issue. Neighboring countries, the countries of the region should take care, first of all, of Afghanistan, now.

Europeans and Americans should also intervene and be an active part of the reconstruction of the country, But this should occur just because they ran the country for 20 years. So, it's their responsibility.

Question: *What kind of urgent actions should the West take in regard to Afghanistan?*

Urgent financial intervention: Funding, by UN agencies that are already on the spot. Funding, quickly, NGOs and Afghan entities that distribute food and medicine, shelter for the people who need that. And unfreezing immediately the money that belongs to the Afghan people, frozen by the Americans.

Building and Reconstruction

Question: *What actions should be taken in the long-term?*

The West should help the reconstruction of the country: The country was already in very bad shape in October 2001, when the Americans invaded the

country. So, you have a country that has to be rebuilt from scratch. It has been destroyed by more than 30 years of civil war, and by foreign invasion. There has been some development, urban development. For instance, Kabul has changed. Now, it's a much bigger city than it was 20 or 30 years ago. But most of the rural Afghanistan is as it was, at least 10 years ago. There are more schools, of course. There was some progress, but this progress was absolutely natural. It was in all the region that grew in the last 20 years. Afghanistan just grew at a rate a bit more slowly than the rest of the region.

So, a big reconstruction plan for Afghanistan, taking care of the resources for the country, is entirely relevant. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, but this is because of the tragedy of the civil war. Potentially, it is a country that could be a middle-income country, in a relatively short time. In not more than ten, fifteen years, Afghanistan could be completely different. And it has natural resources. It has a lot of émigrés, people who can come back, bringing a lot of resources. And also, it's a country with big potential, particularly in agriculture and small industry.

The Wages of Geopolitics

Question: *Do you think that the geopolitical hostility against Russia and China is helping or hindering the reconstruction of Afghanistan?*

I had hoped they would not do this operation in the past or do it again. They will wind up pushing Afghanistan into the hands of China and Russia, because they would then be the only two great powers acting to take care of the country. And then they would blame Afghanistan because it had moved to the so-called "other side." So, they basically create the threat, and then they go to fight the threat. And maybe ask for the Europeans to help them in fighting a threat, that they themselves created!

Since they did it in the last 30 years, all over—the Americans—first they create the threat. They ask for help, and then they offer protection from the same threat. I hope they will not repeat this with Afghanistan.