



Narcotics, Organized Crime & Security in Eurasia

Weekly Digest: October 4-10 2004

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

Quote of the week: "People believe that, to achieve sustainable peace and stability, they have to take some risks. They have placed all their hopes on this election." - Haji Din Mohammed, Governor of Nangarhar Province, on locals' attitude to their election this week, IRIN News 08/10/04.

A semi-successful election

Harmid Karzai's vice-presidential candidate in the elections on Saturday, Ahmad Zia Masood, escaped unhurt from an assassination attempt. A bomb was detonated by remote control in Faizabad (Badakhshan), killing two people and wounding three in his convoy. Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali blamed the attempt on unspecified 'drug runners'.

www.alertnet.org, Reuters, "Druglords blamed for attack on Karzai's running mate", 07/10/04

15 of Afghanistan's presidential candidates boycotted the vote upon hearing concerns that the indelible ink used to prevent multiple voting could in fact be washed off easily.

Washington Times, 09/10/04, <http://www.afgha.com/?af=article&sid=46479>

The OSCE, however, has rejected their demand that the election be annulled, deeming their effort unfair to those who voted, "at great personal risk". The OSCE provided 230 observers for the election, who witnessed some irregularities but, overall, the organization praised the event. It seems that the initial anger of Karzai's rivals is dying off and some have moved in favour of a proposed commission to investigate the irregularities.

BBC, <http://www.afghannews.net/index.php?action=show&type=news&id=1044>, 10/10/04

The Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan issued a congratulatory press release to all Afghans, viewing Saturday's election as an encouraging sign of Afghans' appreciation for their country's political process. It is investigating the alleged problems with the indelible ink, the low level of awareness of the voting process by staff at polling booths and the violation of electoral rules by those continuing the campaign at the booths. It intends to issue a report on the election's success in two weeks, based on information gathered by its 2,300 observers.

FEFA press release, 10/10/04, <http://www.afgha.com/?af=article&sid=46510>

The handover moves closer

The handover of the Tajik border to the Tajik military edged closer this week. However, Tajik and Russian working groups have drawn up and approved draft documents on the handover. Putin had been scheduled to visit Dushanbe to sign a number of bilateral agreements on October 4-5 but his trip has been postponed until later this month.

eurasianet.org, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/tajikistan/hypermail/news/0001.shtml>, 04/10/04

Behind the Niyazov Curtain

Anecdotal evidence from observers in Turkmenistan continues to suggest that drug addiction is quite rampant. Heroin is easily found on the streets. The last figures published by the government for the number of drug users was in 2000 – assuming similar rates of addiction to the other Central Asian republics, it might be expected that there are 64,000 in Turkmenistan now. Such guessing is all that can be done in the current climate, however, with all statistics related to the drug trade. James Callahan, head of UNODC in Tashkent, has witnessed a relative opening up of Turkmen officials on drug issues recently, and expresses hope that a little more information might begin to flow. Meanwhile, the stories of personal tragedy continue to leak out...

IRIN, “Heroin use poses a growing challenge”, 05/10/04,
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=42839&SelectRegion=Central_Asia

An early indicator

Citing Afghanistan’s high production levels this year, an Uzbek anti-drug official said Uzbekistan has already witnessed a noticeable rise in the amount of drugs transiting the country. He also claimed that the drug addiction and HIV infection rates were stable, with more than 22,000 patients at drug clinics. So far this year the State Drug Control Commission has reported only 500 new addicts, compared with the normal yearly increase of 1,500-2,000.

Biznes-Vestnik Vostoka, via BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 07/10/04

More Russians in Kyrgyzstan

Russia is to increase the number of personnel at its Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan to 1,000 and move in more fighter aircraft and helicopters. The Russian military cited the situation in Afghanistan as the reason for its decision.

eurasianet.org, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/news/0006.shtml>, 08/10/04

Russia into CACO

ITAR-TASS reports that Russia plans to sign into treaties of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization when its summit is held in Dushanbe on October 17-18. An invitation to the summit has also been sent to Hamid Karzai for discussion of the drug threat and to discuss the possibilities for Afghanistan taking part in multilateral cooperation.

ITAR-TASS “Russia plans joining Central Asian regional organization”, 08/10/04

Tajik DCA expansion

Tajik President Rahmonov signed an edict on the opening of a representative office of the Tajik Drug Control Agency in Kazakhstan on Tuesday, with plans to open offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and in Afghanistan.

Asia-Plus, “Tajik DCA opens representative office in Kazakhstan”, 05/10/04

Kazakhs and Latvians, Unite

During his visit to Riga, the Kazakh Minister of Internal Affairs Zautbek Turisbekov signed a cooperation agreement with Latvia’s Minister of Interior Eriks Jekabsons, aimed at international terrorism, narcotics and psychotropic substances and organized crime. Their meeting included a discussion of prospects for collaboration between the two countries’ security services.

Latvian News Agency (LETA), “Latvian-Kazakh agreement on cooperation in fight against organized crime signed”, 09/10/04

Almost a whole border

Russia and Kazakhstan have agreed to the delimitation of almost their entire 7,800km border, following a meeting between the countries’ prime ministers. Eight disputed areas remain, however.

ITAR-TASS, <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=1326352&PageNum=0>, 08/10/04

An FATF for Central Asia

Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia and Tajikistan have set up a Eurasian Group, modeled on the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering, in an effort to minimize criminal income in Central Asia. The head of Russia's Federal Financial Monitoring Service, Viktor Zubkov, was named as head of the new entity.

Interfax Weekly Business Report, "6 countries, including Russia, set up Eurasian Group", 06/10/04

And now a migration route?

Russian troops on the Tajik-Afghan border have become increasingly concerned by 'irregular' migrant flows into Tajikistan. Although not apparently involved in drug trafficking, the number of illegal crossings prevented increased by 70% in the first nine months of this year, compared to last year. For example, in the week to October 5th, two Iranians, a Turk and a Bangladeshi were detained.

ITAR-TASS, <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=1313581&PageNum=0>, 05/10/04

Welcome to the club

On October 5 Tajikistan became Interpol's 182nd member, following a vote at the organization's General Assembly in Mexico.

eurasianet.org, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/tajikistan/hypermail/news/0005.shtml>, 08/10/04

Seizures and Arrests

Without specifics

Officials from Tajikistan's Interior Ministry declared that police had seized 90kg of drugs in the country in the week to October 5, 70kg of which was heroin.

Asia-Plus, "90 kilograms of drugs intercepted in Tajikistan over the last week", 05/10/04

5.5 kg of cannabis were seized from the car of a Tajik at the Sharshar traffic police checkpoint in Khatlon, Tajikistan on Friday.

Asia-Plus Information Agency, 08/10/04

Canine bust

Two Kazakhs were detained at the Kargaly customs post in the Aktyubinsk Region of Kazakhstan while attempting to transport 20kg of heroin into Russia. A sniffer dog detected the drugs in a compartment in their car's petrol tank and hollow parts. The heroin was factory-wrapped and produced in Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan Today, via BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 07/10/04

Recidivists in Uzbekistan

A "group of people" in Uzbekistan's northwestern two of Urganch were arrested and 3.5kg seized, two of them with previous convictions and who had been released from prison under a previous amnesty.

Inson va Qonun, via BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 05/10/04