

he had been present earlier, in July, at a meeting at al-Kassar's Marbella estate which included al-Kassar and Medellín Cartel kingpins Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha. On July 27, Spanish police prevented al-Kassar from entering the country. He was traveling aboard his private jet with Salman Izz-Edden, the brother of the Syrian military commander in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley—the main center of Syrian opium cultivation. At that moment, Rifaat Assad was reportedly at al-Kassar's estate waiting to meet them.

During the same period, the same cast of characters were busy selling arms to Iran. For example, a 1987 investigation into the illegal export of weapons to Iran by the Italian firm Borletti, revealed that the orders and shipments were coordinated from Barcelona by the Bovega company. Joint investigations in Italy and Spain revealed that Bovega was run by Monzer al-Kassar, on behalf of Rifaat al-Assad and his son Firaas al-Assad.

Pan-Am Flight 103

But al-Kassar was not only involved in arms and drugs. Investigations by several governments into the explosion of Pan-Am Flight 103, which killed 270 people, reportedly determined that the action had been ordered by the Syrian government, using the Lebanese-based PFLP-General Command, led by former Syrian Army officer Ahmed Jibril.

In order to cover up Syria's role, the Bush and Thatcher administrations ordered a press blackout on the evidence, and instead began to falsely accuse Libya of the crime. In 1992, the U.S. and British governments organized U.N. Security Council sanctions against Libya, under that claim. But, while no evidence has ever been publicly presented showing Libyan involvement, evidence has been presented which tends to indicate Syrian responsibility, including that of Oliver North's crony, al-Kassar.

According to Pan-Am company investigations, made public by U.S. Rep. James Traficant (D-Ohio) in 1989, for example, the Syrian government ordered the incident, and used members of al-Kassar's drug ring, who were baggage handlers in the Pan-Am cargo area at Frankfurt airport, to plant the suitcase that contained the bomb onboard the aircraft.

According to the Pan-Am report, a Frankfurt-based CIA team may have wittingly permitted the Syrian massacre, in order to silence a rival CIA team that had unearthed evidence of drug payoffs to the Frankfurt-based operatives. At least three CIA officials, including the deputy station chief in Beirut, perished in the crash. They reportedly directed a team assigned to locate the American hostages, and to determine whether a rescue operation might be possible. The hostages were held by Hezbollah, which was then earning an estimated \$100 million annually in heroin sales, according to a U.S. Congressional investigation. Al-Kassar was the major vendor of Hezbollah heroin. Reportedly, the team discovered that the CIA Frankfurt unit was profiteering from a deal with al-Kassar.

Afghanistan drugs: a withdrawal syndrome

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

The Nicaraguan Contras were not the only "secret army" run through George Bush's "secret parallel government" chain of command, that got their financing through the sale of illegal drugs during the 1980s. As EIR documented, in an Oct. 13, 1995 Special Report entitled "New Terror International Targets South Asia," over 1979-89, the United States, along with the British and the Israelis, ran a surrogate war in Afghanistan, against the Soviet Red Army. Although the U.S. Congress approved a total of \$3 billion in aid for the "afghansi mujahideen" effort, and Saudi Arabia and other allies poured in matching amounts of money, an estimated 90% of the cost of the war was actually covered by the sale of Golden Crescent heroin and opium—produced in vast quantities in Afghanistan by the Afghan rebels, and processed in underground laboratories all along the Afghani-Pakistani frontier.

At one point, at the peak of the Afghanistan War, in the mid-1980s, the Golden Crescent was providing more than half of the world supply of heroin.

Like the Contra operation in Central America, the afghansi insurgency was run, top-down, by the George Bush command in the Reagan White House. Sources in Washington have told EIR that as much as \$20 billion in Colombian cartel drug proceeds are believed to have been funneled to the Afghan rebels, as part of the cartels' deal with Vice President Bush and his secret team.

Our New Delhi correspondents have sent in this dispatch, updating the EIR report from October 1995.

According to the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (NNICC) annual report, which is prepared by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Afghanistan remained the second largest producer of illicit opium in 1994. The U.S. government estimated that 950 metric tons of opium were produced on 29,180 hectares of opium poppy cultivation, a 38% increase over 1993's production estimate. Officially, however, opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has been banned since 1957.

Observers claim that the U.S. government estimate is, in fact, very conservative, and considering that most of Afghanistan's opium poppy is grown on irrigated land, the actual

production could be as high as 1,200 metric tons. Myanmar (Burma) remains the world's largest producer of opium with its 1994 production of 2,300 metric tons, but these figures, nevertheless, identify Afghanistan as one of the world's leading suppliers of opium and heroin.

Setting the stage

The possibility of an opium breakout along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border was first noted in 1978, which was also the beginning of the Afghan insurgency against the victors of the "Saur Revolution" of 1978, which brought the pro-Soviet Afghan Communists to power in Kabul. It is evident that there was a link between the Afghan insurgency, backed by the anti-Soviet forces in the region and the West, and reports of increasing opium poppy cultivation in the area.

When the 1978 Saur Revolution took place in this strategic corner of the world, the drug-created slush money was increasingly becoming unmanageably large. In 1973, a British-controlled bank, the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), which is domiciled in Luxembourg under the ownership of the late Agha Hasan Abedi, a Pakistani, came into existence. Owned primarily by West Asians and such British charity foundations as the ICIC Foundation, BCCI was projected as an Islamic bank set up ostensibly to help the Third World countries with low-interest financing. In reality, however, the BCCI was a drug bank set up to launder the huge pile of cash generated worldwide through sale of narcotics and to funnel some of the illicitly earned cash into various off-the-books activities, such as arming and training of terrorists to fight the "Soviet menace."

By 1978, the BCCI had opened 45 more British branch offices, its growth attributed to the recycling of petrodollars. Much later, in the mid-1980s, the bank was identified as a drug-laundering instrument and was dismantled, although sticky questions, such as the real source of bank's money, the end-use of the laundered money, and why the bank was allowed to grow so big under the supervision of Bank of England, were left unprobed and, hence, unanswered.

By the time the BCCI was dismantled, the victors of the Saur Revolution were long gone, and even the Soviets, who had come to the rescue of the Saur Revolution, were left humiliated and defeated on the plains of Afghanistan. Pakistan, a key country in the Reagan administration's plan to give the Soviet communists a black eye in Afghanistan, had by then turned into one of the major centers of drug production and drug addiction, and surely a key in the drug trafficking in the region.

Afghan drugs, in conjunction with Pakistani drugs and the combined skills of U.S. and Pakistani intelligence, generated enough cash to sustain military pressure on the Soviets in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and also carry out such sundry operations as financing and arming the Khalistanis against the Indian government in the neighboring state of Punjab and

various secessionist groups demanding independence in Kashmir.

By 1980, the growth of Afghan drug production had become a matter of concern among certain circles. A Canadian magazine, *McLeans*, observed in April 1979 that the "holy war by proxy" in Afghanistan was being fought from the sale of illegal opium. In his State of the Union address in 1980, President Jimmy Carter voiced concern about "drugs from Iran and Asia," but he specifically avoided mentioning either Pakistan or Afghanistan. The omission was deliberate, obviously with the purpose of fighting the "proxy holy war" with the drug-generated cash. At the time, one estimate showed that opium produced along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border was raking in \$100 billion for off-the-books, "sundry uses" annually.

Forming of international linkages

The Soviet misadventure in Afghanistan; the emergence of major drug-trafficking activities in Pakistan, an ally of the Western nations; the arming and training of criminal riff-raff from various Islamic nations posing as *jihadis* (religious crusaders); the linking up of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and making it more powerful than any other institution in Pakistan; and the established exercise of control by the CIA and MI-5 over some of the key Afghan mujahideen leaders shuttling from Peshawar, to London and Washington, led to the drug explosion in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Not by accident, this occurred in the areas under control of *jihadi* field commanders—some of whom are leading mujahideen leaders still in the hunt for power—who had fought against the Soviet troops and had established their own territories. The most prominent of these *jihadi* field commanders is the Pushtun leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a longtime CIA-ISI asset, whose forces have significant control over the opium poppy fields in the Nangarhar, Kandahar, and Helmand provinces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan and Afghanistan-Iran borders.

While Hekmatyar controls the opium grown in the eastern and southern part of Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Massoud, an Afghan-Tajik with French and British intelligence links, exercises control over the opium poppy grown along the Afghan-Tajikistan border. Massoud's control over opium poppy spills over the Afghanistan border into the southern part of the Pamir slopes in Tajikistan, where an increasing amount of opium poppy is now being grown.

Another major drug-trafficking warlord is Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum, a fiery Afghan-Uzbek and a former security member in the pro-Soviet Kabul regimes. Dostum, who controls the opium poppy grown in the Baghlan and Kunduz provinces of northwestern Afghanistan bordering Uzbekistan, has developed extensive links with Turkey using old, degenerate CIA-KGB connections.