

Striving for Lasting Progress of the Afghanistan Reconstruction:

A Dialogue on Inter-Civilization
Cooperation and Major Power
Engagement

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Hamid Karzai

***Editor's Note:** The national rebuilding of Afghanistan has entered a new stage and the Istanbul Process is at a critical juncture. In order to better understand the relevant developments and search for effective solutions, the China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies initiated a dialogue between Professor Yang Jiemian, President Emeritus of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies and His Excellency Hamid Karzai, former President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, during the latter's visit to Shanghai at the end of January in 2016. The dialogue focused on the global power structure, Afghan development, China-Afghanistan relations, and major power engagement in Afghanistan.*

A Civilizational Perspective on the Changing World Order

Yang: Let us start with the large picture. I think the world has come to a defining moment when political leaders should think beyond day-to-day, election-driven issues. On the one hand, the world has witnessed great progress in global awareness, regional integration, nation building, and science and technology. An emerging and dynamic Asia represents a historical trend toward more equality and justice in the distribution of power and wealth. The world since the fifteenth century has seen for the first time the rise of non-Western countries. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Climate Change Conference, the founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the like all point to this new direction. On the other hand, with regard to global governance, the international system, and regional order, a host of new challenges are arising as a result of increasing globalization, information revolution, and the shifting gravity of power. Although nation-states are still the most important actors, they have to work together with non-state actors in the absence of universally accepted rules and norms. Furthermore, the international community sees few leaders with historical farsightedness and strategic competence to chart a new course for the benefit of all mankind. Therefore, former, current, and future leaders of all countries and from a variety of fields should pool their wisdom and insights to shoulder this great historical mission.

To begin with, world leaders should use their imagination in the wildest possible way and possess reasonable optimism about the future. They should use their wisdom and influence to revive substantive discussions for the future of the world. Last year marked the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. It is now the right time for us to envision what kind of world we are going to build. We need to put in more resources, imagination, and wisdom to meet the rise of non-Western countries and a new reconfiguration of powers.

Karzai: I agree with you and I think your comments are very important and insightful. I would call the rise of Eastern powers after five hundred years of Western dominance not a civilizational change, but a civilizational revival. We in the East do not wish to challenge any other civilization. We in the East, as fellow human beings with the West, rightly aspire to the reintroduction of our civilization. The rise of China followed by India and the rise of the countries around them into better economies, into better

education, especially in this age of massive availability of tools of information, is — in terms of the impact of civilizations — a period of tremendous importance that cannot be avoided. Ten or fifteen years ago, if you were someone interested in world politics or in the news around the world, you only had two choices, the BBC and CNN. But today, CCTV (China Central Television) is an alternative, RT (Russia Today) is an alternative, and even Iran's PressTV is an alternative. Al Jazeera in my opinion falls into the category of the BBC and CNN. In other words, the rise of Eastern powers has provided the world with more alternatives — alternatives in information tools, alternatives in tourism, alternatives in the places where you get your education, and so on. So I describe it as civilizational rise. In Afghanistan, many political and social elites share a desire that China's GDP will exceed that of the United States sooner or later.

The revival of ancient civilizations will not only change the world power structure, but also provide more alternatives to future human development.

Yang: As far as GDP is concerned, President Obama said to President Xi Jinping in private that in the not too distant future, China's GDP would overtake America's. But in public he has to insist on America's leadership role. The more often the United States emphasizes its leadership, the less confident it may sound. If it is truly the world leader, the President needs not repeat that.

China boasts five thousand years of uninterrupted civilization and has conducted numerous practices in domestic and foreign affairs. Every time China revisits its long history, it can learn a new lesson for its present and future. During modern times, China has tried to learn and copy, one after another, the European, American, and Soviet models of modernization, but these attempts have led to more failures than successes. The ongoing reform and opening-up have made tremendous achievements thanks to its guiding principles fitting actual conditions. With greatly enhanced comprehensive national strength, Chinese President Xi Jinping appealed to the world for a Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind featuring partnerships on equal footing, new security patterns, win-win development, inter-civilization exchanges, and a green ecosystem.

The situation in Afghanistan is different, but the truth is all the same. Three empires failed to impose their will on Afghanistan because Britain,

the Soviet Union, and the United States did not understand the country at all. Afghanistan has accumulated rich experiences — both positive and negative — in the long years of fighting for independence and national unity. Afghanistan is also looking into the future with a vision of democracy, prosperity, and peace. Therefore, Afghanistan should and could become the main producer of ideas and inspirations for the peace process led and owned by the Afghans.

The Chinese civilization and Afghanistan's Islamic civilization overlap a great deal in the pursuit for the future of equality, justice, and prosperity. Furthermore, the interactions between these two civilizations can lead to a hybrid of modern civilizations that guides us in dealing with the current challenges and building up a better future. However, many of us focus too much on the immediate issues and lose sight of intellectual conceptions of the present and future. Therefore, we should cultivate a keen sense of historical responsibility not only for the material issues, but also for intellectual inspiration and aspiration.

Karzai: China enjoyed double-digit growth in the past. But with the advanced economy that you have now, it is unreasonable to expect China to have double-digit growth rate like before. It is like that you do not expect Germany to have a growth rate of 7 percent. They just cannot do that. The Germans are quite happy with their growth rate of 2.5 percent right now. China has reached a spot where it should no longer have 9 percent or 10 percent growth rate. In my view, for the strength of the economy that you have, the growth rate that you secure now is already great. The impact that the Chinese economy created in your society 15 years ago with a growth rate of 10 percent is the same impact that you are now creating with a growth rate of 6 percent, because now you have a much larger economic foundation. In Afghanistan, when we began in 2001, we had 11, 12 or even 13 percent growth rate. But things are changing in Afghanistan and today we have a larger base, and with an 8 percent or 9 percent growth we will be very happy.

The U.S.' Role in Afghanistan since 9/11

Yang: Since you have dealt with the United States for almost 15 years, shall we talk about what you think of the U.S.' role in helping rebuild Afghanistan immediately after 9/11 and its role nowadays?

Karzai: That is one of the most important questions when it comes to Afghanistan in the past 15 years. I was among those Afghans who worked very hard to have the Americans come to Afghanistan and to free us from the situation we were in. I can say that with respect to the process of the Bonn Conference — not the International Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in 2001, there was another Bonn conference before 2001 called the Intra-Afghan Dialogue Bonn Conference in 1998 — I can safely call myself a pioneer in organizing this earlier conference with the intention to create a dialogue among Afghans and to bring in the influence of the West and in particular the United States to free us.

At the same time, I was also one of those — to give you a full picture of things — who were part of the Taliban movement. I supported them strongly and wholeheartedly. But I began to distance myself from the Taliban around 1995 to 1996, a year after they came into power, on two accounts. One was that they began to be totally exclusive, not allowing others to join, not allowing the well-educated to work for Afghanistan. They became the source of internal conflict in Afghanistan. In the name of the Taliban, they actually became ethically violent toward other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. On another account, they also brought immense Pakistani influence into Afghanistan. We saw the arrival of Pakistani intelligence and Pakistani army.

Eliminating the Pakistani security presence and rebuilding Afghan national unity were the most urgent tasks for President Karzai.

So I worked hard to address two issues: one was the liberation of Afghanistan from the Pakistani presence, their military and intelligence presence; the other was the return of Afghanistan to unity and enlightenment. So the first Bonn Conference was before the Istanbul Conference and the Islamabad Conference that were organized to address the question of Pakistani presence in Afghanistan and the Pakistan challenge for Afghanistan.

That is how we brought that later to the Bonn Conference and even later to the Rome Conference where our ex-King Zahir, who played a very crucial role, was. In that context, we had made a tremendous effort to try to convince the United States that they should come to Afghanistan to help the Afghans. To our surprise and to our disappointment, the United States took no interest. They told us that we did not represent Afghanistan and Afghanistan was more represented by the Taliban and that

the Pakistani influence in Afghanistan was alright. The United States was not willing to help us against the Taliban in rural Afghanistan or reduce the Pakistani presence in Afghanistan. They would only do that when the presence of the Taliban and the Pakistani influence in Afghanistan directly threatened the United States. Otherwise they said you go and work with Pakistan and the Taliban.

The United States moved in actively after 9/11. Six months before 9/11 the United States began to increase contact with us and treat us as one of their partners in Afghanistan. After 9/11 we saw the arrival of the United States in Afghanistan as the salvation of Afghanistan. When they arrived in 2001, the Afghan people joined them. In southwestern Afghanistan, where I was at that time, the United States did not fire a bullet. The people drove the Taliban away and the Taliban withdrew almost immediately. They did not even fight. We only had, on one occasion, a small skirmish of only two hours. That was all. And then new life started in Afghanistan. Between 2002 and 2004 things went perfectly in Afghanistan. After 2004 we saw the United States begin to bombard Afghanistan. And when they began to force the Taliban into uprising, a lot of people in the Taliban went back to their homes. They did not want to fight in Afghanistan. They wanted to settle down in their country. So our initial doubts about U.S. presence in Afghanistan began in 2005 when people from the Afghan countryside came to tell me "Mr. President, the United States comes to our home every day. Their soldiers came to search our men, our wives, and take our children into prison. They are violent with us. They are pushing people to the Taliban." So I began to talk to the Americans behind closed doors and asked them, "Why are you doing this?" But this continued for two years. In 2006 to 2007, I began to speak publicly after I warned the Americans repeatedly and privately not to do this.

So the shifts in opinion and the shifts in the perception toward the United States began in 2005. It began with civilian casualties, with their economic activities in Afghanistan, with the way they spent money in Afghanistan, and also with the way they would not allow Afghan security forces to develop. Private contractors were brought in to provide security that caused lawlessness, anarchy, and looting. And then double dealing with Pakistan on the Afghan issue. They told us that sanctuaries were in Pakistan, and terrorists were being trained and equipped in Pakistan. And then they gave money to Pakistan. Of course we asked the Americans why they did these things. In 2009 to 2010, I came to the conclusion that the issue

of mistakes was really an issue of intention. In my view, the United States was not making mistakes. They had an intention to destabilize Afghanistan.

Seeing more and more negative impact of the U.S. policy, Afghans began to doubt the U.S.' sincerity in Afghanistan reconstruction.

Major Power Engagement in Afghanistan

Yang: I would like to talk a bit about the Sino-American relationship first as a background to understanding China-U.S.-Afghanistan interactions. On the one hand, the United States is one of our most important economic and trading partners. China's trade volume with the United States is about 555 billion dollars every year. China's best and brightest students are studying in the United

States. Young people are deeply impressed and influenced by Hollywood movies, and they speak American English as well. On the other hand, the United States always views China as an existential or potential rival, especially after China became the second largest economy in 2010. After World War II, the United States has repeatedly emphasized that it will not allow any country to take over its leadership in the world or in the Asia-Pacific region. Now it feels its leadership role is being challenged. A senior American official once asked me: when Asian nations' trade with China exceeds their trade with the United States, when they seek more political advice from Beijing than from Washington, when they begin to learn more Chinese than English, where will be the American leadership?

The Americans would like to talk about pluralism in abstract terms. In terms of political and military power, they allow no such things. In the U.S. presidential campaign in 2000, both candidates argued that the U.S. and China were strategic competitors. But after 9/11 they changed their positions. The Americans are very pragmatic. As long as it serves their interests, they immediately change course without any sense of guilt. During the 2008 presidential campaign, President Obama and other candidates were talking about China filling in the vacancies left by the United States. But after the financial crisis, they changed their position. When Hillary Clinton became Secretary of State she began to advocate a "3D" foreign policy, namely, defense, development, and democracy. When Hillary Clinton

visited China in 2009 for the first time in her capacity as Secretary of State, she did not mention democracy and journalists asked her why. She said very clearly that economy overwhelmed anything else in the face of the financial crisis. In late 2009 and early 2010 when the United States had just moved out of the bottom, its position changed once again from “return to Asia” to “pivot to Asia,” and later to “Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific.” Now in this busy American election season, China underscores the importance of a stable bilateral relationship.

China is now confronted with three challenges. The first is domestic economy. In the past three decades, China has enjoyed double-digit economic growth. But now the growth rate has slowed down to about 6.5 percent; some have begun to complain that it is too slow. Each year the Chinese government needs to generate about 20 million new jobs. The second challenge is that China has now entered into a “deep-water area” of reform. We started the reform program more than 35 years ago. All the easier jobs have been done, and now we have a hard bone before us. The third challenge is that as China grows in economic and military strength, its neighbors are closely watching us with growing concern. That is why President Xi Jinping proposed a new concept of China’s neighborhood policy and the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

Apart from immediate challenges to national development, China is confronted with the U.S. relentlessly seeking to maintain supremacy on the world stage.

Karzai: Speaking about the relations among the United States, China, and Afghanistan, I would say that Afghanistan wants to have an overall positive relationship with the United States. I’m not an ideological person, and not anti-Western. In fact, I greatly enjoy many aspects of the lifestyle, some of the music, some of the culture and the arts. And one can certainly appreciate the great infrastructure, industries that they have built, the democracies and institutions they have created for themselves, like the rule of law.

My differences of opinion with the United States arrive at the double application of things. For example, if you ask me today what model of development suits Afghanistan best, if we compare the model that China has developed with the model we borrowed from the West after 2001, we

would definitely be better off with the Chinese model of development. In terms of our experience of democracy and the right of our people to vote, I think we do physically have the right to vote, but we do not politically own our democracy. We vote; the United States counts the votes. So that has brought me to a lot of thinking on how Afghanistan should move forward. It is not only the issues concerning the war on terror. It is also about how our weaknesses have been exploited against us.

We have been discussing nearly each day how to get China involved in Afghanistan and how to do that in a way that is not against the West. China is not here to help Afghanistan defeat Western powers, but is involved to bring a kind of balance which can help to end the violence in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is too small a country to defeat the U.S. objectives. But we are trying to create a balance of power in our country to prevent us from becoming a launching point or a platform for destructive activities against other countries in the region. So that is where China steps in. That is where Russia steps in. That is where India steps in. That is where Iran steps in. There lies the complexity of U.S. presence in the war on terror — I term the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as the war on terror. I think this war on terror has been abused to serve the exercise of American influence in the region.

China has adopted a policy on the Arab world. It has recently released a white paper which is very wholesome and complete. I think the recent visit of President Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran was the official launch of that policy. For me, with a focus on the long term, the immediate issue is the creation of balance in Afghanistan between the long-term U.S. interests in the region and their presence in Afghanistan and the Chinese counterbalance to it. How do we get to this balance and through which

mechanism? As we see it today, China is cooperating with the United States to bring stability to Afghanistan. This cooperation with the United States includes — in a significantly big way — engagement with Pakistan on the issue of Afghanistan. We see China's deep friendship with Pakistan as a positive influence on Pakistan and Pakistan's behavior toward Afghanistan.

Afghans welcome other powers' counterbalancing role to the U.S. dominance of the Afghan rebuilding process.

Yang: You mentioned big powers' role and interests in Afghanistan. So shall we also talk

about the trilateral relationship between Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan? India and Pakistan are important regional players, and they are deeply involved in Afghanistan. Pakistan is a party to the peace process and India established strategic partnership with Afghanistan in 2013 when you were President. Do you think Pakistan is feeling sandwiched between India and Afghanistan? Will Afghanistan and India give more security assurance to Pakistan?

Karzai: India-Afghanistan relations go back to ancient times. India and Afghanistan are old countries while Pakistan is relatively new. In the modern context of relations, Afghanistan, like any other sovereign country, should have the right to choose its friends and relations. Pakistan is a fact of life and we do not deny that. It is a Muslim country just like us. There are a lot of cultural ties between us. And the people of Pakistan, when we became refugees while fighting the Soviets, were the kindest people to us. There is no other example in the history of the world where a nation was received so nicely by another nation. So we are eternally grateful to the Pakistani people for giving us homes, for giving us food and shelter, and sharing everything with us. Our relations with India will never be at the cost of Pakistan. Our relations with India are relations for education, trade, and commerce. India is giving us a thousand scholarships every year. India has provided us with 2 billion dollars in assistance. Should we say no to that?

So we want good relations with both and this is what we tell both India and Pakistan. The three countries are all sovereign countries and sovereignty is what the Afghan people love. That is why we defeated the British; that is why we defeated the Soviets. And let us see what happens to the Americans if they play with our sovereignty. Nations have memories, attachments, and values. Afghanistan is a very poor country. Afghanistan has suffered much as a country for the past 30 years. So what is it that is keeping us going as a nation? Our sense of pride in our sovereignty decides who we should be friends with. And it is this sovereignty which led us to decide that we must be friends with China. And we did it. So if tomorrow some country — no prizes for guessing which country — asks Afghanistan not to be friendly with China, should we deny that friendship? No, never!

Ways to Enhance China-Afghanistan Relations

Yang: You have made quite a few very important points. The first is that we need to develop our own concepts and strategies largely based on our own situation, and in the meantime, we must learn from others. In promoting China-Afghanistan cooperation and general relations, it is up to both of our nations to come up with the main ideas. In my opinion, there are a few policy priorities which can boost our bilateral strategic partnership.

First is sound policy planning. Each and every government designs and outlines its policies, both domestic and foreign. Mr. George Kennan planned the containment concept that governed the U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union for almost half a century. Some Chinese scholars proposed a so-called Greater China Economic Circle in the early 1980s which ushered in the economic cooperation among the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. Four South American Presidents in 1991 initiated the MERCOSUR, the Southern Common Market, which has since promoted regional cooperation.

Second, policy shaping and making is a process of balancing the interests and demands of all parties concerned. China's policy toward Afghanistan integrates its advocacy of international justice, regional stability, and its own national interests. Only when all these factors are properly taken into account, can China's policy be an acceptable and enduring one. This is also the case with Afghanistan. Obviously, we must define the demands and interests of the other parties concerned and make them maximum denominators so as to achieve expected policy goals.

Third, policy outreach should be included at the beginning of policy making. It includes publicity, media promotion, and public diplomacy. The government must push forward policies in a way that the general public can recognize and identify with. Both China and Afghanistan need to do a better job in consolidating their domestic foundation and international support. Think tanks have a big role to play in this regard. Experts and academia should put forward more policy recommendations including how to explain to and garner support from the public. Moreover, the two countries should also try to anticipate the international media's reaction, or even pre-action while making relevant policies.

Fourth, policy implementation should be considered in a larger context. Good policies do not automatically lead to good results unless and

until they are put into practice. In China, a big hurdle is coordination. Chinese policy toward Afghanistan needs the support and down-to-earth work from all the parties concerned. Afghanistan has even more difficulties. Thus China and Afghanistan should take more joint efforts in such major policy areas as the peace process, national reconciliation, economic growth, social stability, and seeking international support. Think tanks should also be involved during the policy process.

Fifth, policy evaluation should be timely and objective. Fifteen years have already passed since 9/11 and there is enough that we could sum up and evaluate. Leaders of both countries should spend more time in policy evaluation and reexamination so as to continue those successful policies and discontinue the unsuccessful ones. Again, think tanks should talk more with the statesmen, strategists, practitioners, and leaders of civil societies about the policies by Afghanistan, China, and other countries.

Karzai: Policy is eventually the product of individual minds. It begins with how an individual thinks. It is based on the experiences of persons. It is either the creation of a few individuals or the creation of logical consensus among those players. My thinking is of course influenced by the experiences that I have and the perceptions that these experiences have created. Therefore, I am vigilant when it comes to dealing with the West in general — and the U.S. in particular — on Afghanistan; I would be considerably more careful. At the same time, for China, while you are trying to be helpful to the United States in Afghanistan, while you are using your considerable influence

over Pakistan to conduct affairs in the region and in Afghanistan, I would also want China, as it has already been doing, to have its own independent and exclusive thinking and relations with Afghanistan as well.

And on this, you must learn from the mistakes that the United States made — not today but after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan. Let me put it this way. If one is of the opinion that the United States has only made innocent mistakes, then the mistakes originated from the days they supported Afghan Mujahideen with radical Islamist ideology. And they have

To promote their strategic partnership, China and Afghanistan need to conduct closer policy coordination while encouraging more inclusiveness in policy making and implementation.

continued perpetuating those mistakes right up to today. They have perpetuated these mistakes through the Pakistani military and intelligence presence which are using extremism as a tool. If you are of the other opinion that the United States did not make mistakes and that the United States planned the situation as it is today, then extremism has become a tool in the hands of the United States. That is where China should be watchful and greatly concerned.

Yang: When I talk with some of our younger scholars, especially those who have been educated in America, they only give me the three “ism’s” — realism, liberalism, and constructivism. I say, yes, these ideas are important, but they are not enough to solve the complicated problems in China or in Afghanistan. We must use our own terms and ideas. If we speak more with our own terminologies as alternatives to the ones on BBC and CNN, then gradually we can shape the narrative.

The second is that we should look at China-Afghanistan relations through a new perspective. Afghanistan has entered a new era. And China is not what it was 15 years ago, as it now has developed its own concepts, strategies, and advantages. Mr. Xi Jinping is a political leader who emphasizes new, innovative, and creative thinking and practices. I often tell younger scholars that when there is a rule, there is exception, and that many exceptions make up a new rule. Our ideas should grow out of the existing ones. Our two countries should work together. Comparatively speaking, China’s diplomacy is good at the bilateral level. China is learning to engage more effectively in multilateral diplomacy. You mentioned the quadrilateral coordination process among Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and China. That is why I enjoy discussion with colleagues from Afghan think tanks. On such non-official and informal occasions, we can talk most candidly and explore all possible scenarios. I hope you can continue to support the work of think tanks from both Afghanistan and China. And also, in the information and media age, we must better explain to the general public [in China] why it is important to support Afghanistan.

Karzai: Your comments are enlightening. When I was in office, one of my pursuits was to get China involved deeply in the resolution of the Afghan situation and to get China involved regionally and internationally in the war against extremism and terrorism, because it is not only Afghanistan that is affected, but China and the wider region as well. And I am glad to

tell you that China has taken a lot of interest in doing two things: one in trying to arrange various forms of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in China and in other parts of this region; the other in trying to create an environment between Afghanistan and Pakistan that was conducive to peace and to friendship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The reason we emphasized the role of China is that we know China is the one country that we are very certain about with regard to seeking peace in Afghanistan. It is by all means in the interest of China to have peace in Afghanistan for the One Belt and One Road and other projects, and for the economic benefits for China and for others in the region. So, yes, China's role is there and China's role is a welcome role that we fully support.

We also know that the situation in Afghanistan is more external than internal. Therefore, it is also important for the quadrilateral group to take into consideration the importance of another neighbor, Iran, in these talks. Iran shares 800 kilometers of borders with Afghanistan. It has specific interests in Afghan stability. And also, you cannot ignore India's interests in the region and in Afghanistan. Russia is also a major player in Afghanistan. So these three major powers' interests should all be taken into consideration while discussing peace in Afghanistan. But of course, the fundamental is the Afghan people and their interests. Hopefully, the end of these peace talks will not only bring peace to our country, but also bring peace to a united Afghanistan, a unitary form of government — not a fiefdomized Afghanistan, not a parochialized Afghanistan. It is extremely important for China and especially for China's security interests to have such a vision in mind while it is working for peace in Afghanistan, which is not only peaceful but also sovereign with a unitary and strong central government and away from any tendency toward decentralization or fiefdomization.

Yang: Your Excellency, we know that your presidency had contributed a lot to the reconstruction of the nation-state of Afghanistan. In retrospect, what were the most difficult or most serious challenges during your presidency? And suppose you were a student of international relations and requested by your professor to define the Taliban, what would be your answer?

It is crucial for the Afghan government to enhance its tools of governance and accommodate the transforming Taliban forces in Afghan reconstruction.

Karzai: When I became President, the country was in total anarchy. It lacked government. It had no institutions. The constitution of a normal country was nonexistent. Some of the undertakings proved to be very easy. For example, the moment the Bonn Conference decided on the new structure of Afghanistan and the international community arrived, Afghanistan immediately became once again the home for all Afghans. That is the inner strength of Afghanistan and the strength of the unity of the Afghan people. Then the building of the constitution was an easy process. The Afghan people readily accepted the form of government we adopted.

What was difficult was the day-to-day governance of Afghanistan, providing the rule of law to the Afghan people, taking heavy-handedness away by powerful individuals. In other words, developing the tools of governance was the most important task, because after all it is individuals who actually abide by law or violate law. And it is individuals who create good governance — not the tools only. We can have many tables, desks, and computers, but if we do not have the right trained individuals for it, they will not function. So raising human capacity and human resources was one of our highest priorities. Here let me be fair and frank. We are grateful to the United States, some of our Western allies and regional countries for providing us with a lot of help in this regard and providing the basic stability, the time, and the resources.

The second most important task was bringing an end to the interference in Afghanistan by our neighbors. That is where the United States failed in the war on terror. It did not address areas it should have addressed. It took a dual, contradictory approach to the war on terror. It provided us with support and it also provided support, bases, and logistics to terrorist groups. The Taliban are an Afghan force. They are original to Afghanistan. They are indigenous to Afghanistan. They are from the Afghan people. I have always referred to them as Afghan brothers — to much criticism from some Afghans and from the international community. I refer to them as such because they are Afghan compatriots, though they are misled. I hope they would understand that by what they are doing they are hurting their own country and their own future. They are a countryside force, religious, simplistic. And those who are Afghans and those who are not under the control of foreign intelligence agencies are welcome to come back to

Afghanistan. But Daesh, or ISIL, is a different issue. It is totally foreign, totally not indigenous, and totally planted from outside. The intention of Daesh and its supporters is expansion beyond Afghanistan. That is why again China has to be extremely vigilant together with other countries in the region.