



Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia Weekly Digest: 21-28 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.

Afghanistan: Legal Opium?

(By Jan Jun) Afghanistan should terminate its expensive and largely unsuccessful opium eradication program. Instead it should license and control the production of opium for medicinal use. This is the recommendation of the Senlis Council, an international drug-policy advisory forum, that presented its analysis at a seminar in London on 21 November. The study said the switch would earn Afghanistan badly needed foreign currency and permit farmers to earn their livelihood legally.

Profits from illegal opium production in Afghanistan represent 60 percent of the country's income. Efforts to eradicate a crop that accounts for such a massive share of the nation's economy are doomed to failure. So says Emmanuel Reinert, the Executive Director of the Senlis Council, an international drug policy advisory forum. Last year, a United Nations report said Afghanistan would become a "narco-state" run by drug lords if nothing were done. The feasibility study by the Senlis Council claims there is an alternative, namely, a licensed plan to grow poppies for global medicinal production. "The World Health Organization and the International Narcotic Control Board underline that there is a big shortage of morphine and codeine in the world," Reinert said. "Actually, 80 percent of the world's population is only having access to 6 percent of it. That really tells you a lot about the potential need for morphine and codeine made in Afghanistan." (...) Raymond Kendall, Honorary Secretary-General of Interpol, spoke at the seminar about the program's international security dimension. He pointed out that enforcing the rule of law presented a major problem in some provinces. A licensing program could significantly improve the situation, particularly if traditional local government structures such as the jirga and shura were involved. Speaking to RFE/RL, Kendall said he was initially skeptical about the Senlis Council plan. But with more details available, he now believes it to be viable, as well as potentially having an important impact on security. "The real issue is -- when we talk about security -- we all know about Al-Qaeda; we all know about people going to Afghanistan for training," Kendall said. "If you don't change the present environment, where 100 percent of this opium growth is taking place in a completely illegal situation, then the risks in relation to other types of extremist activity are much higher." Paul Flynn, a Member of Parliament for the ruling Labour Party, told RFE/RL that he supports the licensing program because the current eradication effort has been very costly and not very successful. Flynn says Britain has already spent 115 million pounds (\$200 million) on eradication, resulting only in a 2 percent crops reduction, and intends to spend even more on what he calls this "mission impossible" of the international community. But Flynn sounds very optimistic about the outlook for the Senlis Council's proposals. "This is the only bright idea in town," Flynn said. "Why on earth don't we legalize the opium production in Afghanistan, and send it into the world markets? It makes sense in every way. There is no other good idea on offer." (...)

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/AC99EF52-58AB-4D90-A21C-EA64216E47BE.html>

RFE/RL, 22/11/05

Blair says democracy prospects in Afghanistan good

British Prime Minister Tony Blair says Al-Qaeda is trying to revive extremism in Afghanistan. But Blair told a House of Commons committee today that he believes the prospects for democracy in the country remain good. Blair's comments came one week after Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak said Al-Qaeda had smuggled cash, weapons, and explosives into the country to prepare for an insurgency campaign against the government. Also today, Blair said his government had been overly optimistic in its goals to eradicate opium production in Afghanistan. Britain

has led a counternarcotics coalition in the country since 2001. However a U.S. report said earlier this year the area in Afghanistan devoted to poppy cultivation last year set a record of more than 200,000 hectares, more than three times the figure for 2003.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/F6A5B2A2-F5E7-4142-AB52-1F2B9139320E.html>

RFE/RL, 22/11/05

U.S. completes withdrawal from Uzbek base

The United States says the last American troops have flown out of the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan, ending four years of operations at the base to support operations in neighboring Afghanistan. U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Joe Carpenter, a Pentagon spokesman, said U.S. personnel held a flag-lowering ceremony at the base and formally returned control of the facility to the Uzbek government. He said the final 90 U.S. personnel were flown out of the base on the afternoon of 21 November. The United States still has access to a base in Kyrgyzstan to support Afghan operations.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/5BD48826-22D5-4B7B-B64F-CC082F7219F4.html>

RFE/RL, 22/11/05

Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy Strategy

(Drafted by Erich Marquardt, Yevgeny Bendersky on November 14) Russian President Vladimir Putin and Uzbek President Islam Karimov agreed to a mutual security pact. (...) The agreement, called the "Treaty on Allied Relations," formalizes Uzbekistan's shifting foreign policy.

The Treaty on Allied Relations

The Russian-Uzbek security pact creates a military alliance between the two former Soviet republics, stating that "in case of aggression against one of the parties by a third state, it will be viewed as an act of aggression against both countries." The agreement also allows the mutual use by both parties of each other's military bases and installations. (...) The alliance served as Karimov's recognition that a security blanket provided by Russia would serve the purpose of limiting U.S. and E.U. attempts to weaken Karimov's government. Karimov said on the same day of signing the agreement, "I would say [Washington's] main goal is to discredit Uzbekistan's independent policy, disrupt peace and stability in the country, and make Uzbekistan obey." For Russia, the alliance is important since it reasserts Moscow's traditional influence in its "near abroad," and gives it the ability to limit U.S. and E.U. influence in Central Asia. It also provides Russia the opportunity to work on improving relations with other former Soviet republics in the region that have drifted toward the U.S. and E.U. (...)

While Russia has security agreements with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, its agreement with Uzbekistan goes further as it commits Moscow to the military defense of Uzbekistan if it is attacked by a third party. This statement refers more to the ability of the two countries to integrate their efforts against a large scale insurgency or even a civil war than the actual defense against a third country since there are no real threats from another state at present. The two possible states that might have anything to do with such a definition are Iran and China, and neither one of them is willing to antagonize Russia by supporting anti-Uzbek actions. However, the clause also is a veiled signal to the United States.

Uzbekistan's Geopolitical Position

(...) Russia has a singular advantage that the U.S. was not willing to offer -- the potential for economic investment and cooperation. Uzbekistan's geographical proximity to Russia and the past Soviet-era economic ties make the relationship between the two states a natural phenomenon. Even with the present small size of the Russian economy, it is still the strongest and most powerful economy in the former Soviet Union. Additionally, Moscow knows that its influence can be re-established by economic, not military, means. Russia recently earned significant revenue from its sale of oil and natural gas, and this trend is expected to grow. It is now infused with cash with which to invest in its neighbors. Most importantly, unlike the United States and other Western countries, Russian investment will not be affected by Uzbek irregularities or the absence of a Western-style tax structure and court system. Russian businesses and investment companies are familiar with the relative lawlessness in the former Soviet sphere, and are ready to enhance the Uzbek economy along with establishing a major Russian presence that will be extremely difficult to extract.

(...) After Washington's rebuke over his actions in Andijan in May 2005, Karimov calculated that it will be healthier for his regime to maintain power if Russian -- not American -- influence is felt throughout his country. While the threat from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is yet to be calculated, Karimov knew that a response of his choice toward any practical or perceived threat from this organization would have to be calculated against the potential for U.S. fallout. Russia, on the other hand, will not ask too many questions when it comes to suppressing any anti-government

sentiments -- whether they be based on religious fundamentalism or a desire for greater democracy and openness. Russia, on the other hand, needs a forward-based approach to any possible infiltration of its southern regions by Islamic fundamentalist forces bent on stoking civil war in Chechnya and other Russian republics. Its military presence in Uzbekistan will allow it to not only "keep an eye" on the states of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and other countries, but actually to respond in force if the need arises. Russia will also be able to become an important power broker in the region's politics by having an ability to mediate local conflicts that often develop along ethnic lines. Thus, it can exploit the large Uzbek diaspora in neighboring states to its advantage, as it will seek to use its influence to prevent regional unrest(...)

Conclusion

After the multifaceted foreign policy of the 1990s and early 21st century, Uzbekistan is moving toward a stronger partnership with players it perceives as reliable. While the United States remains the pre-eminent geopolitical power at present, it is simply too far away to get involved in Uzbekistan in any serious fashion. Russia, on the other hand, retains its role in the former Soviet space as the preeminent economic and military power. Therefore, in the medium to long-term, Russian-Uzbek relations can be expected to grow, with economic and security goals -- and not political ones -- dominating their bilateral relationship.

<http://www.pinr.com>

Power and Interest News Report (PINR), 23/11/05

Uzbekistan Bans Some NATO Use Of Territory, Airspace

NATO said today that the Uzbek government has told the alliance it can no longer use Uzbekistan's territory or airspace for operations in neighboring Afghanistan. The decision comes after U.S. forces vacated a military base in southern Uzbekistan this week at the request of the Uzbek government. Germany still uses a base near Termez, along the Uzbek-Afghan border, that is expected to be affected by today's decision. However, NATO spokesman James Appathurai said alternatives would be found and the Afghanistan mission would not be hurt (...)

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/B9C5D46B-7C1A-47DD-9DEE-28FD0C6EF5B5.html>

RFE/RL, 23/11/05

Seizures and Arrests

Afghan police arrest man with 40 bags of heroin

Afghan forces arrested a smuggler with 40 bags of heroin in southern Ghazni Province, officials said on 21 November. It is pertinent to recall that 11 kg of opium was also seized from another resident last week.

BBC Monitoring South Asia (Source of the report: Pajhwok Afghan News), 21/11/2005

Tajik border guards arrest man smuggling 40 kilograms of heroin, marijuana

Tajik authorities arrested an Afghan man trying to smuggle some 40 kilograms (90 pounds) of heroin and marijuana into the country, an Interior Ministry official said Tuesday.

Associated Press Newswires, 22/11/2005

Opium seized, drug couriers arrested in southern Siberia

Federal Security Service [FSB] officers have cut an international drug-trafficking channel in Omsk. The operatives arrested three Kyrgyz nationals and a Russian who were carrying 43 kg of raw opium worth 464,000 dollars, Rasim Girfanov, the head of the FSB directorate for Omsk Region, has told ITAR-TASS. The opium was hidden inside the boards covering the floor in a Mercedes-709 van. The vehicle transported the drugs [to Russia] from the Kyrgyz town of Osh via the customs checkpoint Kulunda in Altay Territory. The customers met the vehicle in the village of Armeyskiy near Omsk. In a separate report on 22 November Interfax said that law-enforcement agencies had stopped the activity of an organized criminal group of Gypsies in Altay Territory, seized over 120 kg of opium, smuggled via Altay Territory to the Russian Far East.

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union (Source of the report: ITAR-TASS and Interfax), 22/11/2005

UN survey finds decline in Afghanistan opium cultivation

Cultivation of opium poppies declined in Afghanistan last year for the first time since 2001, a success that saw one in every five farmers abandon the drug-producing plant for legal crops, a U.N. report said Wednesday. The decision by some 50,000 farmers to abandon the highly lucrative poppy was undercut by the fact that the 2005 crop was one of the best in years. As a result, total production decreased by just 2.5%, with Afghanistan still accounting for 87% of the world's supply, the U.N. office for Drugs and Crime said. Still, even that shift suggested that Afghanistan's drug-eradication program, begun in 2004, was having some effect on poppy production, and legal sectors of the economy are expanding, the report said. According to the report, 104,000 hectares were set aside for poppy cultivation in 2005, down from 131,000 last year. But because of good weather and low disease, the average opium yield rose by 22%, meaning that 4,100 metric tons of opium were produced. That was down from 4,200 metric tons. In addition, the report found that 309,000 households were involved in opium cultivation, down from 356,000 in 2004. U.N. anti-drug chief Antonio Maria Costa said the prospects for 2006 weren't good because of several worrisome indicators. They include reports of drug traffickers distributing poppy seeds for free; and farmers complaining that they haven't gotten enough help from the foreign community. The report also highlighted just how tempting opium cultivation can be for farmers in Afghanistan. A farmer earns \$5,400 in gross income per hectare of opium poppies. For those cultivating the same amount of wheat, that income is \$550. In another worrying conclusion, cultivation of marijuana plants was found to be enormous - about 30,000 hectares, the report said. That would make it second in the world behind Morocco.

Dow Jones International News, 23/11/2005

In a separate release U.S. government predicted that the cultivation of opium should decline by 10% in 2005, from the total amount of 4.475 metric tonnes allowing for production of around 526 metric tonnes of heroin.

Reuters – Les actualités en français, 24/11/2005

Kazakh police seize over 13 kg of heroin in central town

Kazakh police have seized 13.5 kg of heroin from a woman in Karaganda, the administrative centre of the central Karaganda Region, Kazakhstan's Channel 31 TV reported on 23 November. A 36-year-old unemployed woman with a previous conviction has been arrested for storing and selling the narcotics," the report said.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Source of the report: Channel 31 TV), 21/11/2005

First survey shows nearly one million drug users in Afghanistan

The government and the UN drugs office on Thursday released the first nationwide survey of drug use in Afghanistan, the world's top opium producer, showing nearly one million people used drugs - mostly hashish. The survey suggested there were 920,000 drug users in Afghanistan, including about 150,000 who took opium, 50,000 heroin and 520,000 hashish. This is within the range of addiction rates of neighbouring countries, including Iran (2.8 percent) and Pakistan (0.8 percent). About 180,000 people also consumed non-prescribed pharmaceuticals such as painkillers. 80% of drug users were men, 13% women and seven percent children. "Also alarming is the rate for injecting drug use: approximately 15 percent of male heroin users are injecting," the statement said. The highest level of drug use was in Kabul followed by provinces bordering Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Agence France Press, 24/11/2005

Police seize 386 kg of heroin in Mersin in last 10 months

Turkish police seized 386 kilograms of heroin and 150 kilograms of hashish in southern city of Mersin in the last 10 months of 2005, security department announced. Serafettin Bural, director of anti-trafficking office in Mersin Security Department, stated that narcotic teams staged 162 operations in the city in the last 10 months, confiscating 386 kilograms of heroin and 150 kilograms of hashish. Bural noted that 150 people were arrested in operations.

Anadolu, 24/11/2005

Russia vows to crackdown on drug trafficking from Afghanistan

Russian special services will step up measures to counter the flow of heroin from Afghanistan that has intensified after Russia handed over control of the Afghan border to Tajikistan earlier this year, Russian Federal Drug Control Service director Viktor Cherkesov told Interfax. The fight against drug trafficking was more successful when Russian border guards patrolled the Tajik-Afghan border, the official said. "It was a reliable border shield..." he said. "Efforts are now being made by the Federal Security Service's border guard service to develop an effective system to protect the border with Kazakhstan. We have already sent a number of units to regions on the border with Kazakhstan," he added. "We are closely working with our colleagues from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to stem drug trafficking. These efforts are already showing success," the service director said, adding that U.S. anti-drug agencies may join the Channel international operation that has been conducted at the initiative of the CSTO to counter the flow of drugs from Afghanistan. More large heroin hauls have been seized in Russia's Siberia and Volga districts after Tajik border guards took over control of the border with Afghanistan he also concluded.

Interfax Central Asia News, 25/11/2005

Over 120 kilos of heroin seized on Tajik-Afghan border

More than 120 kilograms of heroin were seized on the Tajik-Afghan border near Parkhar, 250 kilometers southwest of Dushanbe. More than 1.8 tonnes of drugs, including over 920 kilograms of heroin, have been seized on the Tajik-Afghan border in 2005.

Interfax Central Asia News, 27/11/2005

Police confiscate 70.7 kg of heroin and 23.1 kg of hashish in Istanbul

Police confiscated 70.7 kilograms of heroin and 23.1 kilograms of hashish in operations in Istanbul. Sources noted that police found 70.7 kg of heroin in a car in Kucukcekmece district of Istanbul, adding that the heroin was brought from Yuksekova (town of southeastern city of Hakkari). Meanwhile, in another operation, police confiscated 23.1 kg of hashish in a depot in Gaziosmanpasa district of Istanbul.

Anadolu, 28/11/2005