

KARZAI'S BATTLE VS. BRITAIN

Does the U.S. Understand What Is at Stake in Afghanistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

Sept. 20—A Sept. 12 news item, carried by many news media around the globe, has made public a crucial aspect of the British war strategy in Afghanistan, one which Lyndon LaRouche has identified as key to British imperial aims against the United States, as well as the region: the official British involvement in the expansion of the opium trade in Afghanistan.

The cited news item reported that the British Ministry of Defence has announced an investigation of British troops' involvement in the opium smuggling out of southern Afghanistan's Helmand province. The story cited an Afghan drug dealer who spoke to the *Sunday Times* last year. Identified only as Aziz, he said: "Most of our other customers, apart from drug lords in foreign countries, are the military. The soldiers whose term of duty is about to finish, they give an order to our boss. As I have heard, they are carrying these drugs in the military airlines and they can't be reached because they are military. They can take it to the USA or England."

The British online daily *First Post* of the same day provided corroborating background to the charge, which the Ministry of Defence says is not yet proven. The official directive of London to the British troops was, as Col. Gordon Messenger of the Royal Marines told the *First Post*, that the troops deployed in Helmand, the center of heroin production in the biggest heroin-producing country in the world, would not be involved in a process, under consideration by President Hamid

Karzai's government, for eradicating poppies. "There will be absolutely no maroon berets [of the marines] with scythes in a poppy field," he said. British forces will not even directly stop vehicles suspected of smuggling the drug. But it is evident that the British troops have done much more than what Messenger admitted, as we will elaborate below.

Capturing Washington

It must be noted that the British were aided during this period by the anglophiles within the United States, such as Richard Holbrooke, Robert Blackwill, Peter Galbraith and others; by George Soros-linked powerful figures within the Obama Administration; and by the Wall Street-City of London nexus, which condoned the bountiful generation of cash from the huge opium production in Helmand province. Karzai's open revolt against the British on a number of occasions has given the British a black eye in Afghanistan, but the country will neither be free of opium, nor politically stabilized unless this unholy alliance between Washington and London is cut to its roots.

London and its followers have long identified Karzai as an obstacle to their devious plans. While going hammer-and-tong against Karzai on charges of nepotism and corruption of his administration, Britain knows the key to his removal lies in getting the support of Washington. Even more than the Bush Administration,



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Two British MI6 agents, one of them, the former Ambassador to Afghanistan, were caught red-handed operating with the Taliban in Helmand province, the opium-producing center of the country. Since the British troops arrived in Helmand, opium poppy production has skyrocketed. Shown: Afghan National Army soldiers guard confiscated opium in Musa Qala, Helmand, December 2007.

the Obama Administration has cooperated with London in achieving this end.

British Role in Helmand

On Jan 24, 2008, President Karzai told a group of journalists at the Davos Economic Forum that “there was one part of the country where we suffered after the arrival of the British forces.... Before that we were fully in charge of Helmand. When our governor was there, we were fully in charge. They came and said, ‘Your governor is no good.’ I said, ‘All right, do we have a replacement for this governor; do you have enough forces?’ Both the American and the British forces guaranteed to me they knew what they were doing and I made the mistake of listening to them. And when they came in, the Taliban came.”

What Karzai did not tell the “eminent” people present at Davos is that the opium explosion took off in that province in a hurry once the British troops took control in 2005, and that there exists a distinct link between these two occurrences. That revelation, however, came from an Afghan Member of Parliament, Nasimeh Niazi. She told the Fars News Agency of Iran, on April 20, 2010, that the foreign forces deployed in Afghanistan were involved in the production and trafficking of illicit

drugs in the country, adding that the British troops have even trained opium experts. Helmand province, where almost 50% of Afghanistan’s opium is produced, began to register huge growth in opium production that year. Helmand’s opium poppy cultivation in 2006 rose to some 40,000 hectares, a 50% increase over the area cultivated in 2005. In 2007, Helmand produced 4,400 tons of opium, which is about the amount the entire world consumes annually.

In addition, Niazi pointed out that Helmand province has been transformed into a profitable center for foreign states to fund their deployments in the country. Heroin production labs in Helmand, which did not exist before the U.S.-led war, are now plentiful, and work overtly, Niazi

added. Pointing to her recent trip to Helmand, she said that during the trip, foreign forces pretended that they were destroying opium poppy farms, but “I realized that they, in fact, destroyed some small farms whose owners were poor farmers who didn’t have power, and had planted one or two hectares of opium poppy” to make a living.

While Karzai did not speak out against the British role in the opium smuggling, he went after the British MI6 agents involved in the wheeling and dealing with the drug runners and insurgents in Helmand. On Dec. 27, 2007, Karzai gave the acting EU mission head, Michael Semple, an Irish national, and Mervyn Patterson, a senior British official with the United Nations, orders to leave the country within 48 hours. They were exposed as MI6 agents, and diplomats confirmed that the two held talks with Helmand tribal leaders with links to the Taliban who were waging a bloody war against British and other NATO forces. It was also reported that the U.S. military had forewarned Karzai of the duo’s activities.

British Empire-Servers in Afghanistan

Fifteen months later, Stephen Grey, in his article, “Lawrence of Afghanistan and the lost chance to win over Taliban fighters,” wrote about the incident in the

March 29, 2009 *Sunday Times* of London: “Captain Rob Sugden of the Coldstream Guards had not been in Afghanistan long when he first saw this strange figure at a ‘reconciliation’ meeting between two former Taliban leaders and a delegation of British and Afghan officials.”

Sugden was in for a surprise. “The ‘native’ was not an Afghan. He was Irish. His name was Michael Semple. One of the ex-Taliban at the meeting, it transpired later, had just two business cards in his wallet: that of Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British ambassador in Kabul—and Semple’s. It was an accurate measure of this mysterious figure’s significance.”

An unnamed Afghan government official told the London *Sunday Telegraph* that “this warning”—that the men had been financing the Taliban for at least ten months—“came from the Americans. They were not happy with the support being provided to the Taliban. They gave the information to our intelligence services, who ordered the arrests.” Afghan government officials said the decision to expel them was taken at the behest of the CIA, after the two agents were caught funding Taliban units.

According to *The Scotsman*, Afghan intelligence officials discovered the plan—which would have established a training camp for 1,800 fighters and 200 low-level commanders, in an attempt to convince them to switch sides—on a computer thumb drive that they had seized on Dec. 23, 2007, in Helmand province. It revealed that about \$126,000 had been spent preparing the camp, and about \$201,000 more was earmarked to run it in 2008.

The *Times* wrote that, when Patterson and Semple were arrested, they had \$150,000 with them, which was to be given to Taliban commanders in Musa Qala. “British officials have been careful to distance current MI6 talks with Taliban commanders in Helmand from the expulsions of Semple, the Irish head of the EU mission, and widely known as a close confidant of Cowper-Coles, and Mervyn Patterson, a British advisor to the UN,” the *Times* wrote. But what has not been told, is that these two MI6 agents were operating in Helmand, the center of Afghanistan’s vast opium production.

Kicked out of Afghanistan, Semple has been embraced by the anglophiles of the United States, and has been named as one of the Carr Center Fellows of the Harvard Kennedy School for 2010-11. His biography that appears on the Carr Center’s website does not mention either that he is an MI6 agent, nor does report that

he was expelled from Afghanistan after he was caught red-handed financing the Taliban, and planning to raise a group of insurgents in Helmand. Such is the current interconnection between London and Washington.

This brings us to the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) agent, Sherard Cowper-Coles, masquerading as a diplomat in Afghanistan. At the time that the Semple-Patterson duo were kicked out of Afghanistan for plotting against Kabul, Cowper-Coles was the British ambassador; recall that, as reported by the *Times*, it was Cowper-Coles’ “business card” that was found in the “ex-Taliban’s” wallet, while he was meeting the British.

In addition to his stint in Afghanistan, Cowper-Coles had been ambassador to Israel and Saudi Arabia. In February 2009, it was announced that he would be taking up a new role as special representative of the U.K. Foreign Secretary to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In other words, the old spook has earned his bread.

Cowper-Coles’ Failed Mission

Cowper-Coles had performed well on behalf of the empire-servers, including Tony Blair and Buckingham Palace. He was the political counselor in Paris during 1997-99. It was in August 1997 that Princess Diana died in Paris under “mysterious circumstances,” forcing Buckingham Palace to duck from one corner to another.

According to one report, the alleged MI6 roster showed that only three SIS officers were posted to Paris in 1997: Sherard Louis Cowper-Coles, Colin Roberts, and Richard David Spearman. Cowper-Coles’ role—if any—in the morbid affair of Diana’s death was never divulged.

Cowper-Coles earned kudos from Tony Blair when he was identified as “the man” who was instrumental in getting the Serious Fraud Office to abandon its investigation into the corrupt al-Yamamah arms-deal scandal involving Britain’s BAE Systems, Saudi Princes Turki al-Faisal and Bandar bin-Sultan, Wafik Said, kickbacks, prostitutes, and global terror, including 9/11 (see *EIR*, June 22, 2007).

In March 2009, after his two-year stint as ambassador to Kabul, Cowper-Coles was appointed Britain’s Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The assignment was to pressure the United States to end the war abruptly and bring the Saudi-British-backed Taliban to power in Kabul. He had the credentials to act as a liaison between the Saudis and the British, since he

was a part-player on behalf of Blair in the al-Yamamah arms-deal scandal. Moreover, the Saudis and the British fear that a longer stay of U.S. troops in Afghanistan will marginalize the British and Saudi Wahhabi assets built and strengthened during the 1990s when the Taliban was created, armed, and brought to power with the help of the Pakistani intelligence and Army.

However, Cowper-Coles could not deliver, because neither the Pakistanis nor the Americans saw this as a “solution.” Some Americans, former U.S. National Security Advisor Robert Blackwill, in particular, along with Peter Galbraith, in order to help the British, came out with the proposal of partitioning of Afghanistan along the Pushtun and non-Pushtun ethnic lines. However, that rang a bell of alarm to Pakistani ears. Islamabad fears that partition of Afghanistan would lead eventually to the formation of Pushtunistan, whereby the Pushtuns of Pakistan and Pushtuns of Afghanistan would carve out a nation, breaking up Pakistan in the process. As a result, Pakistan did not play ball with Cowper-Coles and his benefactors.

Also, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, at a news conference on Sept. 16, dismissed Blackwill’s suggestions that a conflict in Afghanistan could be resolved by partitioning the country along ethnic lines and handing over the Pushtun south to the Taliban, saying it was a recipe for civil war. “The Taliban have national ambitions; they have made that clear time and time again,” Rasmussen said.

Failing to achieve what the empire-promoters in London, and elsewhere, wanted, Cowper-Coles resigned on Sept. 8, over a reported clash with NATO and U.S. officials on fighting the Taliban. But by no means has London given up on Afghanistan. On Sept. 13, Blackwill was trotted out by London’s Chatham House, arguing that Afghanistan should be allowed to partition along ethnic lines by pulling back the NATO forces, and acknowledging that the Taliban will not be defeated in their heartland. The next day, the *Daily Telegraph* interviewed Blackwill, who said: “Let the Taliban control the Pushtun south and east; the American and allied price for preventing that is far too high.” Blackwill also said that there had been a “decade of innumerable errors” in the Western approach to Afghanistan.

Is Helmand on the Mend?

Since the U.S. Marines moved the British troops out of northern Helmand in July, open criticism by Marine commanders of British achievements in Musa Qala

makes one really wonder what the British were doing there. Marines and a number of British advisors are reportedly involved in a war of words over the correct approach to help Afghan locals in southern Afghanistan. The row comes six months after British forces handed over responsibility for the town of Musa Qala to the Marines, who began an aggressive strategy of pushing the Taliban out of insurgent strongholds.

BBC reported on Aug. 30, that U.S. Gen. Benjamin Freakley told the *Times* that British commanders failed to put enough pressure on the Taliban. Freakley, who was the senior U.S. commander in southern Afghanistan, said he had been “scathing” in his remarks in meetings with his British counterparts. He added that without putting pressure on the Taliban—while simultaneously carrying out reconstruction programs—the British were “just poking [their] finger at the problem.”

But Freakley is by no means the only one who wondered what in God’s name the British troops were doing in Helmand, the center of opium cultivation and an area infested with insurgents. Lt. Col. Michael Manning, the U.S. Marine battalion commander, claimed that U.S. actions have made the area safer and have doubled the area controlled by the Afghan government. “[The British] didn’t pursue the Taliban,” he said. “We’ll go after them.”

Civilian efforts to reconstruct the area were also criticized, with Manning saying the British had pledged to reconstruct, but failed to deliver. Efforts were summed up, he said, by the words on a sign found in an encampment used by British engineers: “Promise everything, deliver nothing,” it says.

Rajiv Chandrashekhara, in a *Washington Post* article, “U.S. Marines, British advisers at odds in Helmand,” Sept. 4, 2010, pointed out that when the U.S. Marines moved into Musa Qala, the British military and civilian officials deemed Musa Qala stable enough. “But when the U.S. Marines arrived this March to take over the area, they deemed the status quo untenable. Within 48 hours, they punched beyond the northern front line and seized a town that had long been a Taliban stronghold. . . .”

Manning and other Marine officers argue that their operations actually have made the town center safer. They maintain that the bazaar has tripled in size since they arrived, in part because the combat operations to the South have improved security along the main route trucks used to bring goods into the area, the *Washington Post* article said.