

## US AF serving Afghani drug dealers

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Afghani drugs are as much a pressing problem of the international community as the global warming is. Existence of the problem is recognized by everybody but a solution to it is not known. An international conference on the subject took place in Kabul in late October. According to the UN report presented there, Afghani opium reaching the international market accounts 93% of the global production. Fifty percent of Afghani drugs is produced in Gilmand on the border with Pakistan, a province where British troops are quartered.

Persuading the House of Commons to send British troops to Gilmand last year, Premier Tony Blair capitalized on the danger to Great Britain posed by Afghani heroin. Paradoxically as it is, British servicemen and their American colleagues have found themselves now dragged into the international mafia that buys drugs made in Afghanistan and smuggles them abroad.

The information this publication is based on came

from various Afghani sources that cannot be identified for quite understandable reasons. All the same, indirect evidence indicates that the Western military is involved in traffic. An operation against poppy plantations was to take place in several southern and southeastern provinces of Afghanistan this May (they were to be sprayed with defoliants). Sources in administration of Kandahar and Jalalabad say, however, that commanders of the US and British contingents in these provinces made a pact with the Afghanis and cancelled the operation.

Sources point out that interests of the Western military involved in trafficking out of Afghanistan (usually by US military aviation) coincide with interests of Afghani chieftains who control poppy fields. Afghani officials say that 85% of all drugs produced in southern and southeastern provinces are shipped abroad by US aviation.

There are several ways of shipping drugs abroad. Some sources maintain that the chain begins with civilian salesmen - usually Americans acting under the cover of all sorts of non-governmental organizations and security firms. They buy "goods" from Afghani

wholesale dealers and take them to military bases (usually the airfield in Kandahar). A well-informed source in Afghani security structures claims in the meantime that the American military never deals with Western civilian structures and works with local Afghani officials directly. It is these officials who deal with field commanders, from Taliban more often than not, who are in charge of drug production. The Talibs control bank accounts money is transacted to in all sorts of devious ways via the Afghanis living in the United States and West Europe.

As a matter of fact, money is not the only commodity drugs are paid with. Weapons will do too. Afghani sources claim that drugs-for-weapons barter deals with the Talibs are widely used. (One cannot help recalling the "deals" between our servicemen and the mujahedin during Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.) It may be added that the mujahedin nowadays get weapons from the northern provinces to which the merchandise is smuggled in the first place from Asian states. Insiders say that a great deal of merchandise passes via Shurtepa, a settlement on the Afghani-Turkmen border. Insiders say that weapons

and munitions are ferried to the Taliban-controlled provinces of Afghanistan by American or British armored vehicles.

Several explosions occurred in Kabul and in Usuzgan and Bamian (the provinces controlled by Taliban) in early November. Well-informed Afghani sources identify the targets of these explosions as the Shi'ah who control poppy fields and production of heroin. They were "punished" for the temerity of trying to deal with the American and British military directly. The explosions were arranged by the Talibs defending their "turf". They also served as a warning to the Western servicemen to stop fooling around and deal with the Talibs only.

As for Kandahar, the British stationed there deal with drug dealers in the local power structures. The Afghanis themselves identify these latter as the brothers of the president Kajum Karzai and Akhmed Vali Karzai, Governor Asabulla Haled, and Senator Shir Mohammad. A powerful explosion rocked Akhmed Vali Karzai's mansion in summer 2003. World media and particularly Die Deutsche Welle covered this episode extensively. What they never

reported, however, was the fact that the explosion had taken place in the arsenal located on the premises of the presidential brother's mansion. Well-informed sources claim that the explosion followed a discord over a deal between Karzai's men and the US military. The former wanted two Stingers delivered to the mansion. One of the options suggested to the US military was that the Afghans could pay for the Stingers with drugs...

President Karzai and his Interior Minister Akhmad Jalili had a row several years ago. Jalili was forced to resign and emigrate to the United States. Some sources imply that the row was caused by Jalili's intention to compile a list of principal Afghani drug dealers for the UN and Interpol. Karzai apparently had valid reasons not to want the list compiled.

The US expert who attended the Kabul conference last month said that drug dealers had infiltrated Afghani state structures to the extent where they could easily paralyze the work of the government if the decision to arrest one of them was ever made.

As for the Northern Route of the traffic to post-Soviet Central Asian states, US and British servicemen are

less involved with it. The north of Afghanistan is controlled by contingents from the Scandinavian countries, Italy, and other NATO states. Senior officer of Tajik security structures told this correspondent that the Russian military was directly involved. (Protection of the Tajik-Afghani border is the Tajik prerogative nowadays, but the Russian military has not exactly withdrawn from Tajikistan.) Sources in Dushanbe claim that Russian commanders retained control over the corridor used to smuggle drugs to Russia.

Some Afghani businessmen believe that the United States and the government in Kabul need trafficking to keep the Afghani financial market in shape. In other words, these revenues enable the Afghani Central Bank to maintain the local monetary unit at the proper level. Without them, it would have taken substantial financial injections from Washington.