Afghanistan's Next Transition_ How we got here, and what comes next

Transcript Begins:

Selmon Rafi: Hello, everyone, thank you all for joining us for today's session, Afghanistan's next transition, how we got here and what comes next. This Harvard University panel is sponsored by the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute and the Negotiation Task Force at the Davis Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies. My name is Saman Rafi, and I'm the Programme Manager at the Mittal Institute. We're very fortunate to hear from the steam panel today on one of the most consequential developments of the past few decades in Afghanistan, and one that we're still trying to understand. As those who listen to US Today, woke to news of another body of a mosque in Kandahar. And as many Afghanistan scholars around the world are taking stock of what this new era means for the future of the country and its people, we hope this in future sessions help provide some clarity. In a moment I'll turn this panel over to our moderator Arvid Bell. Arvid is a scholar, an entrepreneur who specializes in complex conflict analysis, negotiation strategy, and international security. He is a lecturer at the Department of Government at Harvard, and Director of the Negotiation Task Force at the Davis Centre. Arvid is also partner with Negotiation Design Strategy, a training advisory and research development group. He wrote his PhD thesis on the German involvement in Afghanistan, and first travelled to the country 11 years ago, and then again shortly before the pandemic. He's authored several publications on the role and multi-party negotiations can play in deescalating conflicts in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Joining over today, as our panelists for today's session are Anand Gopal Fara Abbas, and Philipp Ackermann. Anand is a journalist and author of No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban and the War Through Afghan Eyes, which chronicled the war in Afghanistan, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in general nonfiction. Fara Abbas is a fellow at the Negotiation Task Force, and former director of programs at the National Security Council for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Philipp Ackermann is the Director General of Africa, Latin America, and the Near and Middle East and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Philipp also served as a civilian head of the German Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kunduz. Arvid, thank you again for serving as the moderator for today's session. And I look forward to hearing from you and our other panelists. Over to you.

Arvid Bell: Great, thank you, Saman. And thank you, dear panelists for joining us today. And it's wonderful to see the attendees tuning in for today's session. So the way this is going to work, we will travel back in time a little bit and go back to 2001 and talk about what kind of chances opportunities existed back then, and how did we get to where we are today. You will probably focus less on, for example, American foreign policy and all these strategy debates that, you know, people are always undertaking in DC, we're going to talk a little bit more about what happened in Afghanistan on the ground, and what does it mean for Afghanistan and the region. And then towards the end of the panel, we talk about what could come next? What might come next? And what could be certain actors do to influence the future of Afghanistan. And I

want to kick this off, by going to you Anand and we're going to start with your fascinating book, I'm sure there are lots of people have read it. If not, I highly encourage it. And let's just hear from Anand from this book, and then I have a question for you. So you write in your book, quote, the first years after 2001 were like a dream. Society, so in Afghanistan society had effectively been on hold for two decades. And now with the war over, it was as if the very notion of public life had been unearthed from a time capsule. It was a new beginning a year zero. Barbers were among the first re-emerge unrolling their mats onto busy sidewalks. For a few pennies and a cup of tea, you could shave your Taliban mandated beard, sharing away the weight of the past. Music once again ran out to the streets and Hollywood and Bollywood DVDs once traded like samizdat, were selling openly in Kabul. Millions of refugees returned after years away. Investment dollars poured in. As television stations and cell phone towers sprouted seemingly overnight, an influx of aid organizations formed part of the broadest international humanitarian initiative in history, and abandoned homes were repurposed into offices for gender experts and development specialists. One result of all the outside attention was the 2004 constitution, drafted with heavy Western input and hailed as one of the world's most progressive. In addition to protecting basic civil liberties and minority rights, the document guaranteed women 25% of parliamentary seats, surpassing the proportion in the US Congress. So that sounds pretty good. And you wrote it these years after 2001 were like a dream. But somehow this dream turned into a nightmare for a lot of people. So help us understand why what in your eyes happened here and what went wrong? Anand.

Anand Gopal: Thanks. Yeah, it was like a dream, especially because most Afghans welcomed the US invasion because the Taliban had very little support by the end of the Taliban rule, due to drought due to their ban on opium due to their repressive style of rule. Very few people were willing to stand up and fight on behalf of the Taliban. And so those are the conditions under which everything you just read, was able to flourish for a few years. The Taliban were defeated in three months. And when they were defeated, more or less, the entire movement from the senior leadership to the foot soldiers essentially surrendered. They quit and they went back to their homes. This is not that unusual if you're thinking about a country that's been at civil war for two decades, where the main prerogative is survival. So this has happened many times in the past, most of these people went back to their homes. And at that point, the US primarily, and then the rest of the international community basically had a choice whether to try to find a way to reintegrate those Taliban into the new political order or not. Unfortunately, what happened was that the US his prime mission in the country was to wage a war on terror. I think it was not to do nation building or to build a state, all of that was secondary to the most important mission, which was to wage war on terror. But that led to a problem, which is that there were no Taliban active Taliban fighters on the ground to fight. And Al-Qaeda, the other principal target of the intervention had fled the country. So you had the situation we had thousands of troops on the ground, without an enemy to fight. And so the way this contradiction was resolved was that the US brought in warlords, commanders from previous years, who had had a terrible human rights record who were had, you know, in some ways

were as conservative and as draconian as the Taliban. And the US, basically allied with them, gave them lots of money, gave them opportunities, and basically said, ''We need you to find us bad guys find these terrorists.'' And so these warlords essentially took their own enemies. You know, remember, this is a country that had been at war for two decades. So there's a lot of local divides at the village level. So these warlords took their own enemies and repackaged them as a Taliban or as Al-Qaeda. So for three years, from 2001 to 2004, you had essentially a one sided war waged by the US and its allies against Afghan civilians. Many, many innocent people were killed, many innocent people were disappeared or sent to Guantanamo. And in that process, a once unpopular movement, the Taliban was able to reconstitute itself as an anti-occupation insurgency. And so that's really where things started to go downhill. And in my opinion, by 2005, the war was essentially lost, because the Taliban was rooted in many parts of the countryside.

Great, thank you. So you're saying the war was essentially lost by 2005? So and Philipp, you were sent to Afghanistan by the German government to co-lead Provincial Reconstruction Team, PRT Kunduz? Maybe you can explain to our audience what PRT actually is or was and what was your mission in Afghanistan on the ground?

Philipp Ackermann: Okay, let me start with a disclaimer, I'm talking in a very personal role here, my professional role does not include Afghanistan. So I'm talking as somebody who has lived in Afghanistan, within the Afghanistan for 10 years during his professional life. But this is my personal view. It's not the view of the federal government. It's very important to say that because it's streamed this meeting. We decided to set up in the countryside of Afghanistan, so called province Provincial Reconstruction Teams, I think the whole Western Alliance had the same idea. And we had, you know, Americans there were many American Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Hungarians, British, Australian, Dutch, you name it. The Germany idea was a little different from the other PRT idea because it had a very strong civilian component. So I was basically together with the military leader and colonel in my case, I was the leader of this PRT, we had a double head or double-headed PRT, where, you know, 550 soldiers, mostly German, but also Belgian, and Romanians, Norwegians, some Dutch soldiers, and a group of diplomats and development experts try to reach out to the provinces in the north, in this case, two provinces, Kunduzand Takhar, in order to set up a better security infrastructure, but also a better, you know, state infrastructure. We wanted to see where schools should be built, where hospitals should be built, where roads should be constructed, and we wanted to create a sort of environment because we felt at that moment and I'm talking 2006 2007 you know, Anand said that the world was already lost there if I listened carefully. I would say it was maybe it was lost at least in 2007. It started to be lost, I would say. But what we wanted is to create an environment that made it clear that security and development are interdependent. We said you know, no development without security, no security without development. That's a nice formula. I think in hindsight, we have to admit that this is not accurate. It's not an accurate formula. But maybe I will talk about that a little later.

Yep, we will.

Or you wanted me to talk about it now? Arvid, you run the show here. Yeah.

Let's hear from Fara and then we come back to that question. So we heard what happened right after 2001, and maybe also certain mistakes that were made. So we will also come back to the point of what did it mean not to integrate the Taliban, right, as an unmentioned? And then we heard this time where some nations through the PRTs in this model had this integrated approach. But then Fara, you have been working for the Afghan government, I believe, on and off for the last 10 past 10 years. That is how it sound about, right? So tell us a little bit about what you were doing with for the government? And then also, what did you feel happened in Afghanistan in the more recent past? So what shifted and what changed them? And also, when if at any point at all, did you get the feeling that it would end the way it ended now? Yeah, go ahead.

Fara Abbas: Thank you, Arvid. So if I can go back to something that Anand said, and then Philipp said in terms of when the war was lost, I would like to be even more extreme than the two and say that the beginning of the loss of the Afghan war was all the way back in 2003, with the American invasion of Iraq. Just with that, you know, invasion, what happened was that all of the attention, got taken away from Afghanistan, and put into Iraq, because Iraq was, quote, unquote, the bad war, and Afghanistan was the good war. And Afghanistan obviously did not need as much attention as Iraq did. And so that was pretty much the beginning of, you know, the loss. And then whether you say it's 2005, when it became certain that the war was lost, or 2007, you know, it's open to interpretation. However, I came back to Afghanistan. I'm originally from Afghanistan, but I've grown up in the West. And I came back to Afghanistan at the end of 2008. And my personal experience was that there was still quite a bit of hope among the people that despite another American engagement in the Middle East, that somehow, we are still going to get the necessary support from the international community, considering the fact that so many nations were actively engaged in Afghanistan as part of ISEF or assisting in the Afghan development and humanitarian assistance. So throughout the surge years, even there was still hope that things were going to turn around. And that Afghan are going to be able to once again, have peace, security and stability. And it's stupid to say even now, I mean, hope dies last. Even into the final days, there was this persistent nagging hope among the people among the officials in the government that somehow things are going to turn around, there is going to be a settlement with the Taliban, despite the fact that it was built on this sort of a not very good Doha deal, that things are going to turn around, there's going to be settlement that we are going to be able to share power and come to an understanding. However, the way it all ended was a surprise to not only the Afghans but the international community and but I guess forums like this, and into the future. However, many books are going to be written on this. We're going to delve some more into this subject as to what exactly happened, why did it eventually fail?

Anand, what do you make of Fara's analysis that the situation with the Iraq war and also maybe the way the such also played a major role, and maybe the war was lost already sooner than you even think, what you think?

Well, I think it's interesting to look at the context, which is, throughout the last two decades, the war in Afghanistan was concentrated only in certain provinces, maybe roughly a third of the provinces actually were seeing war, the other two thirds are, for the most part peaceful, entirely from the beginning to the end. But what was happening in those third of the provinces places like Kandahar and Helmand. I'll give you an example. I was in Kandahar a couple of weeks ago. And everywhere you look in the countryside, there were villages that are completely decimated just flat. There were people who are now coming back to the country for the first time in two decades, because have been living in IDP camps or refugee camps in Pakistan, coming back and finding their homes completely destroyed. When I talked to them, when they describe daily life in the last 20 years, it was not knowing if you're going to go to sleep, and somebody's going to break into your home and carry off one of your loved ones as part of a night raid by the US forces. There was the police chief of Kandahar who was going once a month, especially during when there was a full moon, because they could see during the night time going and just picking people up at random, essentially holding them hostage and forcing these very poor villagers to try to pay money to release them. And if not, these people were being summarily executed. So from their perspective, actually, it was the attention of the US forces and the US proxies of these warlords and these strong men, that was the most terrifying for them. So if you look at it from that way, then, you know, the US war in Iraq didn't necessarily distract anything. In fact, it was the areas where the US troops were present in those early years, which were the ones that were the most violent, where there were no troops, actually, life is quite peaceful.

I mean, just as a quick follow up question, though, Anand on the Iraq war, what do you make of your argument, though, that in terms of the overall political environment, the fact that there was yet another war that America launched this time in the Middle East, not in Afghanistan, of course, war that maybe might have fuelled into narratives that also help, you know, certain movements to mobilize against the occupiers. What do you make of that argument?

I mean, to some extent, yeah, that's true. But I think most people who joined the Taliban were people from ordinary walks of life who lost family members to horrific acts of violence. And so they, when we talk about security, many of them are saying, you know, there's warlords, or there's police chiefs, or there's US forces that are coming and raiding our villages. And so there's many cases in which there was men and women in the villages, basically demanding that the sons of the village sort of pick up weapons and act as protection. So for them, it was much more immediate and much more life and death choices. And most of these people in these villages know very little about what's happening in Iraq. Of course, there's Taliban ideologues at the very top of the movement who may think this way, but I think ordinary reconciled people were thinking about their value over their village. That's it.

And now, Philipp, now you have to help us understand something here, right, because we heard how many things went wrong already early on, and how for many people, the situation, you know, maybe remained a dream for one or two years and became really bad. But when you were on the ground, there still was at least from your PRT's perspective, and also behind the entire PRT model, this was not under the umbrella of this American operation during freedom mission, right? It was not killing terrorists. It was the International Security Assistance Force, it was officially about supporting the government, it was about reconstruction. So help us resolve this and maybe explain to us what kind of tensions between these two different objectives that you maybe also witnessed in your daily work?

Let me start by saying that I think there are very many reasons why we have this situation right now. I hesitate to call it a complete failure. But we can say that there are elements of failure, military failure, are there. So I think Iraq war what was the problem with the Iraq war was that there was a shift of attention all of a sudden, from American politicians towards another very important, you know, battlefield theatre, so that they neglected Afghanistan for a while. I think Anand is very right in describing this, you know, the complete, you know, lawlessness that drew in the provinces where the governors behaved like tyrants and did terrible things to people. I think, this is exactly where we see the, you know, the dysfunctional way of institutions in Afghanistan, and I think that basically is the original thing, mainly that we the West accepted a bunch of people in the government that you know, for reasons we have to discuss did not fulfill the job as much as they could basically. I mean, many of them were just not fit to govern, and we let that happen. And that's because we felt that there are good guys in Afghanistan, and there are bad guys in Afghanistan. And both is wrong, you know, the Taliban were not only the bad guys and the Northern Alliance, and the warlords Anand was referring to perceived by us for reasons of historic dimension being the good ones that were not the good ones. But when you asked me about the PRT, we were not part of this operation, you will feel me all right? And we were I can tell you, you know, I was travelling in the first month of my tenure in the PRT, my posting the PRT, I was travelling through every village, I sat down with every moolah, we discussed with every elder around about schools and hospitals, and it'll be welcomed in a very, very friendly way. And people had high hopes, naive hopes, you know, we were overwhelmed by ideas they had and what they wanted. So when on 10 of April 2007, for the first time 10 police officers in Kunduz in the street where a kid by suicide attack by the Taliban, and couple of weeks later, three German soldiers died during their shopping tour in the bazaar of Kunduz, they wanted to buy some fridges and you know, in order to support also the local economy. Then the mood changed from one day to the other. And the reason for that was that people who you know, Anand said two decades of war, I would say the crisis in Afghanistan even longer that you know, people were not in the countryside, there's a huge difference between urban life in Afghanistan and in the countryside, people were not exposed to peaceful institutions for all their lives basically. The moment they realized that the Germans who, in their mind were there to protect them, and to make their life better, did not protect them from the Taliban, they realize that this was not the right way for them to you know, ally themselves with

us. So what happened was slowly, slowly, they opened up to the other side, it was their life insurance, I would say, you know, because they didn't see the German soldiers really aggressively pursuing the Taliban in the era. But they saw that they were exposed to them in the faraway villages. One could argue that 550 soldiers are not enough to really protect a huge, you know, territory from Taliban. And the Germans are very reluctant, as you know, to really go aggressively out and kill, that was not part of our mission. But I think we realized very quickly that the Afghans had never believed in institutions, because they never experienced working institutions. And the moment they felt that there was something like an institution, and when this institution, namely the German presence failed to protect them, they fell back in their old behavior to cater to all sides in order to survive basically. That's what it was. And I think this very moment, we had to realize that the way we acted in Afghanistan, the way we worked with this notion of interdependence of security and development was wrong, because there is no development without security. But it's not the other way around. I would say. So in hindsight, I think we were naive also, and I will talk maybe later about the problems we encountered and how overwhelming we were by the problems we encountered in these areas where we had no clue basically. But that means that without security, there was no way to really found good institutions and delivery by state or by state institutions. And as we couldn't provide security, I think our idea of providing development was also to a certain degree doomed to fail, if that makes sense.

Fara, what do you think about this?

So I agree with Philipp. I would add that there was goodwill on all sides, the Afghan and the international community that after so many decades of war and instability in Afghanistan, there is going to finally be a chance for peace. So there was an [indiscernible] as he said, on both sides. So and that was a beautiful thing to see. [distorted audio] in retrospect, because everyone wanted Afghanistan to finally be at peace with itself and with the region, and for people to have normal life like everyone else. But I would like to add that Afghanistan should not be seen in a vacuum, it should not be seen as separate from the Iraq invasion. I mean, there was still a lot of troops sent to Afghanistan to fight the war to fight the Al-Qaeda and eventually the Taliban, there was still a lot of funding sent to support in the development of the defense and security forces in the development of institutions in humanitarian assistance. However, what happened was that there was just too much money dumped on Afghanistan, and not enough clarity as to what is the mission. I would have to say that that was especially true for the American and NATO Alliance, that they did not have a very clear mission as to what did they want to pursue in Afghanistan. So a lot of money was dumped, which led to the pernicious and cancerous issue of corruption, that is also at fault in terms of the loss of the war. And I would also add that later on, you know, Afghanistan should not also be seen as separate from the Pakistan issue, because Pakistan played a large role in the eventual toppling of the government and the victory of the Taliban.

So we'll probably come back to some of these domestic dynamics in a bit. But maybe, Anand you'd like to briefly weigh in on this Pakistan question, right? And also the question of like, how did the Taliban get as strong as they now are, and you already explained some of the dynamics that unfolded on the local level, and maybe you can react a little bit to what Fara says, and also explain a little bit how you see Pakistan's role in all of this. You're unmuted, Anand.

Sorry, Pakistan played a really central role over the years in the rise of the Taliban. I think it's important to distinguish between the different ways in which the roles that can see but I think sometimes I don't think Fara was saying this, but sometimes you hear the narrative that proxies essentially created the Taliban insurgency. And therefore, they're ultimately to blame to that. I think, rather, the Taliban insurgency emerge entirely for endogenous reasons having to do with what, you know, the sorts of crimes I outlined. But once they emerged, you know, their leaders were given safe haven in Pakistan. And, you know, the Taliban really didn't have the ability to act independently with if Pakistan didn't like something Taliban was doing they would arrest their leaders, they would disappear, some of them. So in this sense, I think they played a very important role. But whether if Pakistan hadn't played this role with the Taliban had been a strong? Certainly not, but would they not have existed? No, they still would have existed, because ultimately, it was an endogenous response to the local warlords and to the actions of the US military.

And, Philipp, do you want to weigh in briefly on this question of how the relationship between Afghanistan Pakistan or other considerations maybe also affected your work, with security Kunduz on the ground? Because obviously you were aware of these political negotiations, you had to somehow also deal with the fallout. But what's your take on that conundrum?

I think Anand is completely right, Farais us too, Pakistan was a very important actor. But I think what we should not walk into this trap saying that it is all because the foreign, or the external actors that you know, the situation in which we are right now, it has developed so in this direction. So I think Pakistan is not to be underestimated as an foreign actor and helper to the Taliban. But first and foremost, it's an Afghan problem. And you have to see that the government of Afghanistan and our government, because our government, considered the Taliban as enemies, and therefore, for a long, long time, they refused to reach out to them. I would say, the Taliban, although I agree with Anand that in 2001, in the cities and also in the northern areas, they had little, you know, there was little love lost for them, but they had a certain legitimacy because the worst period in Afghanistan, was between '91 and '96. You know, I mean, when the Northern Alliance fired RPGs from the Prime Minister's office to the Minister of Defense of this and that was complete chaos and the Taliban they ceased when they came, they brought some law and order ideas back, although I agree, not very popular to certain extent. So the problem was why wasn't, you know, there within the government, no reflections to somehow try to include them, the Taliban looked at the western doors in 2003 for the first time, and they were defeated by them, they were dispersed, and they failed, and they still have this strong feeling of that they deserved the legitimacy of being a force in Afghanistan

that brought back law and order. And, you know, 2003, that was two years after 9/11, the Americans would have had no possibility to defend that internally, you know, to talk to the Taliban after having defeated them. So clearly, so we, you know, tried to make the Americans understand that it would be better to reach out to them and it be exceeded in 2010 2011. But it took another five years, you know, and then, you know, terrible mistakes were made in the last couple of years, I think terrible negotiation, mistakes were made, completely disasters by the American side, I would say. But you know, these are mistakes on the last meters of the run. And we have to look to the beginning. But let me share one story of a PRT when it comes to, you asked me about Pakistan. So Kunduz is a city that was in basically relatively new, a city which is, you know, sort of 50 70,000 inhabitants in what was used to be a swamp. And they drive this swamp in the 30s, and they started growing cotton there, too, and had a cotton industry. So, in the 30s, the Shah of Afghanistan brought massively pursuits into the river lands of Kunduz in order to work in this faction. These pursuits were always considered to be intruders. The Tajiks in the north, never like the Pakis coming. So when the Soviets came, these persons fled to Pakistan, they all were in camps in Pakistan, now that when the Germans came in Taliban were you know, thrown out, and there was some peace and the international community wasn't conducive. All these factions from the Pakistani camps, came back to Kunduz, only to find their homes occupied by others by Tajiks. And these Tajiks, as these people don't belong to us. They have to go back. But where should they go? Back to Pakistan. So that was, I think, the first conflict where we German PRT realized we couldn't really play a constructive role in this, there was something that was beyond us, it overwhelmed us as a country. And these Pashtun populations, who then withdrew to the little dry villages where nothing was to be grown and to be found, they were the ones who brought the Taliban back in, we had no clue. We had no clue that these Pashtun population coming back from Pakistan to where they thought their ancestors had houses, the houses and hadlands were the ones who were kicked out by the Tajiks and fled to the mountains where they then you know, as a revenge brought back the Taliban. I want to say that, as Germans, we had no clue and how could we, you know, this is not eastern Afghanistan, this is far away from everything. We had no role in this to play. And basically, I have, you know, we tried hard, but there was nothing that we could offer to solve this conflict somehow. And that I think, shows and this is something which in hindsight, I would say that the western Alliance or the you know, the western community has to keep in mind. We were overly ambitious also, to a certain extent, with a PRT concept also. I'm very critical here, because I believed in this very much when I was there, but in hindsight, I would say we were too ambitious. We couldn't solve the cases, because we had no clue how to help them somehow. And that's one example.

And just so that our viewers can understand this. So how long did it take you and your team to figure out all of these things in which you were trapped back then? Because you said we had no clue. So when did you realize that this was really what was going on?

So let me be very honest with you when we went up to Kunduz the German government was of the opinion that this is Tajik land, you know, that is Ahmad Shah Massoud land. Somehow, we

felt that this is a region where we could work rather peacefully in our development agenda, we had no idea that this Pashtun problem was there from the very beginning. So I mean, relatively quickly realize that there was such a problem. But you know, that was only one part of the whole equation. So we felt, okay, this is something they have to sort of we will be trying to talk to them and but in the course of our being there we encountered time and again, problems with which we were confronted that we were not able to solve. And I think, therefore, there was a certain naivety from our side to say, let's go far away to becomes effective. I have never been in my life, I lived a year in Kunduz, in a more remote place than Kunduz and the adjacent provinces. When you go to the villages, I was in villages where women who speak and it is where women were not allowed to leave the premises of the farm they lived on once they were married. So in a very, very, very old fashioned unorthodox way, and basically, we have to admit, as diplomats, and also development experts, there's only so much we can do in these circumstances. And we have to realize that the more we got to know the intricacies of this very complicated, ethnically, very complicated region, the more we have to realize that we were not able to heal old wounds or something.

So Fara, but this begs another interesting question, right? So it sort of makes sense, even though maybe that's naive that the German civilians and soldiers on the ground wouldn't understand all of what's going on in Afghan society, and how that all plays out, right? But Afghans know, their society, they know their country, they know how it works. So what was really going on, you think, from the perspective of Afghans who lived through that time, where you already had this escalating war as an undescribed but you still had actors like the Germans on the ground, and like other, you know, countries who were interested in these reconstruction projects, do you think most Afghans that actually maybe even use the fact that these internationals had no clue to the advantage? Or maybe they wanted to explain it but didn't get through? Or they had to worry about other things? So can you explain to us a little bit how normal people just looked at what was going on in their country and how they lived through that period of time?

Sure. I want us all to appreciate how complex Afghanistan is, though it is a small country, you know, out there, whether you consider the South Asia region or Central Asian region or Middle East, but it is highly complex, and it is very mountainous country as well. So you have these people, or various ethnic groups that are disconnected from one another. [distorted audio] it is oftentimes very difficult for Kandahar Pashtun, to even understand the language of the Khost Pashtun, they are unable to communicate with one another because their Pashtun language is so different. So there are all of these complexities woven into our history. They're far or recent. And, you know, for Afghans, it's difficult to understand that, let alone for, you know, foreigners or international mission groups. Because there is just anthropology and culture and history and customs and norms. They are very, very salient in Afghanistan, unlike in the West. And there hasn't been a whole lot of study done into the various peoples of Afghanistan into their cultures and customs and norms. So it was understandably hard for Germans or for Romanians are for Poles or anyone else or even Americans to come and, you know, to figure this country out, in a

very short period of time to launch their development assistance and to get things going. So yes, Afghans, I have witnessed it myself did sometimes use it to their own advantage. And while other Afghans were left out and unable to, you know, even have a conversation with the quote unquote, foreigners in this case. And so yes, you know, and there was a sense that the international community was getting veered into a different direction from the one that they should be on and that is certainly an Afghan mistake and Afghan problem, and the blame lies with them. I want to correct an earlier misconception that somehow Afghans are projecting the blame on Pakistan or on Iraq or on the Americans, there is a lot of blame to go around. And a lot of it does lie in the government, in the sense that they did not take advantage of all of these resources that were brought to their doorstep, all of this assistance and attention. And what happened was that, you know, it more [distorted audio] to this behemoth of a corruption problem within the government within the society, and one that proved very, very difficult to correct, nearly impossible. I believe that on the Afghanside, it was essentially corruption and the mismanagement of foreign funds that led to the ultimate collapse of the government. And I also want to add something else about Pakistan, if I may. I want us to leave morality out of the question here, whether whatever Pakistan is doing is bad or good, their role in the Taliban's development as an onset, it was central. I did not say that they somehow established the group or the movement, but they certainly did help them a lot along the way. And it is not without reason that the insecurity of the past 20 years was largely in the southern and eastern region of Afghanistan, the area would [distorted audio]. And we have to, again, appreciate the issue of Pakistan strategic depth concerns, their concerns regarding India, which is why they needed to create a buffer zone for themselves in Afghanistan to have Afghans that are going to be on their side. And the best way to do that would have been through the Taliban.

Anand I want to throw out a question for you from the audience. I'm just going to read it out here. So the question is, is the failure to quote the panelists of the NATO Alliance and the Islamic Republic just a failure? Or was it also a result of a winning military or political strategy by the Taliban? What do you think?

That's a good question. I actually think it's more the result of the failure than winning political strategy, the Taliban. You know, I actually don't think the Taliban have nationwide legitimacy, even though they now run the country or have anything like widespread popular support. However, neither does any other side of the conflict. Neither the international community nor the Afghan government have any widespread support. What the Taliban have been able to do successfully is knit together the various excluded communities around the country. And I think Philipp raised a very interesting example of our students in Kunduz who are excluded, visibly Tajiks. That's the story of the Kunduz now if you go to Badghis, for example, the divide is between Pashtuns and Uzbeks. If you go to Kandahar in Spin Boldak, which is a town of the border between Pakistan, the divide is intra Pashtun between two different Pashtun tribes, Achakzais on the one side and Noorzais on the other. And each of these cases, you had one group that was essentially could be seen as a winner in the post 2001 order and another group that was a loser in the post 2000 order. And you know, that's a result, not just because

Afghanistan's a complicated place, I mean, many places are complicated, but because it's been the result of at that point in 2001, already two decades of civil war. And so coming into 2001, you had a set of winners and a set up losers, what the US primarily, I think there's anything like an original sin, what the US did is instead of trying to reconcile the winners and losers, and build a durable, inclusive institutions, essentially sided with the winners and continue to persecute the losers. So where the Taliban were successful, was in kind of being able to brand themselves to these different communities in such a way that they could all kind of fit under a national umbrella. I don't think that's necessarily a military strategy. It's more of a political approach, which they did better than the other side.

Right, thank you. I want to start wrapping up this part and then talk a little bit about what you all think comes next. But before we do that, let me like briefly go over what we identified as factors that played a role in getting us where we are. And then my final question to all the three of you would be to tell our audience, which of those reasons you think is really important because we identified a lot of factors. And there are lots of smart Harvard students who will now probably tell us that if we have 10 reasons, that doesn't really explain anything, so what was really behind it. So we already said, you said, one issue was no integration of the Taliban and the new political order. Second was the war on terror and the side effects, third wrong allies that the West had on the ground and related to human rights abuses, four the Iraq war, whatever the consequences were, five a lack of security provided to people on the ground, six the entire issue of throwing in money and making corruption even worse, number seven, the role of Pakistan, whatever exactly that means, number eight, simple negotiation mistakes, for example, the Doha deal and others. Number nine, societal complexities, ethnic divisions, and 10 broader geopolitics so countries in general who interpret Afghanistan through the lens of their foreign policy objectives. And I'm sure I missed a whole bunch of other things. But if you had to identify one out of these various factors, that you think that was really the most prominent factor in getting us where we are, what do you think was it? And I don't want to cold call people. So whoever wants to go first, give us your take on that. Fara?

I'll go. So, yeah, you actually encapsulated it all very nicely. But I would have to go ahead and say that, it started off with the political attention taken away from Afghanistan and put on to Iraq. You have to understand that Afghanistan coming out of the decades of war and instability, it had zero institutions. And the institutions that had had word from a former communist era, which was completely obsolete. So there were so many capacity development projects, you know, on the ground, to help Afghans develop the necessary capacity to run things on their own to eventually build institutions. But they were all hollow, for the most part, unfortunately, again, simply because there wasn't enough attention onto Afghanistan and onto its development, because the fate of Afghanistan was getting decided out in the West and the West could not agree on what exactly they wanted to do over there. What did they want to get done? What was the ultimate goal? So it was initially that but I would also like to add, in addition to all of the points that you mentioned, Arvid, that as of lately, in the recent couple of years, especially in the sort of the past five or so years, it was a lack of political unity, more

prevalent over the past two years that we witnessed in Afghanistan. There were, you know, in the its final days, President Ghani did come together and bring former President Karzai, Dr. Abdullah, and Ustad Sayyaf to come together and create a sort of political unity that could counter the Taliban, eventually, in the final days of the government needed to create ultimately the state Supreme Council that comprised of 24 senior leaders that included people like Karim Khalili or Rabbani, or others, I'm not sure. Fahim. However, it was ultimately, the disunity that led to the fall of the government. And because of that, the government was essentially hollowed out, in a sense, because none of the technocrats from the Ghani's first administration were any more there because they had all either been sacked, or they had left or they had corruption charges against them. And they had all left. So there were very few people left to govern, except for maybe Hamdullah Mohib, who was initially the Afghan ambassador to DC, and then he became the NSA.

Thank you. So from all the reasons you said, lack of attention or attention going elsewhere, plus lack of Afghan unity, and you know, these intra negotiation challenges. Philipp, why don't we go to you next? What do you think if you had to pick one reason from this list or anything else, what you think?

If we say that, you know, our task was after defeating you know, ISIS or Al-Qaeda in this case, was to create a state in which people could feel at home and to which people could develop some loyalty to I think the original sin from the very beginning was this division into good and bad. You know, the Northern Alliance were the ones with whom the Americans had fought during the whole Soviet time. They were the ones the Americans had, you know, equipped and given money to in order to fight the Soviets. So they knew them very well. And they were very savvy, you know, after [indiscernible], went to France and spoke French. And he had the world behind the Western world behind it. And the Taliban were the ones who hosted Osama bin Laden. And the Northern Alliance also fought against the Taliban. So from the logic of the West, under my belief was that the Northern Alliance and its allies were the good ones. But they weren't. And the Taliban were bad, but they weren't exclusively bad because they had some legitimacy. And from the beginning, we should have obliged the government to be as inclusive as possible. And as we didn't do it, because the Talibans were the bad guys, we, you know, supported this government 100, not 100 1,000%, they could do whatever they wanted. And the money Fara was talking about, the money was pumped into this government, they could do whatever, they could take suitcases full of cash and go to Dubai, nobody would say the same thing about it because they were the good ones. And I think one should have, from the very beginning, try to join forces in Afghans to be as inclusive not against but with the Taliban in order to form some state that you know, deserves the loyalty of its people. Why did the army crumble at the beginning at the end? It's not because they were bad, the army was pretty good, actually. Because they had nobody to whom they were loyal. The last continue oil to burn the American soldiers, the moment they left the army crumble because there was no loyalty. And that's a complete failure, I would say. And the original thing is this Cartesian Western division between good and bad, because we didn't see it clearly. And at the end of the day, they have to

say that the West comes with a certain burden into this missions, you know, in Mali, in Afghanistan, and the burden that we had on our shoulders was 9/11 that was the burden and such a burden does not make you see clearly to certain extent. You know, I think the Americans could not have led in the Taliban in 2003. For that very reason, not everybody, you know, had hoped they couldn't, then they couldn't have defended it in the right way. So I think we have to see that we were over ambitious, and we made a mistake from the very beginning.

Anand do you agree with this, or do you think it was something else primarily?

I agree entirely. I think this Manichaean approach is rooted in the war on terror. As I mentioned, before Afghanistan had emerged at that point from 20 years of civil war, a country that's emerging from civil war needs a truth and reconciliation process. It needs a type of political settlement between the various actors and communities, who would be the winners and losers. Instead, the US allied with one set and excluded, violently excluded the other the other set of actors, not just the Taliban, but entire communities were violently excuse excluded, people were living basically in a state of terror for two or three years. And that I think, is at the core where things went wrong. And that was very early on.

Now, let's talk about where we are now and what could come next. So maybe Fara, do you want to give our audience like a brief impression of what you think the general like atmosphere is like in Afghanistan right now, and of course, it's difficult to generalize, but like, you know, friends, colleagues, family members of yours who speak with former colleagues give us like a very brief idea of what's currently going on in the country and what people there think might come next and then we take it from there?

So, generally, across the board, there is a sense of unease as to what is going to happen. The last Taliban regime or government is not remembered with fondness. They were harsh, they were extreme. They would flagellate people in stadiums, they would kill people on the streets. So the people remember all of that, but at the same time, as each day passes, and there aren't killings in the stadiums, people are getting a little bit relaxed, saying that okay, well, maybe we have you know, this is the most secure we have felt in years. There is a site from threat [distorted audio]. There are no threats from the Taliban themselves. However, there is uncertainty, whether the Taliban are going to be able to create a stable future because the Taliban ideology scarcely lends itself to effective governance and development. And, as we have seen with their recent announcement of their government officials quite a number of them are on the blacklist, and they are sanctioned. And they have an FBI price tag on their heads. So we're dealing with that. In terms of, you know, it depends on like who you speak to. But my colleagues from the security sector, those that worked in the government, or those that worked with the international community, are all understandably very scared for their lives. My colleagues are, you know, underground, they have left their homes, they're living elsewhere. And every so often, they change their place of residence in and they're waiting, and hoping that somehow they're going to get evacuated out of there. But again, with each passing day, there are slimmer chances and hopes for that. And then what else we are seeing is that, you know,

the plight of the women, which is so very sad to watch is that, you know, all of these women that had achieved so much over the past 20 years, that had assumed leadership roles in the government, in the private sector, in civil society, now have to stay home, they cannot work they have been told [distorted audio] to either send a male relative who can work in their place, or to just, you know, not show up to work. And obviously, there is also the issue of girls in middle and high school, and university being unable to enroll and attend school and university unlike boys. So this is what we're seeing right now. Does not vote a whole lot of hope for the people, unfortunately. But let's see what the Taliban are going to do to win international legitimacy because every country, pretty much all of them have said that their recognition of the Taliban government rests with how they behave and how they respect human rights.

So before we have some questions from the audience, also about what could be done practically speaking, but Anand just looking at the situation there right now and given everything you've seen over the past years, what is your prediction? What do you think is the most likely scenario of what we're going to see unfold over the next couple of months? And maybe the next year or so what do you think?

Well, I was just there about a week ago and spent a couple of weeks traveling around the country. And it's a very varied kind of situation in Kabul itself, while on the one hand the city seems normal. There's traffic everywhere. You know, there's the number of women on the streets is way less than it used to be. And it's very heart-breaking to see this, you know, that there's women, especially women who used to go to work professional women who are living in fear and staying in their homes. As far as girls are not going to school in other provinces, for example, Khost girls are going to school right now as same as in Badakhshan, various other places. In Kandahar, where I spent some time, you have almost the opposite situation is what you have in Kabul where in Kabul, of course, so many people are fleeing. And most of us saw those images when they're trying to get into the airport. In Kandahar, a lot of people are returning to their villages for the first time in a long time, because they're expressing some kind of relief that there's for the first time, some degree, there's no violence, they're not going to be caught in an airstrike, or a roadside bomb. But the biggest challenge moving forward yes we have a prediction, I think the biggest challenge moving forward as the country has absolutely no money. The way that the former government was set up is that it was almost entirely run by foreign aid. The Afghan economy was mostly a foreign aid and war economy. And so the international powers have frozen all those funds, we now have about 500,000 public sector workers, teachers and nurses and doctors and others who haven't been paid since June or July. You're now seeing cases of severe acute malnutrition, in children there's a drought that's ongoing. So I think we're at the precipice of a pretty severe humanitarian disaster, one that may dwarf any humanitarian disaster we've seen in the last two decades, unless this problem is solved. I don't see how the Taliban could hold together as a ruling regime under these conditions. So I think we may see a lot more instability looking forward.

I have a follow up question for you. So you previously agreed with Philipp that this you know, this black, white view that probably the Americans, the West in general had moving into Afghanistan was a big problem and a reason for getting us where we are right now. To what extent do you think are the Taliban now making a very similar mistake, meaning similarly enthusiastic about their swift victory on the battlefield, they may be also overestimate the way they can influence and control a society that now is also very different than the one that they've previously ruled over? And so wouldn't we, I mean, this would be like a very tragic thing to see. But doesn't it stand to reason that if they stick to that line, that sooner or later this might escalate in yet another bloody episode of yet another African civil war? How realistic do you think? Or do you agree with this analysis? And also, how realistic do you think would be such a worst case scenario?

Yeah, I agree, that's a very good way of putting it. Actually, there's a few things that have changed from the first iteration of the Taliban. One is there's a whole generation of Afghans who have raised expectations because of what they've experienced in the last 20 years. I think that's part of what's behind, for example, the protests by women in Kabul and some other cities, these wouldn't have happened, I think, in the 1990s. That's for a second, the Taliban today is more of a coalition than it was in the 1990s. So they have Uzbek elements, they have elements from the North, etc. And many of these folks already are feeling disaffected, because they feel like they're second tier citizens within the Taliban, basically, those from Kandahar and Helmand who are the core elements of the movement, so it's going to be much harder for the Taliban to hold that coalition together. And for both of those reasons, I think and also, thirdly, they're repeating some of the same mistakes the US made in the early years after 2001, when what the US should have done was grant amnesty and tried to integrate their former enemies. Do you see the same thing happening with the Taliban because they won? So basically, easily in the last three months, there's a lot of low level targeting of former security, former members of the Afghan security forces. And this is not official policy from the top, but it's a lot of revenge killings that are happening by the rank and file. And that also risks excluding certain communities in the same way the Americans did. So all of that, I think, is a recipe for potential renewed round of violence.

And, Philipp, there's a question that maybe you can take on. So one of our viewers asks taking into account the lessons of the past 20 years and attitudes towards the West among the Taliban and among the population, how does the international community enable stability in Afghanistan without exacerbating the situation? And does the West have a role to play in Afghanistan stability slash development in a Taliban controlled government? What do you think?

I think, first of all, I have to say that I agree with everything which have been said by Fara and Anand. I think they describe the situation very well. And when you look, you know, from our point of view, when you look at the situation right now, I think there is one huge task we have, namely that Afghanistan doesn't, you know, implode somehow, you know, we can't afford a

second mayhem, chaos, civil war like situation in Afghanistan, why? Because that would open terrorist organizations a wonderful opportunity to, you know, to found safe havens, or to sit in some mountains and plot terrible attacks, as we have seen before. And second, and this is for Europe, very important, it would undoubtedly trigger a huge migration movement, which we can't wait for anymore. You know, we have Germany has about a couple of 100,000 Afghans and every other Afghan I think, if you ask Afghans now, they have, every second Afghan would like to leave, you know, because they don't trust. They don't see future in their country. And I can't blame them for that. Yeah. But is that also sort of the fact that we want to welcome the fact that the answer is no. So I think what we see right now is that the Taliban government somehow succeeds in getting a countrywide security system somehow. And Anand you said you travelled from Kandahar to Balkh to Badghis. I have journalist friends who have travelled in Afghanistan in the last month. They never ever travel so freely, and so unimpededly, they went wherever they wanted to go, and they spoke with whomever they wanted to speak. At the same time, what we also know is that the Taliban are not governing. They have the security system, yes. But there is no governance, none. They go to the ministries they discuss in the mornings, and they go home at noon, and they have lunch, and then they don't go back to the ministries. So there is no governing. And that's not in our interest, basically. We can't have a country like Afghanistan with 40 million people, which I think it's not such a small country, frankly, it's quite a big country ungoverned. So are the Taliban in the position? Are they in the state to govern? My answer is no. How can they become a governing body? My answer is when they are as inclusive as possible, that means also that they got only that they have to get all the women back in the ministry, you know, they were the ones who were running the show, they can't send them home and ask any a family member to fill in for them. That's ridiculous. And I think we have two leavers. One is the money Anand was referring to, and I think, you know, it is in our interest to pay the teachers of Afghanistan, I don't see any reason not to pay the teachers of Afghanistan. The teachers are important, we need the children of Afghanistan to be taught. And we have to find ways and means and there are possibilities to pay the teachers without giving money to the Taliban. And the second lever is legitimacy. Nobody has recognized the Taliban so far. And nobody intends to even the Turks they don't and the Pakistanis don't so far. So I think what we have to do is to reach out to them very clearly and say, ''Okay, guys, you are running the show now, but now, show us if you want to be asked to be engaged, meaning that if you want to continue our development work, you have to show us how to govern how to are able to govern, and how to fulfill if you are to fulfill our conditions, like you know, including women, bringing guns back to schools, you know, trying to get all ethnic groups, or communities as I managed to refer to before, back to the table.'' So we have to somehow make them understand that this is the only way for them to somehow survive in this because otherwise, I fear very much. But, you know, people will realize sooner or later that this whole governing thing in Kabul is a fake, yeah? You can't send a 15-year-old you can send a 15-year-old Afghans from Pakistani camps, brainwashed security forces, and they will see to it that the rules are free, and that the traveling is okay. But that's not enough. You know, you need to have ministries, you have to have plans, and they are far away from that, you know, as a complete,

and they tell you that they can't cover. So this is I think, our responsibility. And this is I feel that the word failure is too early. Our responsibility is to try to preserve what we did in Afghanistan, our responsibility is to try to make work what we did when it comes to hospitals, to girls' and boys' schools, to infrastructure to airports. And this has to be done with a government in Afghanistan, that deserves the name of a government. And we are far from that one.

And so quick follow up question Philipp, though, because I see like a negotiation problem and all of this, because you keep saying like we should do this. And you know, that's our interest. But who exactly is that? Because it seems at the moment that a lot of countries are meeting bilaterally with the Taliban. And I assume if the Taliban have this impression, they can just do all kinds of bilateral deals with China and Pakistan anyway, then everything we're saying about using legitimacy as leverage is like a very different story, then there being like a coordinated international consensus. So how would we do that from a negotiation perspective?

I think, frankly, this looks like it. But it's not the case. Very clearly, nobody's happy with the packing cabinet, not even the Pakistanis. They fed them and they wanted them to be powerful. But what happens now is in nobody's interest. For various reasons, the Pakistanis have their own TTP, and they don't want the Taliban to be too powerful. And the Chinese are very unhappy about the oil. Okay, everybody is reaching out to them. But nobody has so far has recognized them, yeah? And I can tell you that there is a huge moment of international coordination with Russia with the Central Asian republics with Pakistanis with Indians, in order to have a sort of coordinated message to the Taliban. Okay, you don't get a coordinated message, which is very detailed amongst all of them. But so far, the Taliban have seen that they have no real friends out there, you know? You remember when we talk about the Taliban came in the in the in the late 90s, they had at least the Saudis and the Emiratis recognize them and Pakistan, the three countries, we are not there yet. And we are not there yet. And what they tell us in Doha is quite interesting, you know, when we talk to them in Doha, it's quite what they say is quite acceptable in many, many ways. The problem is, and this is something we haven't raised, even the Taliban is not a monolithic bloc of people. You know, we have the [indiscernible], you have the Kandahars, you have the Haqqanis, you have all sorts of groups within the Taliban who got united by fighting against the common enemy, but now you know, sitting next to each other and trying to claim their territories against each other. So we will see a huge infighting in the Taliban books and I don't know whether they will survive this, you know. So I think it's far from sure that the Taliban will stay for them for a long time, as long as they don't, you know, include other people of Afghanistan at the table and that's our task to make them understand because I think it's in all our interest to we can't just drop Afghanistan, you know, the bitterness of a veteran discount in politics, I must say, I value very much all the efforts by Western countries to bring people out of Afghanistan. The German government wants to have 50,000. You know, I think there are people who are in danger, and we should really try to save them. But generally speaking, don't get all educated people out of Afghanistan, you need them in Afghanistan, we need them, they should go to work in Afghan.

Without them, this country is not going to be possible to run. So I think we should be careful in our generosity in order to make Afghanistan work out.

Okay, but…

So then we're talking about positioning Germany, I can tell you...

Thank you for being so frank. But that very, very brief answer, please, I want to push back on one thing. So you are saying that you are confident that from all of these consultations, some sort of basic consensus, not just among Western countries, but also including China and Russia will emerge? That would be a…

Because everybody wants a functioning, a working government in Afghanistan, and we are far from there. What kind of government whether it's a democracy or a dictatorship? So that's the next question. You know, right now, I think there is a certain unanimity is a big word, but a certainly similar approach by very many countries, to the Taliban, whether it's Qatar or whether it's Turkey, whether it's Russia, whether it's America, you have to make a government work. And we are far from that but.

So Anand, I'm very briefly taking this sort of Philipp's analysis of what might happen in terms of international negotiations, but also how diverse the Taliban are, right? So how do you think is all of this going to play out on the Taliban end, because, you know, we can analytically say, for example, the Americans back then should have integrated the Taliban into political order. But we also all acknowledge the Americans could hardly have done it because of domestic pressure and the situation and the mood after 9/11, you could probably say something very similar about certain elements of the Taliban. So even those who want to do something along the lines of what Philipp said, they will have a hard time selling that to all of their Taliban followers who say, well, we just won the war. Why should we even work with these Westerners, who we just kicked out? So what would have to happen within the Taliban between the various Taliban's wings and committees in order for something to emerge that Philipp just described, which maybe could lead to a more inclusive Afghan government could make sure there is no civil war and could balance those interests? So what would have to happen to get us there?

I mean, I think that's right. There are hardliners and pragmatists, and there have been divisions, since the since the movement took over last month. But where the pragmatist, perhaps at the current moment have a leg up is that the state is barely able to function. You know, the economy has collapsed. And there's a recognition I think, across the board, that if they don't figure out how to get funding at this point, right now, they're facing an imminent collapse. And this is also looking at it from the other side, when the Western powers sort of negotiate or engage with the Taliban. The very act of engaging could in fact, help the pragmatist and isolate some of the hardliners. The danger is the other way around, where there's a very sort of hostile approaches taken to the new regime, which could only then embolden the hardliners. And so right now, I think, again, the pragmatists are the ones who, the current government, even though from our eyes looks very monolithic, it's all Mullah's, it's it isn't it's not very inclusive,

that government itself was the outcome of a negotiation between these different factions within the Taliban because there are other extreme hardliners who are excluded from the government excluded from positions. So that's one way to look at it. But I think this is why the international engagement at this point is so critical.

Thank you. So I'm going to formally close out our discussion and then Fara, I will give you the very last final word and you can conclude this event. So and as we wrap up, I want to thank the three of you and Philipp Anand Fara for your time and being so candid and frank. A special thanks to Philipp for being a way more candid than maybe we would expect it from a diplomat and you know, given all the red tape that's all around you. So thank you very much for that. And I also like to thank the Mittal Institute and Negotiation Task Force teams behind the scenes, Chelsea Sandman, Matt Katrina, for pulling this together and making this possible. Also, the panelists you will receive our wonderful Negotiation Task Force mug either in person or in the mail. So look out for that. And everyone who tuned in today, check in the chat, there are all kinds of links to our various programs, you can sign up for our newsletters, and of course, go ahead and read this very interesting book. And with that, I will hand it over to Fara and you have a final word for today. Thank you very much for listening. And thank you for joining us. Fara, please.

Thank you so much Arvid and thanks to Anand and Philipp for a very interesting discussion. I would like to just add to what was said before about the future of Afghanistan. I agree with Anand. I mean, the Taliban, it's the movement. It's not a government, they aren't as of yet capable of controlling their own extreme elements. And they are not only there are able to create a unified and effective form of government, a governance and beliefs and you know, a legal system or even a security apparatus. We have been told that the current government is a transitional one, and that there is going to be an inclusive one that is going to include people from the other ethnic groups, some of the former leaders, and I hope that is the case. Because as Philipp said, while every second Afghan is trying to get out of Afghanistan because they are either scared for their life or scared for their future, there are a lot of Afghans that are currently out in the West and outside of Afghanistan that would very much like to go back to their country to build it, and to have the peace and security and stability and to raise their families there. So with that,