



Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia Weekly Digest: 27 February - 6 March 2006

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.

Afghanistan to bolster border security with three neighbours

Afghanistan on Tuesday inked pacts with three of its neighbours to bolster border security at a conference in Qatar amid warnings of growing links between insurgents and the region's drug trade. "There have been three agreements signed between Afghanistan on one side, and Iran, Pakistan and China on the other side -- that means three of the major neighbours," Tom Koenigs, who heads the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), told AFP.

Agence France Presse, 28.2.2006

British forces stay away as Afghan opium war begins

The convoys are formed, line after line, in the swirling dust of Lashkar Gar airfield - bulldozers, oil tankers and trucks bristling with guns. Afghanistan's opium war is about to begin. The force to eradicate the poppy fields arrived at the capital of Helmand province from Kabul yesterday, and the programme will be under way in time, it is expected, for the weekend visit of President George Bush.

The Independent, 1.3.2006

Bush-Karzai: Lots of Kabul, Ignored Drugs Funding Bin Laden, Says Former White House Drug Spokesman; Big Part of Reason Still at Large

"President Bush and Afghanistan President Karzai at today's surprise news conference in Kabul talked a lot about democracy and sovereignty but ignored Afghanistan's role as the world's number one opium and heroin producer. Those funds from drug warlords funding al Qaeda and bin Laden are a big part of the reason America's worst enemy is still at large," said Robert Weiner, former spokesman for the White House National Drug Policy Office.

U.S. Newswire, 1.3.2006

Pakistan committed to making country poppy-free - PM

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz Wednesday [1 December] said the government was committed to make Pakistan a poppy-free country and called for an elaborate strategy to create mass awareness about drug addiction.

BBC Monitoring South Asia, (Source: Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency), 1.3.2006

US Report: Some Gains By Afghanistan In Fighting Drugs

Production and trafficking of opium accounts for fully one third of Afghanistan's economy but a 10% decline in output last year signaled a positive trend, a State Department report said Wednesday.

Dow Jones International News, 1.3.2006

Gulf News: Kabul eyes a strong security apparatus

The Afghanistan interior minister said his country aims to establish a modern and equipped security apparatus by 2010 with the aid of the international community. Moqbel Zarar Ahmad said at least 62,000 police officers will need training, as the country is set to engage in a long-term fight against drug trafficking and terrorism.

Gulf News, 3.3.2006

US says Turkey is narcotics-trafficking base

Turkey remains a major route, refining center and storage, production and staging area for the flow of heroin into Europe, the U.S. Department of State said in an annual report. However, it also noted that the Turkish government has been devoting significant financial and human resources to counter-narcotics activities.

Turkish Daily News, 3.3.2006

An in-depth look at the Russian press, March 3: State Drug Control Service misrepresents statistics deliberately - expert

The UN Office for Drug Control (ODC) has urged the Russian government to allocate funds for anti-drug campaigning. Independent experts consider UN data exaggerated and say the Office draws misrepresented data from the State Drug Control Agency. The official statistics says 500,000 people use narcotics, whereas the UN ODC annual report presented in Russia Thursday said there might be 6 million drug addicts, or 4% of the population. The Federal Drug Control Service called the reported data "absolutely genuine," but refused to comment. "The 4% figure is irrelevant," said Lev Levinson, head of the New Drug Policy public organization. "The number of drug addicts in Russia, for example, those who use heroin, has slumped in the past year. The UN Office does not carry out any research in Russia, it draws the figures from official sources, this time from a federal program," he said. Last year, the UN ODC said there were 3.5-4 million drug addicts in Russia. "The State Drug Control Service provides official data to the Russian government," Levinson said. "The body for a few years spoke about 3.5-4 million drug users in Russia, yet put 6 million in the federal program." According to the expert, "this was done on purpose to enable the State Drug Control Service to report a fictitious 20% decline in the number of drug addicts in the future." Yet, the authors of the report admit their estimates are "not reliable enough" simply because "no systematic nationwide research on drug addiction is conducted in Russia."

RIA Novosti, 3.3.2006

As Bush visits Pakistan, security conditions deteriorate in key province

US President George Bush arrived March 3 in Pakistan, where he is expected to discuss Islamabad's role in the effort to defeat the Islamic militant insurgency in neighboring Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a prominent expert has asserted that Islamabad's repressive policies in the restive province of Baluchistan are undermining efforts to contain Islamic radical activity in the strategically important region.

Bush is scheduled to meet with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on March 4. Pakistan has faced growing international pressure over its allegedly lax stance on Taliban and al Qaeda militants. Afghan President Hamid Karzai recently presented Musharraf with evidence of Pakistani involvement in arming and training Taliban guerillas, who have been increasingly active in Afghanistan. Karzai also relayed information that top Taliban leaders, including Mullah Omar, were operating freely on Pakistani territory. Musharraf rejected the evidence as outdated.

Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah was quoted by Daily Times of Pakistan as saying Mullah Omar has been spotted "time and again" in Quetta, Baluchistan's capital. (passage omitted)

Security conditions in Baluchistan are "rapidly deteriorating," according to Sabina Ahmed, the South Asia Project Director at Crisis Group. Over the last year, there have been 4,000 arrests and at least 150 civilian deaths -- many of them women and children. Government forces have used harsh methods to combat nationalist insurgents, leading to large-scale population displacement. In one of Baluchistan's districts, Dera Bugti, an estimated 85 percent of the residents have fled, Ahmed said. (passage omitted)

Musharraf and other officials in Islamabad have cast the Baluch nationalist movement as under the control of Islamic radicals. The HRCP / Human Rights Commission of Pakistan / report calls such allegations "absurd." Ahmed echoed the HRCP's analysis, asserting that Baluch nationalists have a secular orientation, adding that Islamic radicalism is "the greatest threat to their secular culture."

In alienating Baluch nationalists, Ahmed added, Pakistan is complicating efforts to defeat the Islamic radical insurgency in Afghanistan. "They [Baluch nationalists] are the only way to counter the Taliban" in Baluchistan, Ahmed said. In addition, the HCRP report indicated that the government's campaign against Baluch nationalists was diverting resources from operations designed to contain Islamic militants.

(<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/recaps/articles/eav030306.shtml>)

Eurasianet.org, 3.3.2006

UN Drug agency promotes 'alternative development' for curbing poppy cultivation in Afghanistan

In a report released on March 1 in New York, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) says almost all of the heroin entering Europe comes from Afghanistan. The INCB also says that the strategy of encouraging opium-poppy farmers to switch to other crops is not working and that an "alternative development" approach is needed. Over the years, the INCB has searched for the best ways to encourage farmers growing plants used for producing illegal drugs to get out of that lucrative business.

A key focus has been on opium-poppy growers in Afghanistan and coca growers in Latin America. In both cases, international development agencies have urged the farmers to switch to food crops-- like wheat or corn -- instead, despite the fact that can be much less profitable.

But in a report issued today in New York and based upon data collected in 2005, the Vienna-based INCB tacitly acknowledges that this "crop substitution" strategy has largely failed.

The report recommends instead that governments and international agencies now switch to what it calls a "comprehensive alternative-development approach." That is an approach that would include not only the cultivation of alternative crops, but would emphasize transport and infrastructure development, education, health care, security, stability, and good governance in opium-poppy- and coca-growing areas. (passage omitted) The alternative-development approach, the INCB report says, should also take into account socioeconomic conditions, geographical factors, marketing, trade, government services, and the way law and order is applied in drug-growing parts of the world (passage omitted).

RFE/RL Afghanistan Report Vol. 5, No. 7, 6.3.2006

Pakistan fights its own 'Taleban'

(By Aamer Ahmed Khan, BBC News, Karachi) Fierce clashes between Pakistani security forces and tribal militants in the first week of March in Pakistan's north-western region have led to dozens of casualties on both sides. Security forces fought their fiercest battles to date in the North Waziristan area on 5 March after tribal militants took control of key government buildings including telephone exchanges. Presidential spokesman Maj Gen Shaukat Sultan said on 5 March that the militants had been flushed out from government buildings and the area was under complete control of the security forces. His claims are hotly contested by locals and independent analysts who say the situation is anything but in control. They describe the situation as the worst since the Pakistan army moved three years ago into the area, where many of the tribal militants call themselves Taleban. (passage omitted)

The reasons, / Khalid Aziz, former chief secretary of neighbouring North West Frontier Province/ says, have as much to do with the international situation as they do with the "mishandling of the situation" by Pakistan. (...) When Pakistan moved thousands of troops into the tribal areas in 2003 to help stem the flow of Afghan Taleban and al-Qaeda remnants, it continued to follow the age-old "carrot and stick" policy. Local observers say the security forces were fairly successful in stemming the flow of foreign militants as well as keeping local tribesmen in check. "In doing so, Pakistan kept its focus on foreign - mostly Arab and Central Asian - militants," says journalist Ilyas Khan, editor of The Herald magazine. "The administration was under instructions not to impede the movements of local and Afghan Taleban who kept consolidating themselves in the area," says Mr Khan.

The strategy, say local observers, was to keep the Pakistani Taleban happy by conceding more and more administrative control to them. In return, the government sought guarantees that they would not harbour foreign militants in the area. The BBC's Rahimullah Yusufzai says that the terms of this truce were loaded heavily in favour of the Taleban. It allowed them to do pretty much what they wanted without conceding much to the security forces, he says. But, apparently frustrated with the Taleban's continuing assistance to foreign fighters, Pakistani security forces suddenly abandoned their policy of accommodation. Instead they started resorting to the use of indiscriminate force against all those suspected of harbouring foreign militants. "This resulted in a backlash which saw the Taleban turn against local

jirgas [tribunals] that were helping the security forces maintain peace in the area," says Ilyas Khan. The BBC's Dilawar Khan Wazir, one of the many journalists driven out of the area by the militants, says nearly 100 pro-government elders and tribesmen were killed by the Taleban through 2005. "There is no jirga in South Waziristan any more which is a unique and unprecedented situation," he says. Ilyas Khan points to an even more worrying development for the authorities. "The insurgency in the tribal belt is gradually moving towards the settled areas," he says. According to Ilyas Khan, the area of Tank - the last major town on the boundary of the settled and tribal areas - has also "fallen" to the Taleban recently. "There is not a single video and audio store or an internet cafe left in the area," he says. "They have been wiped out by the Taleban who have also made the local police powerless and virtually ineffective." (...)
(http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/4779476.stm)

BBC News, 6.3.2006

Seizures and Arrests

Kazakh security agents seize 50 kg of heroin in south

Officers of the South Kazakhstan Regional Department of the National Security Committee have seized 50 kg of heroin from the house of a resident of the Turbat village in Kazygurt District of the same region.

BBC Monitoring Newsfile (Source: Interfax-Kazakhstan) 28.2.2006

Major hauls reduce heroin availability in Russia - official

Heroin is becoming less easily available in Russia because of a rise in the quantities seized, head of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service Viktor Cherkosov told journalists today after a meeting of his department's board, which discussed its performance in 2005. Cherkosov explained that 4.7 tonnes of heroin were seized last year, compared to just 6 kg in 1995. "We are aiming to suppress the channels through which heroin is coming into Russia," Cherkosov said.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source: ITAR-TASS) 28.2.2006

Kyrgyz drug squad seizes 3 kg heroin from Tajik national

Officers from the Kyrgyz Drug Control Agency's (DCA) southern directorate have seized 3 kg of heroin from a Tajik national in southern Batken Region, the AKIpress news agency reported on 28 February.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: AKIpress news agency website, Bishkek), 28.2.2006

Opium, heroin seized in Balkh raids

More than 200 kilograms of opium and an unknown quantity of heroin were seized in two separate raids in the northern Balkh province, security officials said on Tuesday.

Pajhwok Afghan News, 28.2.2006

Authorities in southern Kazakhstan seize 33 kilograms of heroin

Authorities in southern Kazakhstan seized 33 kilograms (73 pounds) of heroin, an official said Wednesday.

Associated Press Newswires, 1.3.2006

Frontier Corps seizes ammunition

Frontier Corps Panjgor on Tuesday seized an 8 MM rifle and 18 kg of heroin during a raid at Mashkail in Washuk district, an FC press release here Wednesday said. The raid was conducted on a tip-off. No arrest was made.

Drug dealers flogged in Iran

Eight convicted drug dealers were flogged in public in southern Iran on Thursday, the official news agency IRNA reported. A judiciary official in the southern province of Bushehr, Hedayatollah Rahavi, said the men were given between 70 and 100 lashes.

Agence France Presse, 2.3.2006

US State Department pleased with Slovenia's drug control efforts

A US State Department report on narcotics control praises Slovenia's efforts to counter drug trafficking. Although it is neither a major drug producer nor a major transit country, the government is aware that the country is an attractive potential transit country, and it continues to pursue active counter-narcotics policies, says the report dubbed "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report", which was released on Thursday [2 March]. Slovenia's EU membership in May 2004, and its goal of attaining full Schengen membership as soon as possible, resulted in a continued intensive focus on border controls in 2005, according to the State Department. The report points out that heroin from Afghanistan, which transits Turkey, continues to be smuggled via the "Balkan route" through Slovenia to Western Europe; heroin was the leading confiscated drug in 2005. Moreover, Slovenia's only seaport of Koper is a potential transit point for South American cocaine and North African cannabis destined for Western Europe. The document states that law enforcement agencies seized 1,166 tablets of ecstasy in the first 11 months of 2005 compared with 198 in 2004. In 2005, authorities seized slightly less than 24 kilo of heroin, compared with almost 150 kilo in 2004. (passage omitted) In the first 11 months of 2005, the Slovene authorities registered 1,262 criminal acts involving the production of and trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and the facilitation of illegal drug use. There were several substantial seizures of drugs in the first 11 months of 2005, with three seizures at border crossings constituting the majority of heroin seizures for the year, the report concludes.

BBC Monitoring European (Source: Slovene news agency STA) 2.3.2006

Some one kilo of heroin seized in Tver Region

Officers of the Russian Federal Service Drug Control Department have confiscated in the Tver Region 940 grams of heroin from residents of a village of the Torzhok district, Itar-Tass learnt at the department on Thursday.

ITAR-TASS World Service, 2.3.2006

Opium-free in two months, vows governor of Afghanistan's top poppy province

The governor of Afghanistan's Helmand province, the main producer of the country's huge opium crop, has vowed to destroy all the opium poppies in his province in two months.

Agence France Presse, 3.3.2006

Kazakh police seize over 23 t of drugs in 2005

The Kazakh law-enforcement bodies seized over 23 tonnes of drugs in 2005. "The country's law-enforcement bodies seized over 23 tonnes of various drugs from illegal circulation, including 626 kg of heroin in 2005," the chairman of the Interior Ministry's committee for fighting drug trade and monitoring the circulation of drugs, Anatoliy Vyborov, told a news conference today.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency) 3.3.2006

Five detained in Uzbek capital on suspicion of drug dealing

Five suspected drug dealers were detained in a special operation conducted by police in Sirgali district of Tashkent city

on 2 March, Uzbek TV reported the following day. "The criminal group comprised five people, including two citizens of Tajikistan," the television said. The results of examination showed that the drug seized from them as material evidence was 59 kg 213 g of opium, the report said. Criminal cases were opened against the five detainees under the relevant articles of the Uzbek criminal code, the report added.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: Uzbek Television First Channel) 3.3.2006

Narcotics are being transported from Asia to Europe through Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan's Occupied Territories, U.S. State Department's report states

Azerbaijan is located along a drug transit route running from Afghanistan and Central Asia to Western Europe, and from Iran to Russia and Western Europe. Domestic consumption and cultivation of narcotics are low, but levels of use are increasing. (passage omitted) Azerbaijan emerged as a narcotics transit route several years ago because of the disruption of the "Balkan Route" due to the wars in and among the countries of the former Yugoslavia. According to the Government of Azerbaijan (GOAJ), the majority of narcotics transiting Azerbaijan originates in Afghanistan and follows one of four primary routes: Afghanistan-Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia-western Europe; Afghanistan-Iran-Nagorno Karabakh and occupied territories of Azerbaijan-Armenia-Georgia-Western Europe; Afghanistan-Iran-Azerbaijan -Russia; or Afghanistan-Central Asia-the Caspian Sea-Azerbaijan-Georgia-western Europe. Azerbaijan shares a 611-km frontier with Iran, and its border control forces are insufficiently trained and equipped to patrol it effectively. Iranian and other traffickers are exploiting this situation. (passage omitted) Domestic consumption continues to grow with the official GOAJ estimate of drug addicts reaching 18,000 persons. Unofficial figures are estimated at approximately 200,000 to 300,000, 75 percent of which are heroin addicts. Students make up a large share of total drug abusers at 30-35 percent. The majority of heroin use is in the Lankaran District (64.6 percent), which borders Iran. Drug use among young women has been rising.

The GOAJ has taken the lead on counter narcotics coordination within the GUAM group of countries (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova). As part of this initiative, the GOAJ established the Virtual Law Enforcement Center (VLEC) in Baku and conducted joint narcotics interdiction projects with the other GUAM member countries. During 2005, the Ministry of Internal Affairs registered approximately 1660 cases of drug-related offenses. During the first seven months of 2005, authorities confiscated 205.2 kilograms of narcotics, not including psychotropic substances and drug precursors. The confiscated narcotics included 12 kilograms of heroin, 716 grams of the poppy straw, 19 kilograms of hashish, 139 kilograms of marijuana, 10 ampoules and 11,073 pills of psychotropic drugs. Between January to June of 2005, the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee investigated 33 drug-related offenses, confiscated 15,722 kilograms of narcotics, including 4,872 kilograms of marijuana, 5 kilograms of hashish, 284 grams of heroin, and 110 psychotropic substances (in the form of ampoules, capsules and tablets). The police lack basic equipment and have little experience in modern counternarcotics methods. Border control capabilities on the border with Iran and Azerbaijan's maritime border units are inadequate to prevent narcotics smuggling.

Corruption remains a significant problem. In 2005, the GOAJ adopted a charter for an anticorruption commission and staffed that commission. However, active judges sit as members on the Commission, and according to Azerbaijan's Constitution, only retired judges should sit on the Commission. (passage omitted).

Turan Information Agency (Azerbaijan), 4.3.2006

Kuwait Times: Police seize record drug haul

Kuwaiti security forces seized 187 kilos of pure heroin in one of the country's biggest ever drug busts and arrested a Pakistani man, the Kuwait News Agency (Kuna) reported yesterday. The heroin was hidden inside a shipment of water pumps that had come into the country via ship, said the director of the Hawally Criminal Investigation Department, Colonel Ahmed Abdullah Al-Sabah. He said that police in Ramadan (November) got wind of a large shipment of heroin bound for Kuwait. The water pumps, a common item imported into Kuwait, were intercepted after they were brought into the country's main Shuwaikh Port early yesterday and then transported to Khaitan. An undercover officer then approached the man pretending to want to buy heroin.

Kuwait Times, 5.4.2006

Bulgaria seizes 95 kg of heroin headed for Germany

Bulgarian customs officers seized over 95 kg (210 pounds) of heroin found in a truck travelling from Turkey to

Germany through Bulgaria, officials said on Sunday. Customs agents at the Balkan state's border with Serbia found the drugs in the truck's cabin. They said it was worth more than 17 million leva (\$10.46 million).

Reuters News, 5.5.2006

Russian drugs police seize large batch of heroin in Siberia

Russian drugs police have seized about 200 kg of heroin from Tajik dealers in Perm, Interfax news agency reported on 6 March.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 6.3.2006

Tajik police seize opium haul in south

Officers from the Tajik law-enforcement agencies seized over 44 kg of raw opium in Danghara District of Khatlon Region yesterday. A source within the Interior Ministry's directorate for fighting illegal drug trafficking has told Asia-Plus that a VAZ-2109 car driven by a 49-year-old resident of Hamadoni District, Doniyor Shukurov, was stopped at the Shar-Shar traffic police checkpoint.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: Tajik news agency Asia-Plus) 6.3.2006

Kazakh police detain suspected Kyrgyz drug trafficker

Officers of the Kazakh Interior Ministry committee for fighting drugs have detained a Kyrgyz citizen as she was trafficking 1.02 kg of heroin in the territory of Zhambyl District of Almaty Region on the Almaty-Bishkek road.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: Interfax-Kazakhstan) 6.3.2006

Kyrgyz police arrests Tajik opium dealer

Officers of the Kyrgyz Drug Control Agency have seized over 13 kg of opium from a Tajik native in Bishkek, the AKIpress news agency reported on 6 March.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source: AKIpress news agency website) 6.3.2006