



Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia Weekly Digest: 14-21 November 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.

Eurasia insight: Islamic militant insurgency in Afghanistan experiencing “iraqization”

(by Claudio Franco) (...) The last few months have witnessed a spike in Taliban attacks in southern and eastern Afghan provinces, including Helmand, Khost and Kunar. That suicide bombings have become an increasingly common occurrence is a source of major concern to some political and military analysts. To date, the worst such attack came on September 28, when a suicide bomber on a motorcycle killed eight Afghan army soldiers and a civilian bus driver near a military training center in Kabul. (...) It was not until the summer of 2004 that the first known suicide bombing occurred. In recent months, Islamic militants have also started attacking Afghan civilians who are perceived to be cooperating with either the US military or the Afghan government. The recent surge in violence has coincided with Afghanistan’s prolonged-parliamentary elections process. (...)

The Taliban tactics seem designed to dispel the impression that the legislative election can foster stability in the country. Accordingly, President Hamid Karzai’s administration has seemed eager to minimize the strategic implications of the attacks. Political analysts identify 2004 as a pivotal year for the Islamic militant insurgency in Afghanistan. Between the time of the Taliban’s ouster in late 2001 and 2004, militant bands tended to stage small-scale hit-and-run raids. Since then, however, militant operations have become increasingly complex and their ability to project influence has expanded. A Khost-based analyst, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that militants were offering substantial bounties to people or groups that killed or kidnapped foreigners or government officials. The increasing effectiveness of militant operations has played a significant role in intimidating Afghans in southern provinces. “This [intimidation] has resulted in a drop-out rate of approximately 50 percent among ANA [Afghanistan National Army] recruits in the region,” the analyst said. “Soldiers are afraid of the bounties being offered, and [they believe] their salary does not compensate the risks.” Farmers in rural Khost Province report that a bounty of roughly 15,000 Pakistani rupees (about \$250) is offered for the assassination of Afghan government officials, or civilians working with the US Army. A bounty of up to 100,000 Pakistani rupees (approximately \$1,700) is offered for the killing of a foreigner, whether soldier or civilian. The “Iraqization” of the Afghan insurgency does not appear to be accidental. For the last two months or so, a steady stream of reports indicate that militants trained in Iraq have made their way to Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the help of Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda terrorist network. Sources close to Afghan security forces in the eastern Khost Province say they have information that Arab trainers are working in training centers along the desolate Pakistani-Afghan border. Islamic militants reportedly continue to enjoy a safe haven in the tribal areas of Pakistan. According to the sources, these Arab trainers have helped indoctrinate new recruits on the “successes” experienced in Iraq, and on the effectiveness of new tactics, including suicide bombings and the targeting of Afghans. Arab operatives in Pakistan are also believed to be responsible for offering bounties on the lives of Afghan government officials and foreigners. (...)

According to a Taliban source, the improved operational capabilities are partly a byproduct of greater cooperation among various militant groups. In particular, forces loyal to two notorious warlords, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, supposedly entered into a tactical alliance in May with the Taliban and al Qaeda. Well-placed sources close to Afghan security forces say that militants now operate in detachments of 15-20 guerrillas and tend to be led by an Arab. To secure sufficient manpower for militant operations, Arab operatives are offering large cash payments to local warlords, who are in turn responsible for quickly providing reinforcements for those militants killed, wounded or otherwise incapacitated during raids.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav110805.shtml>

EurasiaNet Weekly Update, posted on 08/11/05

UN starts anti-AIDS campaign in Russia

The United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF and the UN's HIV/AIDS program today launched the Russian branch of their global campaign against the epidemic. Carel de Rooy, UNICEF's representative in Russia, told journalists in Moscow that the campaign -- called "Unite For Children, Unite Against AIDS" -- aims to draw attention to the growing impact of the epidemic on children in Russia. He said the campaign will work to raise awareness, provide HIV-positive children with treatment, and fight the strong stigma and discrimination associated with HIV in Russia. According to UNICEF, more than 100 new HIV infections are registered every day in Russia, making the country the site of one of the world's fastest-growing HIV epidemics. Eighty percent of HIV-positive Russians are under 30 years old.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/09F4A5A1-8B34-4D64-AAE5-50B3DE1768BF.html>

RFE/RL, 14/11/05

Russia, Uzbekistan to sign new accord

(By Claire Bigg, Moscow) Russian President Vladimir Putin is meeting Uzbek President Islam Karimov today for talks set to culminate with the signing of a treaty between both countries. (...) The talks will reportedly focus on ways to boost bilateral military and economic cooperation, and on the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional security group including Russia, China, Uzbekistan, and three other Central Asian countries. Putin and Karimov are also due to discuss Uzbekistan's possible admittance to the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec), a body seeking to establish a single economic zone comprising Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Belarus. Sergei Luzyanin, the president of the Foundation for Eastern Studies at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, tells RFE/RL's Russian Service that the growing rapprochement between both countries illustrates Russia's drive to strengthen its presence in Central Asia. "All this is linked to the strengthening of Russia's position in Central Asia through a rapprochement with its main player, Uzbekistan," Luzyanin says. "I do not exclude that the opening of a Russian military base in Uzbekistan in the near future may even be discussed."

The highlight of today's talks will be the planned signing of a treaty between Russia and Uzbekistan. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement today that the treaty -which builds on the previous Strategic Partnership Treaty signed by both countries in June 2004 - seeks to establish a "long-term foundation" for closer bilateral ties. According to media reports, in this new treaty, Russia pledges to support Uzbekistan in the event of unrest such as the 13 May violence in the Uzbek city of Andijon. Speaking to reporters ahead of talks, Karimov thanked Moscow for its support and said that "Russia will not regret signing this treaty today." Putin, in turn, called the treaty a "serious new step in the development of bilateral cooperation." (...) Moscow has displayed growing support for the Uzbek leader since the Andijon events. China has also thrown its weight behind Karimov. But Luzyanin says Russia's support for the authoritarian Uzbek president is unlikely to strain its ties with the West. "On the whole, if Russia will support Uzbekistan on the [question of] European sanctions, its position will not be significantly affected all the same. Of course, [such a position] will generate some additional criticism but it will not radically worsen Europe's relations with Russia because of Tashkent," Luzyanin says. In early October, the European Union announced that it will ban weapons exports to Uzbekistan. It will also refuse visas to certain officials. In July, the SCO urged the United States to set a timetable for pulling out its troops from bases in Uzbekistan. This call was swiftly followed by Uzbekistan's request that the United States withdraw its troops within six months. As a further sign of growing military ties, Russia and Uzbekistan held their first joint military exercises in September.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/65FC169F-18C8-4206-8089-8ECAC0D2155F.html>

RFE/RL, 14/11/05

Suicide attacks leave two dead

(Erada) – Two suicide car bombers on November 14 targeted ISAF forces in eastern Kabul, killing one German and one Afghan soldier and wounding a number of other Afghan and ISAF troops and civilians. The attacks happened on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, where United Nations offices and the ISAF base are located. General Mahboob Amiri, head of the Kabul police's rapid reaction force, said the suicide bombers were probably of Pakistani or Arab origin, but it was still unclear who had organised the attacks.

Erada is an independent daily run by the Afghan Media Resource Centre.

Taleban say they killed five US soldiers

(Cheragh) – Taleban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi on November 14 claimed that the group's militants had killed

five US soldiers in south Afghanistan. He said the incident took place the previous day in the Charchino district of the southern province of Uruzgan, when Taleban fighters attacked a US military convoy. The governor of Uruzgan, Haji Jan Mohammad, confirmed there had been an attack but denied the claim that the US military had lost five men. Instead, he said two Taleban commanders named Mullah Fahim and Muhibullah were arrested, another insurgent was killed and a fourth wounded.

Cheragh is an independent daily run by the Development and Democracy Association.

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 194, 15/11/05

Eurasia Insight: China joins the Great Central Asian base race

(A EurasiaNet commentary by Stephen Blank) Although apt to make public denials, China seems eager to expand its strategic influence in Central Asia. Officially, Chinese diplomats disavow a desire to establish alliances, military blocs and foreign bases. Nevertheless, earlier this year Chinese sources indicated that Beijing contacted Kyrgyz officials to explore the possibility of establishing a military base in Kyrgyzstan. As soon as the contacts were reported, however, Chinese officials strongly denied them and the matter was dropped. Beijing's interest did not seem to abate, though. After the Uzbek government in late July ordered US forces to leave the Karshi-Khanabad base, China made quiet, yet definite inquiries about gaining access to the base, according to Russian military analyst Vladimir Mukhin. This request galvanized Russian military policy in Central Asia, and Moscow quickly sought to ensure that it would potentially have sole access to Uzbekistan's military facilities. Russia and Uzbekistan concluded a mutual security pact on November 14 that seemingly allows for the establishment of a Russian base on Uzbek territory in the future. (...) Since 2001, Beijing has been a leading force in the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), under which China stands ready to go to the aid of another member state in case of attack – either conventional or terrorist in nature. For the last decade, if not more, the Chinese military as a whole (...) have undergone steady modernization. In addition, Chinese military units have participated in an array of joint exercises in recent years with troops from other SCO states, including the first-ever joint maneuvers held with Russian forces this past summer. Beijing has also increased its financial support for local militaries and has placed greater emphasis on defense-related diplomacy. It is quite clear that China fears American military presence in Central Asia. Chinese diplomats also say the presence of US forces constitute not just a potential threat, but is also a factor in regional instability. At the same time public statements by high-ranking Russian officials dating back at least to 2004 underscore Moscow's steadfast opposition to a Chinese military presence in Central Asia. If anything, Russia may oppose a growing strategic role for China more than it does the possibility of an extended American presence in the region.

Since Mukhin first disclosed that China sought an Uzbek base, nobody has stood up to either acknowledge the validity of the report, or to deny it. At the same time, the base request evidently was not repeated. Within the context of all that has occurred in Central Asia over the past year, there are several questions touching on China's strategic concerns and objectives for which there do not seem to be definitive answers. Such questions include: What kind of forces would Beijing deploy at a Central Asian base in the event that it ever established one in the region? Does China regard Russia as a threat, potential or actual, in Central Asia? And how has the United States reacted to the reports of Beijing's desire for a regional base? Beijing's search for a base has occurred against a backdrop of growing regional militarization and an intensification of great power rivalry in Central Asia. Thus, China's requests of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, even if made sotto voce, have served to heighten the geopolitical jockeying in the region. It also suggests a growing willingness to entertain the use of the military instrument to address regional issues. This cannot be considered a good sign. In seeking bases in Central Asia, China is announcing its intention to be seen as a great power, and not necessarily subtly. At least for the moment, that announcement can only contribute further to the already palpable unease and sense of insecurity that grips Central Asia from within and without.

Editor's Note: Stephen Blank is a professor at the US Army War College. The views expressed in this article do not in any way represent the views of the US Army, Defense Department or the US Government.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav111605.shtml>

EurasiaNet, 16/11/05

Taleban reject peace offer

(Hewad) – The Taleban have rejected a peace offer made by Afghan president Hamed Karzai. Taleban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said the militants they have the will to fight, and that their resolve will not weaken. A few days ago, the Afghan government called on all its opponents to abandon the insurgency and join the reconciliation process. Hewad is a state-run daily mostly in Pashto.

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 195, 16/11/05

Cooperation agreement signed with EU

(Islah) – Afghan foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah and his British counterpart Jack Straw, whose country currently holds the presidency of the European Union, signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in Strasbourg on November 16. President Hamed Karzai, who was present at the signing, called the agreement another major step by the EU to help with reconstruction, infrastructure creation, and democracy-building in Afghanistan. Islah is a state-run daily mostly in Dari.

Suicide attack leaves three dead in Kandahar

(Arman-e-Milli) – Three civilians were killed and seven others including three US soldiers were wounded when a suicide bomber rammed a car into a US military convoy in the southern province of Kandahar on November 16. The attack came two days after two suicide car bombs aimed at ISAF forces in Kabul. Officials blamed al-Qaeda and Taleban for the Kandahar attack. Militants have stepped up suicide attacks across Afghanistan in recent months. Arman-e-Milli is an independent daily run by a group of journalists.

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 196, 17/11/05

Thousands in fresh Azeri protest

Tens of thousands of demonstrators have protested in the Azeri capital, Baku, against the results and conduct of the 6 November parliamentary election. Protesters say the poll was rigged. International observers say it fell below democratic standard. Some demonstrators called for a permanent protest in the capital until the election results are annulled. Several hundred riot police watched the rally, the largest yet. Two previous protests passed off without incident. The authorities agreed to recounts in five out of 125 electoral districts, and are investigating fraud in more than 10 others. However, they say any changes will not affect the official result, which is due to be announced on 26 November. (...)

Up to 30,000 people attended the rally. At least 20,000 people attended the two previous protests. (...) The opposition has warned it may not abide by government restrictions on demonstrations when the official election results are published in a week's time. Freedom of assembly in Azerbaijan is limited - a government permit is required to rally, and demonstrations cannot last longer than two hours and are not allowed in the city centre.

(...) The opposition has appealed to the courts and is waiting for a ruling on the legitimacy of the election results. However, Mr Aliyev's government shows little sign of giving in, says the BBC's Natalia Antelava in Baku. And some in Azerbaijan believe the opposition has lost its chance of bringing serious change. The major opposition parties won 10 out of 125 parliamentary seats. President Ilham Aliyev's ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party won half the seats and controls many of those won by independents and smaller parties.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4452174.stm>

BBC News, 19/11/05

Explosion leaves one ISAF soldier dead

(Erada) – An explosion which tore through a convoy of vehicles of NATO-led security assistance force on November 18 in the Bagrami district east of the capital, Kabul killed one Portuguese soldier and wounded three others. A spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance force in Kabul confirmed the explosion, adding that the dead and wounded soldiers have been evacuated to the military hospital of the troops in Kabul. The spokesman added that they are attempting to determine whether it was an old mine or an improvised explosive device. The incident came after two suicide attacks on ISAF force in Kabul last week.

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 198, 20/11/05

Seizures and Arrests

Russian customs officials seize 6 kg of heroin in Volga region

Customs officials have seized over 6 kg of heroin at Orenburg airport, ITAR-TASS was told at the Volga Customs Directorate today. The drugs were discovered during a customs examination of passengers arriving on a flight from Kulob in Tajikistan. "This is the largest batch of heroin confiscated on international flights in the Volga Federal District

in the recent period," the directorate said. It added that the district has an extended border, nearly 2,500 km long, with Kazakhstan, and that "the drug traffickers use all kinds of transport". According to the directorate, "a month ago Orenburg customs officials seized a vehicle on the border in which the traffickers were trying to bring 369 kg of drugs into Russia, including 362 kg of heroin".

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source of report: ITAR-TASS), 14/11/2005

Russian police seize 37 kg of heroin in Urals region

Russian police have seized over 37 kg of heroin in Sverdlovsk Region, RIA news agency reported on 14 November quoting a spokesman for the Prosecutor-General's Office in the Urals Federal District. The suspects were "active members" of an organized criminal group consisting of Russian citizens and nationals of one of the CIS countries, he added.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source of report: RIA Novosti), 14/11/2005

Pakistan seizes nearly a tonne of morphine

Pakistani security forces have seized nearly one tonne of morphine as well as shipments of hashish and opium near the Afghan border, officials said Monday. The raid early Monday followed a tip-off that the drugs had been smuggled from Afghanistan to Pakistan's rugged Bibi Karaiz area close to the border, paramilitary commander Jamil Hasan told reporters. The raiding party recovered 942 kilograms (2,076 pounds) of morphine, 295 kilograms of hashish and 37 kilograms of opium, he said.

Agence France Press, 14/11/2005

Heroin haul seized in eastern Afghan province

A raiding unit of the counter-narcotics department of the Interior Ministry seized 100 kg of heroin during an operation in Achin District of eastern Nangarhar Province, officials said. A senior officer at the counter-narcotics department, Tajoddin, told Pajhwok Afghan News that following a tip-off, they raided a house in the Loy Kali area and recovered 100 kg of heroin packed in several bags. He said the contraband was destined for the capital, Kabul.

BBC Monitoring South Asia (Source of report: Pajhwok Afghan News), 15/11/2005

Tajik police seize over 30 kg of heroin in past week

Over the past week, 16 drug-related crimes have been uncovered in Tajikistan, Asia-Plus has been told at the press centre of the Tajik Internal Affairs Ministry. The source said over 67 kg of narcotics, including 34.7 kg of heroin and 32.4 kg of cannabis, had been seized during this period. The source also said that 15 Tajik citizens, two of whom were women, had been detained for involvement in drug trafficking.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source of report: Asia-Plus), 16/11/2005

UK Minister: NATO needs to help more to stop Afghan drugs trade

U.K. Defence Secretary John Reid Wednesday said NATO should take an active role in helping Afghan authorities stamp out the narcotics trade as the alliance expands its peacekeeping operations into the volatile south of the country next year. The U.K.-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, based near this village at the NATO base of Moenchengladbach will take a command role in the Afghan operation starting in May, just before NATO expands into the south, to replace U.S. troops in the southern sector. "The Americans are pursuing the objectives of counter-terrorism and we are pursuing an objective of reconstruction, and counter-narcotics," Reid said. He said the Afghans should continue to play the lead role in tackling the problem, but as NATO moves in the southern sector where opium production is endemic, he said the alliance force would provide close support for the Afghan authorities acting against drugs barons. "There should be no quarter for them, no toleration," Reid said.

Dow Jones International News, 16/11/2005

Afghan police arrest 2 African nationals with heroin

Afghan police arrested two African nationals [citizens of Nigeria and Ghana] on charge of smuggling heroin at Kabul International Airport on Thursday, an official said. The smugglers attempted to take the contraband to Dubai onward to Europe and America, he added. This is the third time that African nationals have been held on charge of drug trafficking at Kabul airport over the past three months. Police detained earlier eight Nigerian nationals on the same charge.

Xinhua News, 17/11/2005

Russian official gives details of drive against drug-trafficking

Over 129 tons of narcotic, psychotropic and other powerful substances have been confiscated in Russia in 2005, including over 3.5 t of heroin. These figures were revealed today by the head of the Russian Federal Service for Control over the Trafficking of Narcotics, Viktor Cherkesov. According to the federal service, almost 147,000 drug-related crimes have been prevented, which is 13.5 per cent higher than last year. The crime rate in drug-dealing has gone up by 40 per cent. In fighting against transnational drug trafficking, Cherkesov said that the top priority is "to build an anti-narcotic safety belt around Afghanistan in the shape of a system of preventing drug trafficking across the borders with that country as well as the borders of other countries which are situated along drug-trafficking routes". He stressed the importance of regional collaboration in Central Asia. In his view, one of the most effective ways of tackling the threat of drug-trafficking from Afghanistan has been the international preventive Kanal [channel] operations which have been carried out regularly since 2003. The operations are aimed at finding and eliminating drug-trafficking channels in regions directly bordering on Afghanistan. Fighting against drug money laundering is another important area of fighting against drug dealers, Cherkesov said. He described as a major success in this fight the arrest of a criminal gang whose members included staff of several Russian banks. According to the service, the criminal gang managed to legalise up to R400m of drug money every month.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source of report: ITAR-TASS), 17/11/2005

Crime gang arrested, 60kg of heroin seized outside Moscow

More than 63 kilograms of heroin has been seized in the Moscow Region and a drug-trafficking gang from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan broken up, the Federal Drug Control Service said Friday. "More than 15 members of the group, who were trying to transport heroin in trucks carrying fruit, were detained," the service said.

Ria Novosti, 18/11/2005

Gunbattle with drug traffickers in Afghanistan kills a policeman and wounds two

Police seized two tons of opium loaded into five Toyota Landcruisers after a gunbattle with drug traffickers in southern Afghanistan that killed one policeman and wounded two others, officials said. Six suspected smugglers of the narcotic were arrested after the clash late Friday on the main highway heading west from southern Kandahar city, said Ghulam Muhiddin, a local government administrator.

Associated Press Newswires, 19/11/2005

Two arrested with 50 kg heroin in northern Afghanistan

Police in the northern Konduz Province said they had arrested two people with 50 kg of heroin during an overnight operation in this provincial capital. Police chief Col Abdol Qahar told Pajhwok Afghan News the heroin was hidden in a residential house and the arrested people wanted to smuggle it to an unknown location.

Pajhwok Afghan News, 20/11/2005

Large quantity of narcotics seized in Nimroz

(Anis) – Security forces in the southern province of Nimroz say they discovered and seized 169 kilograms of narcotics in Zaranj on November 18. Confirming the report, the Afghan interior ministry said the police and the national security department in the province conducted a joint operation in which they seized 104 kilograms of morphine, 30 kilograms of processed opium and 35 kilograms of unprocessed opium in the town. The source noted that no arrests had been made to date.

Anis is a state-run daily published mostly in Dari.

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 198, 20/11/05