



Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia

Weekly Digest: 09 – 19 September 2005

The following are summaries of articles related to narcotics and security in the Central Asian 5 and Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Europe. Where possible, web addresses for the entire article are provided.

EU ministers discuss migration, drugs from Afghanistan

The production of drugs in Afghanistan has been curbed by two-thirds, Afghan Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali told EU interior and justice ministers today, Czech Interior Minister Frantisek Bublan told CTK. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, there was consensus that the EU is making much, but not everything has proved a success, diplomatic sources told CTK. The EU is not as successful as it would like to be, EU commissioner Franco Frattini told journalists. EU officials agreed that Afghanistan needed more money to help persuade farmers give up opium growing and to rebuild irrigation systems and roads destroyed by decades of wars in the country. EU presidency holder Britain said the efforts made by the Afghan government to curb cultivation were a "good start", but fighting drug production in the war-ravaged country was a long-term problem. "The immediate risk is not there ... but the key is going to be maintaining the reduction in production into the future," said Peter Holland, head of Britain's Afghan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit. Britain has led an international campaign against the \$2.8 billion-a-year Afghan opium trade. Drug exports make up 60 percent of Afghanistan's economy.

CTK, 09/09/2005

Good Harvests Cause Afghan Opium Prices To Plummet - UN

Favorable opium harvests in Afghanistan have led to a sharp drop in prices since the U.S. military forced the Taliban regime from power in 2001, according to a U.N. report. The Taliban imposed a ban on opium cultivation in 2000, triggering an eight-fold price increase to \$675 per kilogram in late 2001, the U.N. report said. Since then good harvests coupled with improved yields dropped the price to \$151 as of this past July, the study said. The report was outlined at a new conference by the U.N.'s anti-drug chief, Antonio Maria Costa. It will be presented Tuesday to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on International Relations. A crackdown on poppy farming by the current Afghan government led to a 21% decline in the area of Afghanistan under poppy cultivation, Costa said. But production remained almost unchanged because of optimum growing conditions. He said there has been a sharp increase in opium production in the northern Afghan province of Balkh. Costa linked the increase to the appointment of Gen. Atta Mohammed as governor last year and said he has urged President Hamid Karzai to replace Atta. A separate report listed "removal of corrupt governors" among six initiatives the Afghan government should take over the next 12 to 24 months to build on improvements in the anti-drug campaign to date.

Dow Jones International News, 12/09/05

Commentary - Uzbekistan presses 'information cleansing' campaign on Andijan events

The eviction of US forces from Karshi-Khanabad, announced in late July, marked the culmination of the stunningly rapid collapse of the US-Uzbek strategic partnership. US officials ultimately did not believe the Uzbek attempt to whitewash Tashkent's decisions and actions concerning the Andijan events. Washington's repeated insistence on an independent international investigation into the Andijan events – calls that Karimov's administration, with backing from Russia and China, summarily rejected – served as a catalyst for the falling out. In the months since Andijan, Uzbek authorities have quashed all potential sources of independent information inside the country, and conducted a media campaign designed to portray the Uzbek government not as the perpetrator of an atrocity, but as the victim of a global Islamic radical conspiracy. At the heart of the Uzbek government's strategy is an effort to create an alternate reality. In this alternate reality, the Andijan horrors were perpetrated by a local Islamic militant group called Akromiya, with alleged backing from international radical and terrorist organizations including Hizb-ut-Tahrir and al Qaeda. Tashkent insists the Islamic militants were attempting a coup designed to topple President Islam Karimov's administration. The centerpiece of the government's information cleansing endeavor was a multi-part television "documentary" -- titled Qabohat, or Villainy – aired in late July in which those interviewed are described as "victims," and who tell stories of Islamic militant atrocities. The programs also featured confessions given by those said to have been participants in the supposed armed uprising. In August, Nikolai Patrushev, the director of the Russian Security Service, admitted that Russian security police went to Uzbekistan to aid in the Karimov government's investigation into the Andijan events.

This admission has prompted some Western experts to wonder whether Russia specialists had any role in devising and implementing the Uzbek information cleansing campaign. The recent deportation to Russia of Igor Rotar – an Uzbek-based journalist who worked primarily for the Forum 18 news service – is one of many examples in which Uzbek authorities acted to stifle independent purveyors of information. In addition, authorities have restricted the ability of some Russian television channels to broadcast in Uzbekistan, and have sought to block access to Russian-language web sites that focus on Uzbek events, including Ferghana.ru and Tribune.uz. Prominent international broadcasters, such as the British Broadcasting Corp. and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, have also been harassed and verbally attacked. Another important component of the Uzbek information campaign involves vitriolic attacks on all individuals and media outlets that continue to challenge Tashkent's version of events. The newspaper, Hurriyet, published an article on August 3 claiming that terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden "is a loyal spy for the West." Though mainly focused on the domestic audience, there are indications that the Uzbek government at least contemplated internationalizing its information campaign. In June, before Tashkent evicted US troops from an airbase near Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbek officials reportedly considered reaching out to a prominent Washington-based lobbying firm, identified by a reliable source as Cassidy & Associates, to represent Tashkent. Repeated calls to Cassidy & Associates seeking verification were unanswered as of publication time.

A EurasiaNet Commentary (www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091205.shtml), 13/09/2005,

Senior taleban official leaves Guantanamo

(Arman-e-Milli) The Taleban's former ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, was released from Guantanamo Bay on Monday after spending four years in detention there. A close relative, who declined to be named, said on Monday that Zaeef had joined his family in Afghanistan and appeared to be in good health. Zaeef was arrested in North Waziristan in late 2002 by Pakistani security forces and was later handed over to the United States. (Arman-e-Milli is an independent daily run by a group of journalists.)

28 Afghan parliamentary candidates disqualified

(Islah) The Joint Electoral Management Body announced on Monday that 28 candidates are to be disqualified from parliamentary polls due to be held next week. According to the JEMB, 21 candidates were disqualified because of links to armed groups, while the remaining seven were disqualified for not having quit their government jobs. The names of the disqualified candidates have already been printed on ballot papers, but the JEMB's operations manager said people will be instructed not to vote for them.

(Islah is a state-run daily mostly in Dari.)

Musharraf proposes border fence with Afghanistan

(Outlook) Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf has unveiled plans to build a "fence" along the border with Afghanistan, in order to curb the movement of militants bent on destabilizing the government in Kabul. Musharraf floated the proposal during a meeting in New York with US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice. "The president offered to Dr Rice that Pakistan is prepared to make a fence along certain areas which are more amenable to incursions," Pakistani foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri told a reporter after the meeting. Militants have used bases on the Pakistani side of the border to launch a campaign of violence across Afghanistan in the run-up to parliamentary polls on September 18.

(Outlook is an independent daily published in English.)

IWPR'S AFGHAN PRESS MONITOR, No. 153, 13/09/2005

Drug aggression against CIS, Europe stems from Afghanistan - Russian minister

Narcotic aggression against CIS countries and European states is stemming from Afghan territory, Russian Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov said today. He is attending an informal meeting of Russian and NATO defence ministers. "To call a spade a spade, narcotic aggression against Russia and other CIS countries, as well as European states, is stemming from the territory of Afghanistan," Sergey Ivanov said. He provided expert data showing that over 90 per cent of heroin supplied to Europe is of Afghan origin. Sergey Ivanov said Afghan drugs turnover amounted to 30 billion dollars a year, a large proportion of this sum being used to support terrorists in and outside Afghanistan, according to a report by Russian ITAR-TASS from 13/09/05.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Text of report by ITAR-TASS), 13/09/05

Ministry rejects Pakistani press report on Bin Laden

(Hewad) - Interior ministry officials have rejected reports in the Pakistani media that Osama Bin Laden is in Afghanistan. A ministry spokesman said there was proof that the al-Qaeda leader and hundreds of his combatants had

fled to the border tribal areas of Pakistan after their defeat by Coalition and Afghan government forces, and that they were still hiding in these areas. Al-Qaeda fighters have clashed with Pakistan's security forces. Afghan security forces and particularly the National Police have been deployed throughout the provinces, and the al-Qaeda chief could not have spent a single night inside Afghanistan, the spokesman said. Hewad is a state-run daily mostly in Pashto.

Afghanistan rejects Pakistan border fence idea

(Outlook) – Afghanistan has rejected a proposal by Pakistan to build a fence along their common border, which runs for more than 2,400 kilometres. The proposal was made by Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf during a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in New York. Afghan interior ministry spokesman Lutfullah Mashal said that first of all, Kabul would want the border to be determined in accordance with international law. Outlook is an independent daily published in English.

Karzai- International forces should review strategy

(Arman-e-Milli) – President Hamed Karzai, in an interview with the BBC, said the Coalition forces led by US troops should look again at their strategy for defeating terrorism. Karzai said the Afghan government must also assess its own strategy, and said both the country and the international community should consider whether their current counter-terrorism strategy is the right one. Arman-e-Milli is an independent daily run by a group of journalists.

IWPR'S AFGHAN PRESS MONITOR, No. 154, 14/09/2005

UK: NATO Must Focus On Destroying Afghan "Drugs Mafia"

NATO must focus on destroying Afghanistan's "drugs mafia" when the alliance expands its peacekeeping mission across the country next year, U.K. Defence Secretary John Reid said Wednesday (The U.K. will take the lead role in the NATO force next year as it moves into volatile southern Afghanistan). NATO defense ministers were discussing the expansion of the Afghan mission that will see allied troops, mostly from Europe and Canada, replace some U.S. units which have been fighting the remnants of the Taliban. Reid said Tuesday that thousands of extra allied troops would be needed as NATO widens the mission. At a news conference Wednesday he declined to say how many U.K. troops would be deployed when the country takes over from the U.S. in southern Helmand province next spring. "We want to make sure that it is of sufficient capability and size to counter narcotics," Reid said. The international forces have faced criticism for not doing more to tackle the booming Afghan drugs trade. The U.N. estimates Afghanistan produces 87% of the world's supply of opium and its derivative, heroin. Although a crackdown has seen a recent reduction in the area under poppy cultivation, Reid said the drugs trade still accounts for about 60% of Afghanistan's economy. He said more international help was needed so the Afghan authorities can root out politicians corrupted by drugs money and aid poor farmers switch to legitimate crops, but he stressed NATO troops also had to play a role clamping down on the trade. "We have to be prepared to use military means to combat insurgency or tackle the narcotics trade," he said.

Dow Jones International News, 14/09/05

Russian drug control service to open office in Afghanistan

Russia's Federal Drug Control Service plans to set up a representative office in Kabul to slow the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, said Federal Drug Control Service Director Viktor Cherkosov. "This will help in our work with colleagues from Afghanistan and with the special services of European countries and the U.S. fight against the production of heroin in Afghanistan," Cherkosov said. After Russian border guards left the Tajik-Afghan border [in the summer of 2005], drug trafficking from Afghanistan increased, he added. "This shows that the border is not protected properly in that region... We see that the volume of drugs of Afghan origin that we have seized on Russian territory has significantly increased. We did not seize such large amounts of drugs either last year or the year before last as we did in the summer this year." The activity of Russian border guards at the Tajik-Afghan border "was of great strategic importance far outside our country." The Russian border guard department in Tajikistan will be transformed into an operative border group, which will start acting from the beginning of 2006. The group will not include armed men, and the Russian border guards to stay in Tajikistan will assist their Tajik counterparts as consultants in training personnel. According to the Federal Drug Control Service, most illegal drugs, including over 90% of heroin, comes to Russia through Central Asian states from Afghanistan.

Interfax Central Asia News, 14/09/05

Editorial: Waziristan remains a simmering embarrassment

(Cheragh, September 11, 2005) While the Pakistani government still has international support for its military operations in Waziristan, opinion abroad differs over whether these raids against al-Qaeda have been terribly effective. It started

with South Waziristan and now, in the third year, North Waziristan is involved as well. From Wana, in the south, the focus has shifted north to Miranshah, despite official declarations of control of the trouble in the south. Three people were killed and four injured on September 12 when a gunman in Miranshah opened fire at officials who tried to confiscate his Kalashnikov. The Pakistani army has failed to catch ex-Guantanamo Bay prisoner Abdullah Mehsud who kidnapped two Chinese engineers, one of whom was killed. A Pakistani army officer, General Hussain, was more emphatic about "foreign forces" interested in fomenting trouble inside Pakistan. Most of us would think he was talking about India, but the reference could actually be to the Americans in Afghanistan who have been complaining about Pakistan's laxity on Waziristan. And he denied cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan. (Cheragh is an independent daily run by the Development and Democracy Association.)

US may cut troop presence in early 2005

(Outlook) – Senior Pentagon and military officials are discussing a proposal to cut US troop levels in Afghanistan next spring, perhaps by as much as 20 per cent, the New York Times reported on September 14. The troops would be replaced by NATO soldiers, who now oversee security and reconstruction missions in northern and western Afghanistan and are due to take over an American-run mission in the south in spring, the report said. US troops have been taxed by lengthy deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Pentagon officials have sought to replace them with Afghan or Coalition soldiers.

(Outlook is an independent daily published in English.)

IWPR'S AFGHAN PRESS MONITOR, No. 156, 16/09/2005

Comment: Musharraf's proposal to build a border fence is a pretext for inaction

In his latest meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf proposed to build a security fence along the border with Afghanistan, to thwart cross-border infiltration by insurgents. The news has shocked people on both side of the border. They cannot understand how Pakistan can fence off a 2,500 kilometre stretch and successfully stop militants getting into Afghanistan. If Pakistan really wants to co-operate on international counter-terrorism efforts, it should get rid of terrorist centers, radical groups and training camps, all of which continue to exist there.

Afghanistan parliamentary election turnout lower than expected

Radical Islamic insurgents had vowed to try to disrupt the elections, in which Afghans cast ballots for the 249-member lower house of parliament and for 420 representatives who will serve on 34 provincial councils. But only sporadic attacks were reported on election day. Even so, 15 people -- including a French commando who stepped on a landmine in the mountainous region along the Afghan-Pakistani border -- were reported killed during the 24-hour period prior to and during the elections. Turnout was disappointingly low, with just over 50 percent of Afghanistan's approximately 12 million voters casting ballots. Election officials said the turnout for the parliamentary vote was roughly 20 percent lower than that for last October's presidential election. They offered a variety of reasons for the drop-off in voter participation, including a confusing election process and a reluctance to vote for candidates with warlord connections. The parliamentary and provincial council elections featured more than 5,800 candidates. Over 6,000 polling stations were open on election day. Despite the significant logistical hurdles, election officials reported that the voting process itself went about as smoothly as could be expected. President Hamid Karzai, casting his ballot in Kabul, said the elections marked "a good day for Afghanistan, whatever the results." Human rights activists harshly criticized the Afghan government for not developing stricter eligibility criteria that would have prevented those who had leadership roles during Afghanistan's 25-year cycle of violence from running for elected office. Election officials banned over 30 candidates for maintaining ties to warlord militias. But a significant number of individuals with violent pasts were permitted to run. The presence of such individuals in parliament could hamper its effectiveness, political analysts fear. Mohammad Atta, a warlord based in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, disputed the notion that warlords -- especially those associated with the Mujaheddin that fought Soviet occupiers and, later, Taliban militants -- constituted an obstacle to democracy. Speaking on the eve of the elections, Atta said former Mujaheddin commanders deserved an opportunity to serve in the new legislature. "Some of the Mujaheddin had militias and weapons, which they used at one point to do their duty for their motherland. ... Today the real Mujaheddin have disarmed," claimed Atta, an ethnic Tajik who has resisted Karzai's efforts to extend the central government's influence in northern Afghanistan. Final election results are not expected until mid-October.

IWPR'S AFGHAN PRESS MONITOR, No. 157, 19/09/ 2005

Seizures and Arrests

Russian police seize heroin in Moscow Region

About 8 kg of heroin have been seized from two Tajik nationals and an unemployed Russian national in Moscow

Region, RIA news agency reported on 12 September, quoting a source in the regional law-enforcement agencies. On 11 September a total of 7.637 kg of heroin was seized from the three men in the town of Lyubertsy. Possible trafficking channels are being investigated, the report said.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Text of report by RIA), 12/09/2005

Russia: Chelyabinsk Region worried by inflow of drugs from Kazakhstan

There are 40 active criminal groups in Chelyabinsk Region involved in organization and maintenance of drug trafficking channels across the Russian-Kazakh border, the [Chelyabinsk Region] governor's press service told RIA today. "The dominant feature of the drug trafficking landscape in Chelyabinsk Region is the persisting flow of Afghan heroin and marijuana smuggled from Kazakhstan, as well as continuing development of new drug trafficking channels and tricks," the press service said. Some 355 kg of drugs has been seized in Chelyabinsk Region since the beginning of the year and most of them were of foreign make, the service added. Drug-related criminal charges have been brought up against 976 people. The regional directorate of the Federal Service for Control Over the Trafficking of Narcotics says 140,000 residents of Chelyabinsk Region have tried drugs at least once and 30,000 people take them on a regular basis.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Text of report by RIA), 12/09/2005

Over 50 kg of drugs seized in Tajikistan in a week

Heroin accounted for nearly 19 kg of the seized drugs, the ministry's press centre has told Asia-Plus. According to data from the ministry, 19 cases of drug trafficking were discovered during this period. In all, 18 Tajik nationals, including a woman, were arrested on suspicions of selling and illegally storing drugs. The source also said that there were three Afghan nationals, five residents of [northern] Soghd Region, six inhabitants of [southern] Khatlon Region and three residents of Dushanbe. Criminal proceedings have been launched into the cases and investigations are under way.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Text of report by Asia-Plus), 12/09/2005

Huge quantity of drugs seized in several Afghan provinces

Security officials claimed seizing a huge quantity of narcotics in different areas of the country over the past two days. Two tons of hashish were seized in eastern Khost Province after an overnight encounter, security officials said on Monday. Sadeq Tarakhel, a provincial security chief, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the security forces cordoned off the Babrak Tana area following a tip-off that some people were trying to smuggle a huge quantity of hashish to neighbouring Pakistan. He said the smugglers opened fire on the security forces. The exchange of fire continued for an hour but the smugglers made good their escape, leaving behind the contraband. In a separate incident in western Herat, security officials captured 69 kg of opium on the Herat-Badghis highway. Mohammad, press officer of the Herat police headquarters, told this news agency that two smugglers had been arrested. Some 300 kg of heroin was recovered from an abandoned house in Khak-e Jabbar District of Kabul, deputy chief of counter-narcotics department Abdollah Stanakzai said. Dad Mohammad Rasa, a press officer of the Interior Ministry, said the drugs were recovered in the Band-e Ghazi area of Khak-e Jabbar District. Elsewhere, security officials in western Badghis Province claimed arresting four smugglers along with 1,710 kg of opium near Morghab District of the province. Badghis security chief Col Abdol Hamid said the drugs were packed in two trucks bound for Badghis Province from Mazar-e Sharif, capital of northern Balkh Province.

BBC Monitoring South Asia (Text of report by Pajhwok), 12/09/2005

Russian police seize 57 kg of heroin in Volga republic

Anti-narcotics agents from Tajikistan and the Russian republic of Tatarstan have seized a total of 57 kg of heroin during joint operations, ITAR-TASS news agency reported on 13 September quoting the Tatarstan drug control authorities. The agency was told that agents from Tajikistan tracked down a group of drug smugglers in August and asked for help from their counterparts in Tatarstan. An agent from Tatarstan infiltrated the group, as a result of which a Tajik citizen was arrested and 5 kg of heroin, delivered to Kazan from Dushanbe via Moscow, was seized. Another three batches of heroin weighing 30 kg, 10 kg and 12 kg were seized during subsequent operations, the agency said.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source of report ITAR-TASS), 13/09/2005

Serbian customs officials seize 82 kg of heroin at Bulgarian border crossing

Members of the [Serbian] Customs Administration have seized 82 kilograms of heroin at the Gradina border crossing [with Bulgaria], whose value on the [Western] European market is around 1.5m euros. The head of the customs in Dimitrovgrad, Nikola Toncevic, told FoNet that the heroin had been discovered at around midnight in a lorry designed for the transport of motor vehicles. He added that a Bulgarian national, Mitko Todorov, was behind the wheel. The

heroin was packed in 150 packages hidden in the vehicle's cabin. It was discovered at a cargo terminal at the border crossing during a regular customs check of the truck, which was entering Serbia from Bulgaria.

BBC Monitoring European (Text of report by FoNet), 13/09/2005

Law enforcers bust Russia-Latvia heroin transit route

In August, law enforcement institutions managed to eliminate a heroin transit route from Russia to Latvia, and detain two persons who had been smuggling heroin into Latvia for some time, as LETA learned from the State Police's Press and Public Relations Department. The police points out that during the international operation the employees of the law enforcement institutions of the two countries involved destroyed a heroin transit channel from the Central Asia region to Russia and from Russia to Latvia and other Baltic states. Cooperating with the Russia's Federal Service of the Russian Federation for Control of Circulation, the State Police officers implemented an international operation during which two persons were detained on August 12 in the Russian city of Samara. 1.109 kilos of heroin were found with the detained.

Latvian News Agency 16/09/2005

Tajik guards net 30 kg of heroin on Afghan border

Tajik border guards foiled an attempt to smuggle a large batch of Afghan drugs in a section guarded by the Moskva border detachment [in southern Tajikistan] last night, a reliable source at the State Border Protection Committee under the Tajik government has told Asia-Plus. "The border guards were forced to open fire on the drug smuggler because he tried to put up armed resistance during an operation to detain him," the source said. "As a result, the drug smuggler, whose identity is being established, was killed... A total of 30 kg of heroin and a Makarov pistol were found at the scene of the incident," it added. About 800 kg of drugs, with heroin accounting for more than half of it, have been seized on the Tajik-Afghan border since the start of the year.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Text of report by Asia-Plus), 16/09/2005

Turkish police seize more than 60 kilos of heroin

Turkish police seized 65.4 kg heroin in three separate operations in Baskale and Gurpinar townships in eastern city of Van, it was reported on Friday [16 September]. Sources stated that teams of Van narcotics department, acting on a tip off, stopped a car at Gurpinar police checkpoint. Eighteen point three kg of heroin hidden in secret parts of the car was seized. In a separate operation, teams of Baskale security department seized 41.9 kg heroin hidden under a truck and found 5.1 kg heroin on a person said to be a drug smuggler.

BBC Monitoring European (Text of report by Anatolia), 16/09/2005

Tajik drug agency urges closer CIS ties to fight drugs

The Tajik Drug Control Agency (DCA) believes that closer cooperation between the CIS power-wielding agencies is one of the effective ways to counter the spread of drugs from Afghanistan. The head of the DCA public relations department, Police Maj Avaz Yuldoshev, voiced this position of the agency's leadership during an interview with an ITAR-TASS correspondent today. He said that since the start of 2005, DCA officers had carried out 32 large-scale joint operations with their colleagues from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and some other CIS states, which resulted in the seizure of nearly a tonne of drugs, with heroin accounting for almost half of it. The source said the operatives involved in the operations had to repeatedly engage in armed clashes with organized criminal groups. Therefore, along with drugs seizures, a large arsenal consisting of 13 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 58 grenades and about 4,000 pieces of ammunition have also been confiscated. The DCA is also closely cooperating with Tajik border guards. About 60 kg of heroin has been seized as a result of joint search and operational measures in the Moskva and Farkhor sections of the [Tajik-Afghan] border over the past week alone. In all, Tajikistan's law-enforcement and power-wielding structures seized over 3.5 tons of drugs, nearly two-thirds of which is heroin, in the first eight months this year.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Text of report by ITAR-TASS), 18/09/2005