used against the Palestinian leadership.

The British and Israeli motives are coherent with the dirty operations of the U.S. neo-conservative networks, which use terrorism as covert warfare to secure their policy objectives.

The Political Battle Begins

Responsible Iraqi leaders, including religious authorities, remain focussed on wielding their authority to force through a political solution.

Just prior to the attacks, the Iraqi Governing Council had reached an agreement, under immense pressure from Bremer, on an interim constitution, to allow for the formal transfer of sovereignty by June 30. Disagreement over the basis for law, as well as the role of the Kurdish autonomous area, had led to a walkout by Shi'ite members on the eve of the Feb. 28 deadline set by Bremer. Under enhanced pressure, a compromise formula was found, whereby Islam would be "a" (rather than "the") source of law, no laws would be passed that violated Islam, and the principle of federation would be upheld, without any details given regarding Kurdish claims. The Kurds were allowed to maintain their militias, the *peshmerga*, a concession which did not please the Shi'ite representatives, whose militias have been outlawed. Elections were slated to be held by the end of 2004, or in January 2005 at the latest.

Despite continuing disagreement, all signed, including the Shi'ites, who have been following the guidance of al-Sistani. This was done for political reasons, according to sources in Iran; that is, after having received the guarantee of elections as demanded, Ayatollah al-Sistani aims at forcing through its implementation, in order to establish an elected government which can end the occupation. The aim is to force the occupying military forces to leave.

If the United States were to renege on its promises, and/or to attempt the merely cosmetic transfer of sovereignty currently on Washington's agenda, the combined force of the Shi'ite and Sunni religious authorities, whose cooperation has been consolidated by the tragic March 2 events, could bring millions of Iraqis into the streets. Awareness of this fact has forced the occupation to make the concessions it has made thus far, but they will not suffice.

A provoked civil war will not work. In fact, there is no basis in Iraqi history for such a Shi'ite-Sunni conflict. And the corollary to this fact is that the occupation will not function. The only rational and just solution lies in the withdrawal of the occupying forces, with the transfer of responsibility for overseeing elections, to the United Nations.

Why Afghanistan Is Becoming a Narco-State

by Ramtanu Maitra

Within a few weeks, Afghan farmers in the southern and southeastern part of the country will start harvesting poppy. If the annual wailing of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and U.S lawmakers are interpreted right, Afghanistan is going to have a bumper crop; that means it would exceed last year's monstrous crop of 3,600 tons and cross the 4,000 ton mark. Afghanistan remains the world's largest source of illicit opium, a new UNODC survey reported on October 29, 2003.

Similar wailings were heard last year at this time, and have simply become a ritual. The United States has no will, no determination, and no plan—as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld acknowledged at a Pentagon press conference last September—to deal with Afghan drug production.

The tolerance of this U.S. "ally" as the world's dominant opium producer goes higher than Rumsfeld and farther than the "hands-off" attitude he expressed. Since the New York Stock Exchange's notorious mega-millionaire Richard Grasso and associates made their infamous "business visit" to the leaders of the FARC narco-terrorist cartel in the Colombian jungle in 1999, it has been the case that this driver of worldwide war—narcotics traffic—is also a key driver of the international banking system. Grasso and company went, then, to get FARC narco-dollars invested in New York markets; the International Monetary Fund policy on debts has consistently pushed nations to "access" illegal drug proceeds for their GDP and their international debt repayment capabilities. There is fierce banking competition for narco-dollars—one of the biggest sources of cash flow in the world today, at a time when the dollar-based financial system faces collapse.

During 1995-99, the global production of both opium and coca *declined*, due to drastic reductions achieved by both Bolivia and Peru, and Burmese government interdiction which cut opium production there by about half. But since 1996, the production of opium in Afghanistan zoomed in the opposite direction, from less than 1,500 tons to the near-4,000 tons estimated for 2003; and Colombian coca production shot up by 126% from 1995-99 under the increasing direction of Richard Grasso's prospective business partners in the FARC.

The UN survey found that in 2003, Afghanistan produced three-quarters of the world's illicit opium, as it did in 2002. The area under opium poppy cultivation increased by 8%, from 74,000 hectares in 2002 to 80,000 in 2003; and opium production increased by 6 percent from 3,400 to 3,600 tons,

the U.N. report said. This year's figure will be over 4,000 tons, if the estimates are correct. The number of farmers has increased to 264,000 opium-growing families, representing 7% of Afghanistan's population of 24 million.

In addition, the report said, there has been "a clear and accelerating extension of opium cultivation to previously unaffected or marginally affected areas" of the country. The number of provinces where opium poppy cultivation was reported has steadily increased, from 18 provinces in 1999, to 24 in 2002, and to 28—out of a total of 32—in 2003.

The tragedy in all this, is that the Taliban cannot be blamed for the poppy explosion any longer. On the other hand, those who are perpetuating opium cultivation are untouchable, because they provide Afghanistan "stability"—a magic word in the American lexicon, which means victory. No one in Washington really cares what kind of stability is achieved by turning over a country to the hands of drug warlords.

The Phony Debates

For the policymakers, confronted with this difficult situation, the answer is simple: Condemn the drug traffickers; urge everyone to cooperate to help eradicate drugs; and wait for the next year's bumper crop to show up. In essence, nothing should be done which would rock the virtual boat of stability.

This phenomenon was in full display on Feb.11, when Congressman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) at the House International Relations Committee, called on the Pentagon to treat opium labs and storage areas in Afghanistan as "legitimate military targets, and to utilize [the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's] narcotics-related intelligence to locate other such targets." The statement, designed for public consumption, had neither any meaning nor any content, and was awash with dishonesty.

The Pentagon's counternarcotics office, well aware of the dog-and-pony show that surrounds the Afghan drug issue, promptly issued a statement on Feb.11, re-emphasizing that "U.S. troops destroy drug facilities only if they are discovered incidental to military operations and if the mission permits."

The head of drug intelligence for Britain's customs service, Chris Farrimond, said that drug enforcement places coalition troops at greater risk. "If drugs are really big in a particular province, and we've got soldiers doing reconnaissance and then seen going out and destroying labs, there could be repercussions," he told the Congressional committee.

Speaking from Geneva, the executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, tried to evoke what worries the American lawmakers most—the dreaded instability. He said that several hundred million dollars in current opium drug profits could be going to the Taliban and to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. Representative Hyde echoed those concerns in his prepared remarks: "We clearly have a possible 'narco-terrorist' state in the making in Afghanistan, with all that means for our short- and long-term strategic and security interests."

Later, Hyde, in an interview elaborating on his statement, turned it on its head and agreed that going after labs could be dangerous and could hamper collection of intelligence. It is evident that he, or American lawmakers in general, are not the only ones who are dishonest about Afghan drugs. Costa and the United Nations are equally dishonest, because they would not tell the truth. They would not spell out who controls drugs; why farmers grow drugs; why the U.S. and NATO commanders protect the drug barons; and why President Hamid Karzai is surrounded by the drug warlords.

Afghanistan's Drug Warlords

Another dog-and-pony show was in full swing last December in a huge tent in Kabul, where 502 Afghan delegates had assembled to rubber-stamp the U.S-drafted Afghan constitution. The tent activities were dominated by the drug warlords (no warlord in Afghanistan can be of substance unless he dips into the huge money generated by Afghan opium). In the front row were the UN representative Lakhdar Brahimi, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, and interim Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The morning session of Dec. 19 was livened up when a female delegate from the western province of Farah, Malalai Joya, denounced the drug warlords. "Why have you again selected as committee chairmen, those criminals who have brought these disasters for the Afghan people? In my opinion they should be taken to the world court," said Joya.

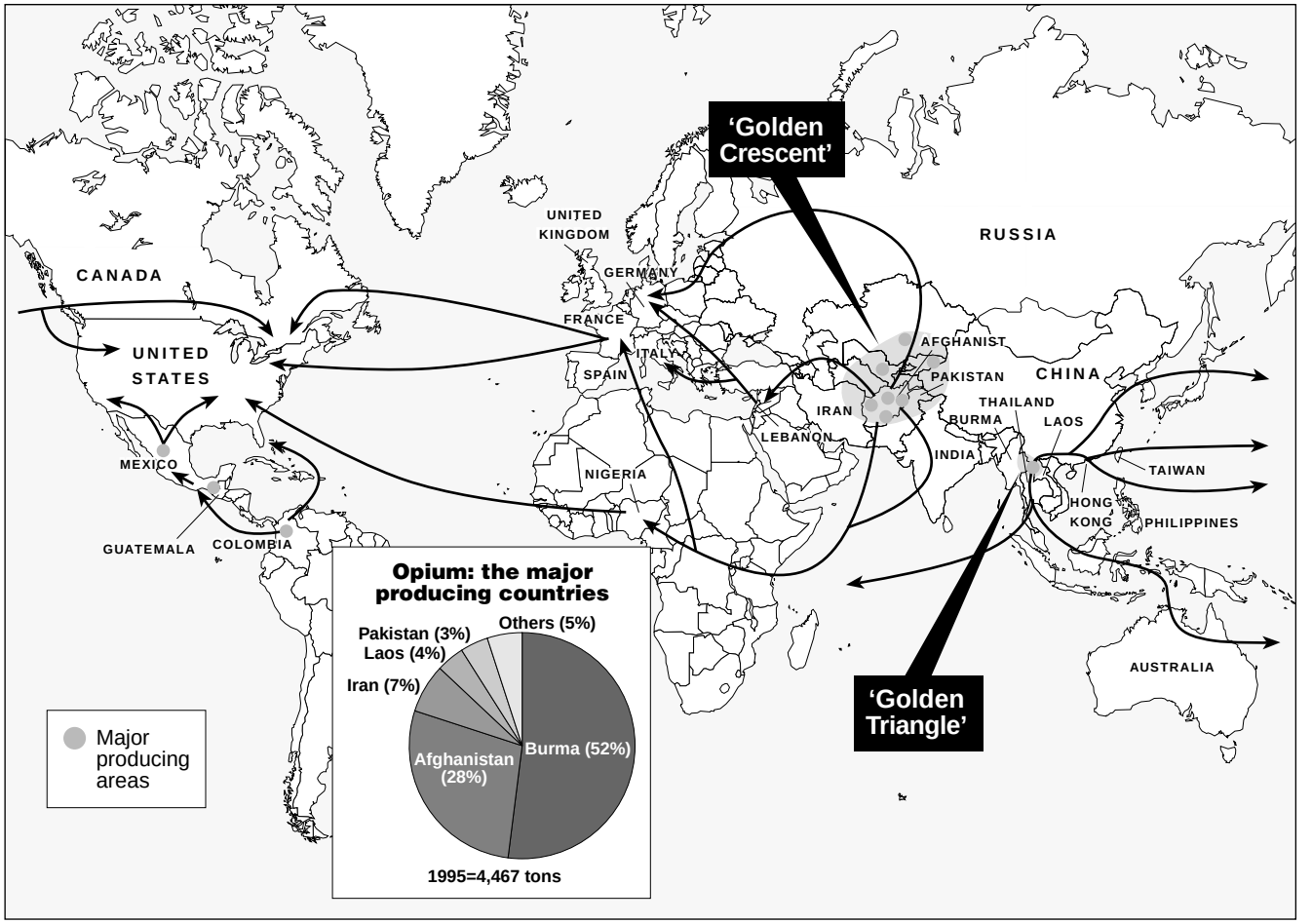
One of the drug warlords, Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, presiding over the session, asked that Joya be removed. She was indeed removed for a few hours, and business as usual descended inside the tent. What did Brahimi, Khalilzad, and Karzai—who represent the so-called anti-drug lobby—do inside the tent? It has not been reported, but someone should have handed each one a *burqa* under which they could hide.

The trouble started in late 2001 following the ouster of the Taliban, and these problems have not been attacked. The leaders the United States considers eligible to fill out an interim government, included many who are implicated in drug-trafficking since the 1980s. The BBC compiled a list of these leaders in November 2001. Leading the list was President Burnahuddin Rabbani, the main player inside the tent in the December Loya Jirga in Kabul, and whose home province of Badakshan became—in the 1990s, while under his control—"the stepping stone for an entirely new means of conveying opiates to Europe, via Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia's Central Asian railway service." Veteran Uzbek-Afghan Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum, in Mazar-i-Sharif, who is now once more back in the U.S. fold, "was suspected of earning huge profits by exporting drugs via Uzbekistan."

Of the seven Pashtun leaders named as eligible for the interim government, three (Pir Sayed Gailani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Hazi Bashir) have been linked in the past to drug-trafficking. A fourth, Younus Khalis, is a powerful figure from drug-rich Nangarhar province, and is the man with whom Osama bin Laden made contact in 1996, before offer-

FIGURE 1

Heroin-Trafficking Routes



Source: NNICC; EIR.

This map was published in EIR*'s July 1996 report,* Dope, Inc. a $521 Billion Business. *There has been, since then, a very significant change among the major producers of opium: Afghanistan now accounts for 75% of the world supply.*

ing his riches to the Taliban. Hekmatyar has now joined the anti-U.S. drug lobby.

The restored leader of the Shura-i-Mashriqi or Eastern Shura in Nangarhar province, Haji Abdul Qadir (who withdrew from the Bonn leadership conference and was later assassinated on his first work day as Vice President in Kabul), became rich in former times as the Afghan source of a drug pipeline involving, in Pakistan, Haji Ayub Afridi, "the lord of Khyber heroin-dealing."

In the 1980s, all the major Afghan warlords, except for the Northern Alliance's Ahmed Shah Massoud—who had his own opium fiefdom in northern Afghanistan—were part of Afridi's coalition of drug traders in the CIA-sponsored holy war against the Soviets. Commanders such as Haji Abdul Qadir, Haji Mohammed Zaman, and Hazrat Ali once again began ruling the roost in these areas. These commanders used to be known as the biggest heroin and opium mafia in Afghanistan's Pashtun belt.

Cancer About To Metastasize

It is not necessary to name more Afghan drug warlords. Malalai Joya made it clear at the Loya Jirga why Afghanistan is becoming a narco-state.

In this context, it is worth noting how fast Afghanistan is approaching that narco-state status. "The country is clearly at a crossroads: Either major surgical drug control measures are taken now, or the drug cancer in Afghanistan will keep spreading and metastasize into corruption, violence, and terrorism," UNODC Executive Director Costa said at a press conference in Moscow releasing the report in early February.

Their survey found that in 2003, the income of Afghan opium farmers and traffickers was about $2.3 billion, a sum

equivalent to half the legitimate GDP of the country, the report said. "Out of this drug chest, some provincial administrators and military commanders take a considerable share," it noted. "The more they get used to this, the less likely it becomes that they will respect the law, be loyal to Kabul, and support the legal economy." UNODC said that the 2003 harvest represents an average potential income of about $3,900 per opium-growing family, making the average per capita income among them $594. In comparison, in 2002, Afghanistan's population as a whole suffered a per capita GDP of about $184.

The report said that about 10 million people, or two-thirds of opiate abusers in the world, now consume Afghan opiates. Among the most affected countries are Russia and Europe. Heroin injecting is also fueling the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Central Asia, Russia, and Eastern Europe. UNODC estimates that more than half a million people are involved in the illicit opium trade along the trafficking chain from Afghanistan to Europe.

In addition to releasing the report, Costa also said that the traffickers make huge sums of money. It is, therefore, imperative to confront them with the penalty associated with breaking the law, he added. But Costa never said who would bell the cat in this way.

In a preface, Costa also said that the experience of several countries in Asia and Latin America demonstrates that dismantling a drug economy can be long and complex, lasting a generation or longer." There is a palpable risk that Afghanistan will again turn into a failed state, this time in the hands of drug cartels and narco-terrorists—a risk referred to more than once by President Karzai."

Another version of the same picture becomes visible from the following statement by Ashraf Ghani, a former World Bank official who is now Afghanistan's Minister of Finance. He told reporters on one occasion that everything could be threatened if the government doesn't take this drug trafficking seriously. "The United States is not helpful," Ghani said. "They say we can be OK in ten years, like Thailand; but if we wait ten years, there will be a drug dealer sitting in my house."

Why No Action?

This leads to the question why the U.S-led coalition forces have formed an alliance with the drug warlords. One answer has been provided by the *Financial Times* of London in its Feb. 18, 2002 article, which noted, "The United States and United Nations have ignored repeated calls by the international anti-drugs community to address the increasing menace of Afghanistan's opium cultivation, threatening a rift between Europe and the U.S. as they begin to reconstruct the country. . . . European governments believe one of the reasons the United States is 'out to lunch on the issue,' as one diplomat put it, is that Afghan heroin is not a significant player in the U.S. drugs market, accounting for less than 5 per cent of consumption. Colombia, he said, was the focus of the U.S. anti-drugs campaign. This is in sharp contrast to Europe, where Afghan heroin is viewed as a main source of the region's trade in hard drugs." In fact, according to the United Nations, Afghan opium accounts for as much as 90% of the heroin consumed in Europe.

But the blame game can only go so far. In reality, except Russia, no other country has shown active concern about the ill effects of Afghan drugs. The Afghan drug traffic has made 4-5 million Russians into addicts, and the number is growing fast; Moscow is the loudest and perhaps the most constructive voice out there. Boris Kalachev, Professor of the Criminology Department of Moscow University under the Russian Interior Ministry, speaking at the UN Security Council last June, pointed out that he believes that Afghan drug trafficking concerns not only Russia but the international community as well.

According to Kalachev, Afghan poverty accounts for the fact that "production of drugs has become the main activity of Afghans." He also points out that "drug traffickers and authorities are knitting together." Kalachev believes that it is necessary to set up a commission, involving Russia, to monitor financial means allocated for the restoration of Afghanistan. According to him, the World Bank has already allocated $1.3 billion for Afghanistan, but "it is still unclear what purposes the money was used for." Kalachev believes that "if the EU [European Union] and the U.S.A are concerned with drug trafficking through Russian territory, they have to partly finance the Russian frontier corps on the Tajik-Afghan border."

At the 40th annual Munich Conference on Security Policy in early February, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, in the presence of the NATO defense ministers including American Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, accused the United States and its NATO allies of allowing Afghan warlords to produce and export drugs. Ivanov called it understandable that by allowing drug peddling in Afghanistan, the North Atlantic Alliance ensures the loyalty of warlords on the ground and of some Afghan leaders. He said the drug flow from Afghanistan is posing a serious threat to the national security of a number of former Central Asian Soviet republics, as well as Russia.

The Russians, however, have gone beyond the United Nations to bring the issue to the fore. The Russian initiative to combat the production of drugs in Afghanistan is included in an Afghanistan action plan which has been adopted by the G-8, as a result of a two-day conference of its finance ministers and central bankers in Boca Raton Feb. 6-7. That final communiqué said: "We recognize that opium production poses a serious threat to security, economic growth, and reconstruction in Afghanistan. We call on the international community and the Afghan authorities to join forces so as to eliminate opium production."

Russian Finance Minister Aleksey Kudrin said that Russia is ready to provide the assistance that is necessary to combat drugs production and to control their spread. "The main solution to the problem is creating jobs and other sources of [legal] income in Afghanistan, as drugs today are the only source of income for a large number of Afghans, who have no other means of existence."