

U.S.-RUSSIA WAR ON DRUGS

Has Ivanov's Pressure on the U.S. Finally Produced Results?

by Mary Burdman

The potential for cooperation between the United States and Russia was demonstrated early on the morning of Oct. 28, when the first-ever joint effort of Russia's Federal Drug Control Service, Afghanistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs, and U.S. special forces in Afghanistan, ran a successful raid against heroin-producing laboratories in Nangarhar province, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

At a joint Russian-U.S. press conference in Moscow the next day, Viktor Ivanov, head of Russia's Federal Anti-Narcotics Committee, announced that over 932 kg—almost a ton—of heroin had been seized, enough for 200 million doses, worth \$250 million, the Russian news agency Novosti reported. More importantly, the three heroin labs and one morphine lab all produced for a long-established drug-trafficking route into Pakistan, which was worth an estimated \$1 billion to the drug trade, Novosti quoted Ivanov as saying.

But this raid, three months in preparation, after the Russian anti-narcotics service provided the coordinates for locating the labs to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), is only a first, small step towards taking on what Ivanov rightly describes as the “monster” of the Afghan dope cartels. It is an irony that the so-called “conflicts” between Russia and the United States over dealing with Afghan opium, come from Russia's repeated, specific demand that the DEA and the U.S. military in Afghanistan, act as they have in Co-

lombia, by eradicating the drug crops, including with aerial spraying. Yet, the U.S./NATO International Security Assistance Force (IASF) has repeatedly refused to do just that.

Afghan opium production has exploded under Operation Enduring Freedom, Ivanov told *Russia Today* Oct. 8. Afghanistan produced about 7,000 tons of opium in 2009, enough to make 700 tons of heroin. This glut is so big, that Afghanistan exports less than half; there is far too much for the world's drug addicts to consume. Russia and other countries estimate the stored drugs “at about 13,000-15,000 tons of opium,” Ivanov said. “So even if drug production stops in Afghanistan, it will still be able to supply the international market with heroin for another 20 or even 30 years. . . .

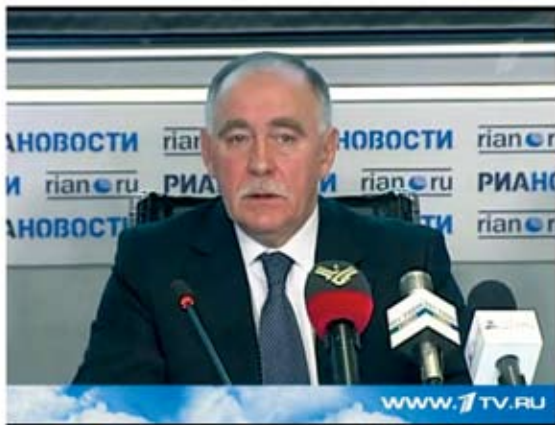
“When the U.S. says you can't deprive farmers of their livelihood, it actually sends a message to the Afghan leadership as well, saying they shouldn't do it because, first, this will destroy people's livelihoods and, second, you push farmers into the hands of the Taliban. I think this is merely an excuse.

“Since the U.S. special representative for Central Asia Richard Holbrooke first suggested, almost a year ago, this idea that instead of eradicating drug crops, the U.S. should target drug labs and traffickers, the number of labs producing drugs for Russia *tripled*. A year ago, we knew about 170 labs in Afghanistan; today, we know of more than 400 labs producing drugs for Russia.

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Russia's "anti-drug czar" Viktor Ivanov addresses a televised press conference Oct. 29, to announce the successful Russia-U.S. raid on heroin-producing labs on the Afghan-Pakistan border, in which a ton of heroin was seized.

"With more than 70% of coca crops eradicated in Colombia and only 3% [of opium] in Afghanistan, don't you think this is a case of a double standard? In other words, it's not that NATO cannot do it; they do it in one country, but for some reason they do not do the same thing in Afghanistan. When I visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels [on March 24] to address the Russia-NATO Council, I pointed out that more than 2,300 sq. km of coca crops are destroyed in Colombia annually. Yet only 20 sq. km of drug crops were destroyed in Afghanistan last year."

Britain's Dope, Inc.

The force behind this drug explosion is international organized crime, opium lords, including absentee plantation owners who live outside Afghanistan, and the international traffickers running a \$500 billion dope trade. This force is a far greater strategic threat than insurgents in Afghanistan, who themselves are funded by the drug trade.

To put an even more precise label on the monster: It is the London-centered and British-run Dope, Inc. apparatus that is behind the opium and heroin explosion in Afghanistan. The greatest expansion of opium production in southern Afghanistan came after 2005, as British

forces took charge of the ISAF mission in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. A number of reports have directly linked British forces in the region to heroin smuggling, and it was the British who most aggressively blocked the eradication programs, and made deals with opium lords and Taliban commanders.

As Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly charged, the British puppet President, Barack Obama, has blocked any comprehensive anti-drug policy from being enacted. Factions in the U.S. government, including the military, who strongly support the Ivanov call for more joint U.S.-Russian collaboration against the opium scourge, have been forced to fly below the radar screen, or, as in the case of Gen. James Jones (ret.), the former National Security Advisor, have been purged altogether from the Administration.

Earlier this year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton succeeded in funding a small-scale crackdown in Helmand province, conducted by the U.S. Marines, who replaced British troops in the area. But these rear-guard efforts, including the recent joint Russian-American operation, will go no further so long as President Obama remains in office.

Drop in the Ocean

In Moscow Oct. 29, Ivanov announced that, "After we gave information to our U.S. and Afghan partners, the three sides planned the operation for three months. We used about 70 special forces units, three landing helicopters and six supporting ones. . . . The whole operation lasted less than four hours." He called the joint efforts of the anti-drug services, a good example of a "reset" in relations between the two countries. Deputy Head of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Russia Eric Rubin called the operation "a very concrete example of real cooperation. We cannot succeed alone. This was the first step and we will continue to destroy labs. . . . This problem [narco-trafficking] has been one of the biggest problems for both the U.S. and Russia and we can cope with it only by working together," he said, Xinhua reported.

However, Ivanov stressed, this raid was just a "drop in the ocean." Powerful and dangerous militarized drug cartels, similar to those in Mexico, have appeared in Afghanistan and the transit countries of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The scourge is taking a huge toll: Afghan narcotics killed some 100,000 people a year, 30,000 in Russia alone. Nine years after opium production exploded in the wake of the 2001 invasion, the "drug infrastructure in Afghanistan is expanding," Ivanov said in

Moscow. The number of labs known to Russian intelligence alone, has risen almost 2.5 times in the past two years, from 175 in 2008, to 425 in 2010. “We are interested in further cooperation in destroying drug laboratories. According to our sources, in Badakhshan alone, there are more than 400 drug laboratories, and a large number are located in Helmand. The number of labs is huge.”

Advisor to Russia’s Foreign Ministry Armen Oganesyan told *Russia Today* Oct. 29, that NATO’s reluctance to destroy the dope trade, allegedly because it would deprive Afghan peasants of work, “is insufficient, because we are talking about people’s lives.” But the Oct. 28 raid sent a message to the drug lords, that NATO and Russia will work together and fight them, he said. “I think it is a very good start, on a very, very long road.”

The Nangarhar raid took place less than a week after Ivanov travelled to the U.S., visiting Washington D.C. and California. On Oct. 22, he met with Gil Kerlikowske, director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, for the third session of the two nations’ joint anti-drug task force. The Russian official has long been calling for military action in Afghanistan, as the only possible way to combat the strategic threat from the drug cartels; this time, inside the U.S., he went far beyond his previous statements, to confront the deliberate stonewalling of Obama Administration special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, on any effective action against opium production.

“Holbrooke was a bit short of time,” Ivanov told *Foreign Policy*, in an interview published Oct. 22. “We started the meeting with him; then he handed us to his deputy.

“The argument that now NATO and Holbrooke are using is that if we destroy poppy crops it will deprive peasants of their livelihood. It sounds so touching that they’re taking care of the peasants, but it’s not to be taken seriously,” Ivanov said, mockingly. “Those peasants do not profit from poppy. They make, at most, \$70 per year. Those who profit from it are the landlords living in Europe and America, and the Gulf countries. If we could give the land back to the Afghan government and provide these peasants with wheat, they could easily make their \$70 a year growing wheat, not poppy.”

Taliban Not the Main Producer

Speaking in Washington D.C. Oct. 22, at a joint press conference after the meeting with Kerlikowske,

Ivanov made the bitterly ironic point that “all the 150,000 [IASF] military personnel [are] employed in eliminating a mere 0.2% of the total illicit drug production” in Afghanistan. “In August 2009, the U.S. Congress Foreign Relations Committee released a report titled ‘Drugs, Insurgency, and Terrorism,’ [and] made an assessment of the volumes of illicit drug production by Taliban ... at \$150 million.” Yet, “all Afghan drug production is estimated at \$65 billion, so we can see the Taliban’s sector is only 0.2%. Obviously, it is not the main producer. The international forces say they will eliminate only the drug production related to the Taliban, in other words, all 150,000 personnel will be directed to eliminate just 0.2% of the drug production. The remaining 99.8% is left to be destroyed by Afghan forces.”

During the Taliban rule (1996-2001), which never succeeded in extending throughout Afghanistan, the opium production reached a record 4,000-plus tons, in 1999. The next year, Mullah Omar, the Emir of the Taliban, cracked down heavily on opium planting, and, as a result, in 2000, production dropped to about 500 tons. Omar had taken ruthless measures.

The IASF fear that eradication will drive masses of peasants into the arms of the Taliban is also absurd—only about 6% of the Afghan population make their living from opium, and this, under complete control of drug lords, the big plantation owners, and traffickers. If the drug lords’ power were broken, the peasants could grow other crops, as Ivanov wrote in a commentary published Oct. 21 in the *Washington Times*.

“Stabilization and peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through efforts that include a decisive fight against the production and trafficking of Afghan heroin,” he wrote. “Drug money is seriously undermining international efforts to restore order in Afghanistan, and fueling terrorism elsewhere.” U.S. national security is at stake, he wrote. “Among NATO countries, civilian deaths from a heroin overdose are 50 times the number of military casualties in the alliance operation in Afghanistan. Afghan heroin eventually ends up in the United States—ruining lives, devastating American families.”

Ivanov was sharply critical of the U.S. refusal to use aerial spraying to eradicate opium plantations, saying that the assumption that spraying would “alienate” the population cannot be considered “convincing, moral or even accurate.” While there is some progress in Russian-U.S. anti-drug cooperation, Ivanov wrote,

“we still need to address the core of the problem: opium plantations.”

At the Foreign Press Center briefing, Ivanov made clear that Russian anti-narcotics forces grasp the importance of the financial side of the world opium trade. “Drug cartels and barons are major financial players,” with the world drug trade being worth some \$500 billion a year, Itar-Tass quoted Ivanov. Russia and the U.S. “agreed to exchange experiences related to the confiscation of property of incomes of people engaged in drug trafficking. The final goal of the drug business is to make profit, so it is an important task to expose financial traffic and the flow of money on bank accounts for the purpose of laundering,” he said.

Kerlikowske expressed Washington’s policy, that the IASF-related anti-drug effort should focus on getting rid of drug labs in Afghanistan, while the local government should deal with the opium plantations. This means doing nothing, Ivanov responded. “The government of Afghanistan will hardly succeed in resolving the problem by itself,” he told *Russia Today* in an interview Oct. 22. The “revenues from drug production are \$65 billion, and the Afghan government’s annual budget is \$12 billion, and 90% of this amount comes from financial aid. I will ask a rhetorical question: Can a government with such a small income deal with such a monster as the drug mafia?”

Going After the Labs and Landlords

As for dealing with the drug labs, Ivanov, who had served as an intelligence officer with the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, told the press that Russia has given the U.S. information on about 175 drug labs already. Ivanov told AP in an interview published Oct. 23, that he had provided details to U.S. officials in Kabul months ago, but DEA officials there have told him they are awaiting U.S. military approval to take down the labs. “For some reason they are unable to carry out any operations to destroy these laboratories, because there is a delay from the military side,” Ivanov told AP. DEA officials also complain about a lack of equipment and fuel. “We will help them with fuel,” Ivanov volunteered.

Ivanov said he also has suggested going after the big landlords in the opium poppy regions, by submitting their names to the UN for sanctions. “It wouldn’t be difficult to trace them,” he said. He had discussed the issue with Holbrooke and other officials Oct. 21, but, he said, was frustrated because of U.S. adherence to the claim that eradicating poppy fields would send farmers into

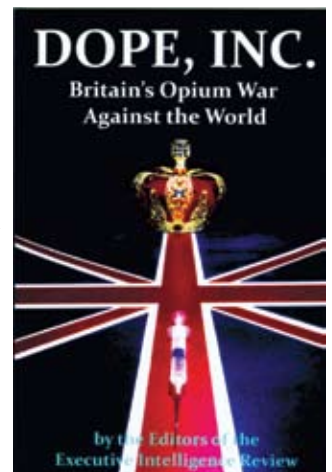
the hands of the Taliban. “It sounded not like constructive discussion but a manifestation of stubbornness,” Ivanov said. “I cannot say they are not listening. They are listening very carefully and attentively. But unfortunately, there are no results.”

Ivanov had taken the unusual step of going to Los Angeles, he told *Foreign Policy* to speak out against the California ballot initiative, Prop 19, to legalize marijuana. “I hadn’t known about it before, and I was absolutely shocked when I was in the city and saw these posters saying that you can get marijuana for medical purposes,” he said. “Medical” marijuana is already legal in the state! Ivanov met with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Sheriff Leroy Baca to voice Russia’s opposition to the measure. “I’m afraid that the consequences of [legalization] will be catastrophic. Even the Netherlands, where they sell marijuana legally in coffee shops, they are now reversing on this. Because there, and everywhere, drug addiction is becoming stronger, and the people who are addicted develop psychiatric deviations. They say, ‘What does God do when he wants to punish a person? He deprives him of his mind.’”

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