

# Afghan Drugs Target Russia; U.S. Ignores

by Ramtanu Maitra

Dec. 17—NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was in Moscow yesterday seeking more help from Russia to meet the logistics requirements of the U.S. and NATO-led war in Afghanistan. Speaking to reporters after talks with President Dmitri Medvedev, Rasmussen said he was asking Russia to supply helicopters, spare parts, and fuel, and to train Afghan pilots.

However, Russia's repeated demand that the huge production of Afghan drugs be curbed, has been systematically ignored. Drug production there has increased almost fourfold annually since the 1990s, flooding neighboring Russia and Iran in particular. The huge sums of drug money and Britain's Islam Brigade—the terrorist Hizbut Tahrir (HuT)—have continued to weaken Russia and the nations to its south.

Rasmussen's pell-mell rush to Moscow is yet another outcome of the foreign troop surge, which may be as high as 40,000, including the 7,000 promised by NATO in 2010, and of the increasing uncertainty of the main supply line from the Port of Karachi to Kabul and Kandahar that serves the foreign troops. In February, Russia agreed to allow the transit of non-lethal supplies for NATO and U.S. troops in Afghanistan. This time around, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the President had instructed his government to study the NATO chief's proposals and respond. It is likely that Russia would further extend help to ease pressure on the foreign troops and not demand a *quid pro quo*. It is important to note that the Russian help that has been extended already, was without any strings attached, while NATO and the United States have done absolutely nothing to curb either the massive annual opium production in Afghanistan or the terrorist operations inside Russia, orchestrated by the London-controlled HuT and financed by drug money.

## Rumsfeld-Speak: My Way, or the Highway

Within months after the despised Taliban were ousted from Kabul, poppy production in Afghanistan

FIGURE 1  
Heroin Flows Out of Afghanistan



CIA

took off, aided by the spirit of “free enterprise.” The Taliban had brought down production to about 800 tons, for whatever reasons, and drug peddlers who had borrowed money to buy poppy seeds had been hiding out in Pakistan. But the takeover of Afghanistan by the U.S. and European troops in 2001 brought these peddlers back and they went right into business. By the end of 2002, there were reports from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan that Afghan opium and heroin had been flooding the local drug market. Although about 10,000 Russian troops were still in Tajikistan patrolling the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, drugs began to pour through the basin of Tajikistan’s Pyandzh River.

In that year, Afghanistan produced less than 2,500 tons. Today, with almost 100,000 foreign troops and another 92,000 Afghan National Army soldiers “in control” of the country’s security, Afghanistan is producing about 8,000 tons in a bad year. The steady rise of opium production has officially centered around two beliefs: one is former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s mantra that curbing narcotics is not the job of the military; and the ridiculous belief, which all the pundits in and out of the Bush Administration swallowed, that drug money does not finance the insurgents. The outcome of this retarded belief is now on display for all to see.

But the biggest obstacle to curbing narcotics was the attitude of the United States and its NATO partners,

whose leaders did not give two hoots about what was happening in the region with respect to drugs—Russia, Iran, and Pakistan included.

In 2002, the United Nations Drug Control and Crime Prevention Program (UNDCP) pointed out that in **Tajikistan**, of registered drug abusers, 74% were heroin addicts. Other Central Asian nations were suffering similarly. In **Kyrgyzstan**, 82% of registered drug addicts in 1991 were hashish smokers, according to Almaz Garifulin of the Kyrgyz State Narcotics Commission, while in 2001, fully 68% of

abusers were taking opium and heroin. In **Uzbekistan**, there were already over 20,000 registered drug abusers, according to a March 2, 2002 report in *Pravda Vostoka*. The newspaper indicated that heroin use was rising at an alarming rate. In 2001, heroin represented 44% of the 1,069 kilograms of narcotics confiscated by authorities. In 2000, heroin represented only 22.6% of all confiscated drugs.

## Russians Speak Out

After the first wave of narcotics swept across the Central Asian plain, claiming addicts and recruiting an army of carriers, opium and heroin began to show up in large amounts in Russia. The drug money was already going into Chechnya, Dagestan, and South Ossetia, among other provinces of Russia, financing the secessionists and terrorists operating there. In about 2007, Russian authorities at a very high level began to urge the United States and NATO to stem the tide that had begun to undercut Russia’s security by strengthening terrorist groups. But, the appeal remained and remains unattended.

In May 2008, at Yekaterinburg, Russia, after the foreign ministers of China, India, and Russia met for the first time to discuss regional matters, these three countries called for the creation of a security belt around Afghanistan to halt the spread of heroin. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said a joint communiqué on boosting links among these three countries would look

at enhanced cooperation on humanitarian aid, fighting terrorism, and combating drug trafficking.

“We discussed the situation around Afghanistan, where the drug threat emanates. It would help to build drug-secure belts around Afghanistan,” Lavrov said. The statement pointed out that Afghanistan accounted for 93% of world opium output in 2007, according to UN data. Around 90% of the global supply of heroin emanates from Afghanistan.

Then Viktor Ivanov, head of the Russian Federal Narcotics Control Service, said, in an interview with the daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on Jan. 30, 2009, that Russia wanted to work with the new Obama Administration to fight drug trafficking. Noting the spread of drugs from Afghanistan to the border with the Central Asian countries, Ivanov said, “To reduce this danger, we are vitally interested in working with the new American Administration.”

Ivanov called for convening a conference under UN auspices on Peace and Prosperity in Afghanistan, as a “first step” in such U.S.-Russian collaboration against drugs. “It would be appropriate to hold such a conference in Afghanistan itself, e.g., in Kabul,” he said.

In October 2009, following their second meeting at Bangalore, the communiqué issued by the foreign ministers of China, India, and Russia “expressed concern at the continuing deterioration of the security situation” in Afghanistan, and pledged “concerted trilateral action against international terrorism, trans-national crime and drug-trafficking.” Again, both Brussels and Washington shrugged off the “expressed concern” of nations that represent almost half of the world’s population.

Then, on Nov. 19, Ivanov met with President Obama’s Af-Pak czar, Richard Holbrooke, a longtime associate of drug legalizer George Soros. Ivanov told Russian journalists, “My meeting with Holbrooke unfortunately confirmed our fears that they are not prepared to destroy the production of drugs in Afghanistan.” He said the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was



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*NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (left) in Moscow on Dec. 16, asking for logistical support in Afghanistan. A clearly skeptical Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov promised to study the request; but what he and other Russian officials are keenly concerned about is the impact of Afghanistan’s soaring opium production on Russia.*

“totally ineffective,” and the presence of a 100,000-strong military force was only escalating tension. He noted the increase of drug production since U.S. troops entered the country.

## Drugs Flood into Russia

The greater part of Afghan heroin enters the territory of the former Soviet Union through Afghanistan’s borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It then travels westwards across Kazakhstan, before entering the central and Ural regions of Russia, where there are intense focal spots of heroin addiction. Russian medical authorities say overdoses are killing more than 80 people every day. Russia has also seen hundreds of thousands of HIV and hepatitis infections as a result of intravenous drug abuse. Precise figures are not available, but it is estimated that there are somewhere between 1.5 million and 6 million heroin addicts in Russia.

Recent reports indicate that the drug traffickers have now developed another route, which moves the Afghan opium/heroin from Iran through Azerbaijan and the conflict-ridden region of Nagorno-Karabakh. In an interview with Today.Az on Nov 27, 2009, an Azerbaijani expert on war on terrorism, Prof. Kamil Salimov, said:

“Afghanistan is the greatest threat in terms of international terrorism... There is a need to eliminate this threat by eliminating channels that finance international terrorism. In other words, there is a need to eliminate drug-trafficking routes, the enormous funds which support the Taliban and other terrorist organizations. This drug-trafficking route passes through territories which are not fully under governmental control. Previously, international drug-trafficking routes passed through the Balkans. However, following the Kosovo events and deployment of international peacekeepers in the area, international drug-trafficking routes changed. Now they are bypassing Europe and passing through Central Asia and the uncontrolled Azerbaijan territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, uncontrollability of Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the greatest threats in terms of global terrorism...”

It is also interesting to note that the Russian authorities have identified the witting, or unwitting, support lent by the British troops in this massive production of opium in Afghanistan. In a Dec. 16 interview with *Sky News*, Russia’s Viktor Ivanov pointed out that British troops in Helmand Province are not doing enough to stem production of the world’s deadliest drug. “Sixty percent of all opiates in the world are produced in the area that the British forces are responsible for,” said Ivanov. “There were 25 hectares of opium in 2004. Now there are 90,000. This shows you how effective they are.”

While many West European experts believe that Russians are less than competent in preventing drugs from entering Russia, they ignore the fact that, as reported by Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “60% of all opiates in the world are produced in the area that the British forces are responsible for.” He stressed that seizing “Afghan opium where it is produced is infinitely more efficient and cheaper than trying to do so where it is consumed.”

“The Taliban’s direct involvement in the opium trade allows them to fund a war machine that is becoming technologically more complex and increasingly widespread,” said Costa. “Newly born narco-cartels in and around Afghanistan are blurring the difference between greed and ideology.” He pointed out that many of the drug barons, with links to the insurgency, are known to Afghan and foreign intelligence services. “Why have their names not been submitted to the UN Security

Council ... in order to ban their travel and seize their assets?”

### **Britain’s ‘Islam Brigade’**

It is an historical fact that drugs follow conflicts. Well-known examples are Vietnam, Colombia, the Balkans, and Myanmar; and now we have Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere in Central Asia, as well as parts of Russia. While the vast amount of Afghan opium is “slipping through” the areas where the British troops are on “constant vigil,” the drug money is financing not only the so-called Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan, but also the Pakistani Taliban and various terrorist groups that operate in Central Asia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Even more provinces and nations may join the list, if opium keeps “slipping” out of the British troops’ “tight cordon.”

Many terrorist groups change their names to protect their financial transactions, but the Central Asian nations have identified the source of this hydra-headed monster as the MI6 intelligence agency’s “Islam Brigade.” Hizbut Tahrir is banned in many countries, including all of the Central Asian “stan” countries, yet it continues to flourish and proliferate in Britain. Even though in Britain, a large majority of the population and many within the British Parliament identify the HuT as a terrorist outfit, Tony Blair and his majordomo, Prime Minister Gordon Brown claim that the British Government, purveyor of justice and democracy, has not found any incriminating evidence that the HuT is indeed a terrorist gang.

The white-robed HuT members preach the fundamentalist Wahhabi version of Sunni Hanaafi Islam. Financed by the Saudis and Gulf emirates, HuT members hand out free Korans and set up soup kitchens for the poor. The group is against all sovereign nation-states and works exclusively to set up an Islamic Caliphate, stretching from the Maghreb in northern Africa to parts of Russia. Central Asian leaders point out that almost every member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the largest and most vicious of the many terrorist groups operating in that theater, was, earlier, a member of the Hizbut Tahrir.

But HuT cannot keep its mask on all the time. For instance, it has set up its Pakistani headquarters in the increasingly violent city of Lahore, less than 40 km from the Indian border. Last July, members of the group based in Lahore told the *Sunday Times* of London that



*Viktor Ivanov, director of Russia's Federal Service for the Control of Narcotics. Speaking here in Washington on Sept. 24, he called for U.S.-Russian cooperation in eradicating Afghanistan's drug trade.*

Hizbut Tahrir was preparing for a “bloodless military coup,” so as to indoctrinate the region by “military means,” if necessary. Terrorists that operate throughout Central Asia, and in liaison with al-Qaeda and terrorists from Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, among others operating in that theater, were recruited from the HuT.

## **HQ in Pakistan**

Loyalists of the Hizbut Tahrir political movement are calling for a coup in Islamabad to establish an Islamic Caliphate, by force if necessary. Imran Yousafzai, a spokesman for the group, claims to have organized mass demonstrations, insisting that people in the tribal regions of Pakistan adopt Islamic law.

According to Pakistani analyst Noman Hanif, Nicola Smith's article in the *Sunday Times*, entitled “British Islamists Plot against Pakistan,” suggested that British members of HuT had been operating throughout Pakistan's institutions, especially the Army, to foment a bloodless coup. Hanif points out that the crunch point in Smith's article was the revelation by an insider that in 2003, four Army officers were arrested in Pakistan on suspicion of being linked to extremist groups, although the groups and men have not been named. The insider claims they were recruited by the organization's Paki-

stan team, while training at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, U.K., Hanif reports.

The HuT has also built a base inside Russia. According to one Russian analyst, Dagestan has witnessed the merging of Islamism with terrorism, as represented in the activities of Jamaats Jennet (Paradise) and Shari, radical Islamist groups commonly found in the South Caucasus. They are trained for acts of subversion and ideological indoctrination, while one of their new tactics has been suicide in the name of Islam, a practice quite alien to their culture and religious traditions. Supportive of armed resistance and guerrilla acts, they are reinforcing the already sturdy North Caucasian Wahhabi Islamic network. The system of Jamaat is believed to be capable of mobilizing more than 10,000 extremist combatants, including 4,000 from the Volga region and Central Russia, one report said.

On Oct. 22, Russian forces raided the homes of suspected members of the Hizbut Tahrir in the Urals cities of Ufa and Dyrtyuli, and in the region of Bashkortostan, the Interfax news agency reported. The Federal Security Service said that it confiscated “a significant amount of agitprop materials,” including those defined as extremist by Russian courts. The suspected members “recruited residents of the republic to take part in illegal activity,” the security services said.

The scourge unleashed by British intelligence, using its control over Islamic forces since colonial days, is not going to go away—or at least, Britain does not want it to. On July 26, thousands of delegates attended Hizbut Tahrir's national conference in the U.K., “The Struggle for Islam and the Call for *Khilafah* [Caliphate].” The conference followed a month-long series of events in Lebanon, Kuwait, Gaza, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the U.S., and Australia, including a landmark gathering in Indonesia of thousands of scholars supporting the re-establishment of the Caliphate, and addressed by the global leader of Hizbut Tahrir, Sheikh Ata abu Rashta.

Presentations were given on how Islam provides an alternative to capitalism and on the current chaos in the Muslim world. The theme of the presentations was to convey the increasing anxiety in Western capitals in light of the growing call for *Khilafah* in the Muslim world. To thwart this call, “Western-backed puppet rulers” are doing everything they can to stop the political work of Hizbut Tahrir, the speakers warned.