
International Intelligence

Afghan Opium Production Hits Yet Another Record

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007," paints a horrific picture. Each succeeding year under U.S. occupation has produced a new record opium crop.

In Afghanistan, with a population of 23 million, an estimated 3.3 million people, about 14% of the population, produced 8,200 tons of opium in 2007, 34% more than 2006, and twice the amount produced just two years ago. That's 93% of the global production of opium.

Apart from China under the British guns in the 19th Century—a country which at that time had a population 15 times larger than today's Afghanistan—no other country has ever produced opium on such a scale.

The report notes that 70% of the opium comes from southwestern Afghanistan, from five provinces bordering Pakistan. One of those provinces, Hilman, with a population of 2.5 million, produced about 50% of the entire 2007 Afghan opium crop, about 4,100 tons. The report states: "Unless serious action is taken in terms of external assistance to Balkh and other opium free provinces, there is a high risk that they will resume opium poppy cultivation in the coming growing season."

An UNODC survey of Afghan farmers found that 98% said they would be ready to stop opium poppy cultivation, if there were other means of earning a livelihood.

In 2000, before the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan, the country had 82,000 hectares of land under opium poppy cultivation. In 2007, that figure is 193,000 hectares. The gross income from opium per hectare is \$5,200, while the gross income from wheat is \$546. The production of cannabis is also increasing, and is becoming as lucrative as opium.

What is the report proposing for measures to put a halt to this scourge? Not much. It calls for 1) higher rewards to non-opium farmers, and inclusion of a no-opium pledge as a precondition for assistance; 2) higher

risks for opium farmers; 3) more opium-free provinces; 4) NATO to help take on opium labs, markets, and traffickers; and 5) coherence in policy.

The report says, "The government's benign tolerance of corruption is undermining the future," and "Tacit acceptance of opium trafficking by foreign military forces as a way to extract intelligence information and occasional military support in operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda undermines stabilization efforts." In other words, there is a "coherence in policy" not to do anything to stop drug production on the part of the government and the foreign military forces.

Behind the figures of the UNODC report is the reality, that over 100,000 people die from opium-related drug consumption every year, millions have their minds and lives destroyed, as the nation of Afghanistan, and its neighbors, are used as pawns in the great oligarchical chess game.

Myanmar Destabilization Run by IMF and Cheneyacs

At an Aug. 30 briefing at the White House on President Bush's upcoming Asia trip, there was a constant refrain of "Burma, Burma, Burma" as a top item to be discussed at every meeting. The routine demonization of Myanmar (Burma) has reached a new level, as demonstrations within Burma over the past ten days have been given prominent coverage in the Western press—supposed evidence of suppressed opposition to the government breaking out of containment.

In fact, the small demonstrations were, for the first time in many years, economic in nature, protesting the cutting of some subsidies for fuel. What is generally left out of the coverage is that cutting the subsidies was an International Monetary Fund proposal! Ironically, when Indonesia cut its fuel subsidies last year, also under heavy IMF pressure, there were similar demonstrations—but Indonesia was praised by the West for showing courage against "populist" support for the subsidies, and for get-

ting more in line with "market prices."

The Nation in Thailand, partially owned by Dow Jones, tipped the Western oligarchy's hand in the matter, writing on Aug. 27: "The IMF has been advising the junta on how to modernize its economic management and tax collection system. In normal circumstances, the junta's latest move would have been considered sound economic policy. But given the long-standing suppression and suffering of the Burmese people, the fuel-price hike represents a small window to speak out."

Bush is unlikely to succeed in turning Myanmar's Asian neighbors against it, as evidenced by the headline of *The Nation* article: "Uproar in Burma, Silence in ASEAN."

New Finance Minister, Anti-Trust Law in China

China's Finance Minister, Jin Renqing, resigned Aug. 30, and four other ministers, including the Minister of State Security, have been replaced. These were largely decisions taken by the National People's Congress, the major legislative body of China. The actions are in preparation for the upcoming Communist Party Congress in October, in which more personnel exchanges are expected. The decision may not, however, be totally unconnected to the ongoing blow-out of the world financial system, and China's intent to deal with it.

The new minister, the 59-year-old Xie Xueren, from China's eastern province of Zhejiang, has been the director of the State Administration of Taxation. The National People's Congress has also passed an Anti-Monopoly Law, a form of anti-trust legislation, which reserves the right to prevent mergers and acquisitions that might endanger the national security. Only 11% of all mergers and acquisitions in China are done by foreign firms, but that number is up from 4% in 2004 and is growing. A new government office will be set up to monitor the law. The law was first introduced in the legislature in 1993, but was not passed in its final form until now.