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## Obama and Afghanistan: America's Drug-Corrupted War

by Prof Peter Dale Scott  
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The presidential electoral campaign of Barack Obama in 2008, it was thought, “changed the political debate in a party and a country that desperately needed to take a new direction.”[1] Like most preceding presidential winners dating back at least to John F. Kennedy, what moved voters of all descriptions to back Obama was the hope he offered of significant change. Yet within a year Obama has taken decisive steps, not just to continue America's engagement in Bush's Afghan War, but significantly to enlarge it into Pakistan. If this was change of a sort, it was a change that few voters desired.

Those of us convinced that a war machine prevails in Washington were not surprised. The situation was similar to the disappointment experienced with Jimmy Carter: Carter was elected in 1976 with a promise to cut the defense budget. Instead, he initiated both an expansion of the defense budget and also an expansion of U.S. influence into the Indian Ocean.[2]

As I wrote in *The Road to 9/11*, after Carter's election

It appeared on the surface that with the blessing of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, the traditional U.S. search for unilateral domination would be abandoned. But...the 1970s were a period in which a major “intellectual counterrevolution” was mustered, to mobilize conservative opinion with the aid of vast amounts of money.... By the time SALT II was signed in 1979, Carter had consented to significant new weapons programs and arms budget increases (reversing his campaign pledge).[3]

The complex strategy for reversing Carter's promises was revived for a successful new mobilization in the 1990s during the Clinton presidency, in which a commission headed by

Donald Rumsfeld was prominent. In this way the stage was set, even under Clinton, for the neocon triumph in the George W. Bush presidency[4]

### **The Vietnam War as a Template for Afghanistan**

The aim of the war machine has been consistent over the last three decades: to overcome the humiliation of a defeat in Vietnam by doing it again and getting it right. But the principal obstacle to victory in Afghanistan is the same as in Vietnam: the lack of a viable central government to defend. The relevance of the Vietnam analogy was rejected by Obama in his December 1 speech: "Unlike Vietnam," he said, "we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency." But the importance of the Vietnam analogy has been well brought out by Thomas H. Johnson, coordinator of anthropological research studies at the Naval Postgraduate School, and his co-author Chris Mason. In their memorable phrase, "the Vietnam War is less a metaphor for the conflict in Afghanistan than it is a template:"

It is an oft-cited maxim that in all the conflicts of the past century, the United States has refought its last war. A number of analysts and journalists have mentioned the war in Vietnam recently in connection with Afghanistan.1 Perhaps fearful of taking this analogy too far, most have backed away from it. They should not—the Vietnam War is less a metaphor for the conflict in Afghanistan than it is a template. For eight years, the United States has engaged in an almost exact political and military reenactment of the Vietnam War, and the lack of self-awareness of the repetition of events 50 years ago is deeply disturbing.[5]

In their words, quoting Jeffrey Record,

"the fundamental political obstacle to an enduring American success in Vietnam [was] a politically illegitimate, militarily feckless, and thoroughly corrupted South Vietnamese client regime." Substitute the word "Afghanistan" for the words "South Vietnam" in these quotations and the descriptions apply precisely to today's government in Kabul. Like Afghanistan, South Vietnam at the national level was a massively corrupt collection of self-interested warlords, many of them deeply implicated in the profitable opium trade, with almost nonexistent legitimacy outside the capital city. The purely military gains achieved at such terrible cost in our nation's blood and treasure in Vietnam never came close to exhausting the enemy's manpower pool or his will to fight, and simply could not be sustained politically by a venal and incompetent set of dysfunctional state institutions where self-interest was the order of the day.[6]

If Johnson had written a little later, he might have added that a major CIA asset in Afghanistan was Ahmed Wali Karzai, brother of President Hamid Karzai; and that Ahmed Wali Karzai was a major drug trafficker who used his private force to help arrange a flagrantly falsified election result.[7] This is a fairly exact description of Ngo dinh Nhu in Vietnam, President Ngo dinh Diem's brother, an organizer of the Vietnamese drug traffic whose dreaded Can Lao secret force helped, among other things, to organize a falsified election result there.[8]

This pattern of a corrupt near relative, often involved in drugs, is a recurring feature of regimes installed or supported by U.S. influence. There were similar allegations about Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law T.V. Soong, Mexican President Echevarría's brother-in-law Rubén Zuno Arce, and the Shah of Iran's sister. In the case of Ngo dinh Nhu, it was the absence of a popular base for his externally installed presidential brother that led to drug involvement, "to provide the necessary funding" for political repression.[9] This analogy to the Karzais is pertinent.

An additional similarity, not noted by Johnson, is that America initially engaged in Vietnam in support of an embattled and unpopular minority, the Roman Catholics who had thrived under the French. America has twice made the same mistake in Afghanistan. Initially, after the Russian invasion of 1980, the bulk of American aid went to Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, a leader both insignificant in and unpopular with the mujahedin resistance; the CIA is said to have supported Hekmatyar, who became a drug trafficker to compensate for his lack of a popular base, because he was the preferred client of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which distributed American and Saudi aid.

When America re-engaged in 2001, it was to support the Northern Alliance, a drug-trafficking Tajik-Uzbek minority coalition hateful to the Pashtun majority south of the Hindu Kush. Just as America's initial commitment to the Catholic Diem family fatally alienated the Vietnamese countryside, so the American presence in Afghanistan is weakened by its initial dependence on the Tajiks of the minority Northern Alliance. (The Roman Catholic minority in Vietnam at least shared a language with the Buddhists in the countryside. The Tajiks speak Dari, a version of Persian unintelligible to the Pashtun majority.)

According to an important article by Gareth Porter, Contrary to the official portrayal of the Afghan National Army (ANA) as ethnically balanced, the latest data from U.S. sources reveal that the Tajik minority now accounts for far more of its troops than the Pashtuns, the country's largest ethnic group..... Tajik domination of the ANA feeds Pashtun resentment over the control of the country's security institutions by their ethnic rivals, while Tajiks increasingly regard the Pashtun population as aligned with the Taliban.

The leadership of the army has been primarily Tajik since the ANA was organized in 2002, and Tajiks have been overrepresented in the officer corps from the beginning. But the original troop composition of the ANA was relatively well-balanced ethnically. The latest report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, issued Oct. 30, shows that Tajiks, which represent 25 percent of the population, now account for 41 percent of all ANA troops who have been trained, and that only 30 percent of the ANA trainees are now Pashtuns. A key reason for the predominance of Tajik troops is that the ANA began to have serious problems recruiting troops in the rural areas of Kandahar and Helmand provinces by mid-2007.[10]

This problem derives from a major strategic error committed by the U.S. first in Vietnam and now repeated: the effort to impose central state authority on a country that had always been socially and culturally diverse.[11] Johnson and Mason illustrate Diem's lack of legitimacy with a quote from Eric Bergerud:

The Government of Vietnam (GVN) lacked legitimacy with the rural peasantry, the largest segment of the population...The peasantry perceived the GVN to be aloof, corrupt, and inefficient...South Vietnam's urban elite possessed the outward manifestations of a foreign culture...more importantly, this small group held most of the wealth and power in a poor nation, and the attitude of the ruling elite toward the rural population was, at best, paternalistic and, at worst, predatory.[12]

Thomas Johnson rightly deplores the U.S. effort to impose Kabul's will on an even more diverse Afghanistan. As he has written elsewhere,

The characterization of Afghanistan by the 19th Century British diplomat Sir Henry Rawlinson as `consist[ing] of a mere collection of tribes, of unequal power and divergent habits, which are held together more or less closely, according to the personal character of the chief who rules them. The feeling of patriotism, as it is known in Europe, cannot exist among Afghans, for there is no common country' is still true today and suggests critical nuances for any realistic Afghanistan reconstruction and future political agenda.”[13]

According to Thomas Johnson, the first eight years of the U.S. in Afghanistan have also seen the Army repeating the strategy of targeting the enemy that failed in Vietnam:

Since 2002, the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan—at all levels—has been based on an implied strategy of attrition via clearing operations virtually identical to those pursued in Vietnam. In Vietnam, they were dubbed “search and destroy missions;” in Afghanistan they are called “clearing operations” and “compound searches,” but the purpose is the same—to find easily replaced weapons or clear a tiny, arbitrarily chosen patch of worthless ground for a short period, and then turn it over to indigenous security forces who can’t hold it, and then go do it again somewhere else.... General McChrystal is the first American commander since the war began to understand that protecting the people, not chasing illiterate teenage boys with guns around the countryside, is the basic principle of counterinsurgency. Yet four months into his command, little seems to have changed, except for an eight-year overdue order to stop answering the enemy’s prayers by blowing up compounds with air strikes to martyr more of the teenage boys[14]

The astute observer Rory Stewart is equally pessimistic about the new counter-insurgency strategy, which according to its proponents needs one “trained counterinsurgent” for every fifty members of the population, or a troop level of from 300,000 (for the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan) to 600,000 (for the whole country):[15]

The ingredients of successful counter-insurgency campaigns in places like Malaya – control of the borders, large numbers of troops in relation to the population, strong support from the majority ethnic groups, a long-term commitment and a credible local government – are lacking in Afghanistan.[16]

Johnson and Mason’s depiction of the Vietnam template underlying Afghanistan is important. But there is a glaring omission in their description of power in the Afghan countryside:

When it is in equilibrium, rural Afghan society is a triangle of power formed by the tribal elders, the mullahs, and the government.... In times of peace and stability, the longest side of the triangle is that of the tribal elders, constituted through the jirga system. The next longest, but much shorter side is that of the mullahs. Traditionally and historically, the government side is a microscopic short segment. However, after 30 years of blowback from the Islamization of the Pashtun begun by General Zia in Pakistan and accelerated by the Soviet-Afghan War, the religious side of the triangle has become the longest side of jihad has grown stronger and more virulent.

This remains true, but is dated by its omission of drug-trafficking, and the militias supported by drug-trafficking, which since 1980 have become a more and more important element in the power-balance. Sometimes the drug-traffic adds to the power of tribal elders like Jalaluddin Haqqani or Haji Bashir Noorzai, with tribal drug networks often passed from father to son. But today one of the most important power-holders is the drug-trafficker Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Ghilzai Pashtun from the north without a significant tribal base. Hekmatyar is much like General Dan Van Quang during the Vietnam War, in that his power continues to depend in part on his sophisticated heroin trafficking network in Afghanistan’s Kunar and Nuristan provinces.[17]

The more we recognize that today drugs are a major factor in both the economy and the power structure of Afghanistan, the more we must recognize that an even better template for the Afghan war is not the Vietnam war, where drugs were important but not central, but the CIA's drug-funded undeclared war in Laos, 1959-75.

### **Afghanistan and the Laos Template**

I have quoted at great length from Johnson's pessimistic essay in *Military Review*, partly because I believe it deserves to be read by a non-military audience, but also because I believe that his excellent analogies to Vietnam are even more pertinent if we recall the CIA's hopeless fiasco in Laos.

Vietnam, for all its problems with Catholic and Montagnard minorities, was essentially a state with a single language and a single, French-imposed system of law. Laos, in contrast, was little more than an arbitrary collection of about 100 tribes with different languages, in which the dominant Tai-speaking Lao Loum tribes compromised, in the 1960s, little more than half of the total population. Faced with an intractable mountainous terrain, the French wisely devoted little energy to establishing a central power in Laos, which then had one capital for the north and another for the south.[18] Like Afghanistan and in contrast to Nepal, Laos remained and remains one of the world's last countries without a railroad.

To supplement their own minimal presence in Laos, the French relied on two minorities with two completely different non-Tai languages, the Vietnamese and the Méo or Hmong. The protracted French war in Indochina produced two combating armies in Laos, the pro-French Royal Laotian Army, in uneasy alliance with Hmong guerrillas, and the pro-Vietnamese Pathet Lao.

Thus Laos, when it became nominally independent in 1954, was a quasi-state with two armies, a collection of tribes with different languages and customs, and tribe-dividing borders defined arbitrarily to suit western convenience. All this might have remained relatively stable, had not Americans arrived with naïve notions of "nation-building." Misguided efforts to establish a strong central government rapidly produced two dominating consequences: massive corruption (even worse than Vietnam's), and civil war.[19]

It would appear that the CIA in Laos, reflecting the opposition of the Dulles brothers to any form of neutralism, intended to divide the country and make it an anti-Communist battlefield, rather than let it slumber quietly under the guidance of its first post-French prime minister, the neutralist Souvanna Phouma (nephew of the king). A CIA officer told *Time* magazine in 1961 that the CIA's aim "was to 'polarize' the communist and anti-communist factions in Laos." [20] If this was truly the aim, the CIA succeeded, creating a conflict in which the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of bombs on one part of Laos, more than in both Europe and the Pacific during World War Two.[21]

Despite this absurd and criminal U.S. over-commitment, the end result was to turn Laos, a profoundly Buddhist nation with an anti-Vietnamese bias, into what is nominally one of the last remaining Communist countries in the world. And our principal ally, a Hmong faction allied

earlier with the French, suffered devastating, almost genocidal casualties. (The London Guardian charged in 1971 that Hmong villages who “try to find their own way out of the war – even if it is simply by staying neutral and refusing to send their 13-year-olds to fight in the CIA army – are immediately denied American rice and transport, and ultimately bombed by the U.S. Air Force.”)[22]

No one has ever claimed that in Laos, as opposed to Vietnam, “the system worked,”[23] or that the U.S. might have prevailed had it not been for faulty decision-making at the civilian level.[24] From a humanitarian standpoint, America’s campaign in Laos, was from the outset a disaster if not indeed a major war crime. Only one faction profited from that war, international drug traffickers – whether Corsican, Nationalist Chinese, or American.

With the beginning of CIA support for him in 1959, the CIA’s client Phoumi Nosavan, for the first time, directly involved his army in the opium traffic, “as an alternative source of income for his [Laotian] army and government.... This decision ultimately led to the growth of northwest Laos as one of the largest heroin-producing centers in the world” in the late 1960s.[25] (The CIA not only supported General Ouan Rattikone (Phoumi’s successor) and his drug-funded army, it even supplied airplanes to senior Laotian generals which soon “ran opium for them” without interference.)[26] Conversely, when the US withdrew from Laos in the 1970s, opium production plummeted, from an estimated 200 tons in 1975 to 30 tons in 1984.[27]

### **America’s Addiction to Drug-Assisted War: Afghanistan the 1980s**

It is hard to demonstrate the CIA, when unilaterally initiating a military conflict in Laos in 1959, foresaw the resulting huge increase in Laotian opium production. But two decades later this experience did not deter Brzezinski, Carter’s national security adviser, from unilaterally initiating contact with drug-trafficking Afghans in 1978 and 1979.

It is clear that this time the Carter White House foresaw the drug consequences. In 1980 White House drug advisor David Musto told the White House Strategy Council on Drug Abuse that “we were going into Afghanistan to support the opium growers.... Shouldn’t we try to avoid what we had done in Laos?”[28] Denied access by the CIA to data to which he was legally entitled, Musto took his concerns public in May 1980, noting in a New York Times Op Ed that Golden Crescent heroin was already (and for the first time) causing a medical crisis in New York. And he warned, presciently, that “this crisis is bound to worsen.”[29]

The CIA, in conjunction with its creation the Iranian intelligence agency SAVAK, was initially trying to move to the right the regime of Afghan president Mohammed Daoud Khan, whose objectionable policy (like that of Souvanna Phouma before him) was to maintain good relations with both the Soviet Union and the west. In 1978 SAVAK- and CIA-supported Islamist agents soon arrived from Iran “with bulging bankrolls,” trying to mobilize a purge of left-wing officers in the army and a clamp-down on their party the PDPA.

The result of this provocative polarization was the same as in Laos: a confrontation in which the left, and not the right, soon prevailed.[30] In a coup that was at least partly defensive, left-wing officers overthrew and killed Daoud; they installed in his place a left-wing regime so extreme

and unpopular that by 1980 the USSR (as Brzezinski had predicted) intervened to install a more moderate faction.[31]

By May 1979 the CIA was in touch with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the mujahedin warlord with perhaps the smallest following inside Afghanistan, and also the leading mujahedin drug-trafficker.[32] Hekmatyar, famous for throwing acid in the faces of women not wearing burkas, was not the choice of the Afghan resistance, but of the Pakistani intelligence service (ISI), perhaps because he was the only Afghan leader willing to accept the British-drawn Durand Line as the Afghan-Pakistan boundary. As an Afghan leader in 1994 told Tim Weiner of the New York Times:

“We didn't choose these leaders. The United States made Hekmatyar by giving him his weapons. Now we want the United States to shake these leaders and make them stop the killing, to save us from them.”[33]

Robert D. Kaplan reported his personal experience that Hekmatyar was “loathed by all the other party leaders, fundamentalist and moderate alike.”[34]

This decision by ISI and CIA belies the usual American rhetoric that the US was assisting an Afghan liberation movement.[35] In the next decade of anti-Soviet resistance, more than half of America's aid went to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who soon became “one of Afghanistan's leading drug lords.” Brzezinski was also soon in contact with Pakistan's emissary Fazle ul-Haq, a man who by 1982 would be listed by Interpol as an international narcotics trafficker.[36]

The consequences were swiftly felt in America, where heroin from the Golden Crescent, negligible before 1979, amounted in 1980 to 60 percent of the U.S. market.[37] And by 1986, for the first time, the region supplied 70 percent of the high-grade heroin in the world, and supplied a new army of 650,000 addicts in Pakistan itself. Witnesses confirmed that the drug was shipped out of the area on the same Pakistan Army trucks which shipped in "covert" US military aid.[38]

Yet before 1986 the only high-level heroin bust in Pakistan was made at the insistence of a single Norwegian prosecutor; none were instigated by the seventeen narcotics officers in the U.S. Embassy. Eight tons of Afghan-Pakistani morphine base from a single Pakistani source supplied the Sicilian mafia "Pizza Connection" in New York, said by the FBI supervisor on the case to have been responsible for 80% of the heroin reaching the United States between 1978 and 1984.[39]

Meanwhile, CIA Director William Casey appears to have promoted a plan suggested to him in 1980 by the former French intelligence chief Alexandre de Marenches, that the CIA supply drugs on the sly to Soviet troops.[40] Although de Marenches subsequently denied that the plan, Operation Mosquito, went forward, there are reports that heroin, hashish, and even cocaine from Latin America soon reached Soviet troops; and that along with the CIA-ISI-linked bank BCCI, "a few American intelligence operatives were deeply enmeshed in the drug trade" before the war was over.[41] Maureen Orth heard from Mathea Falco, head of International Narcotics Control for the State Department under Jimmy Carter, that the CIA and ISI together encouraged the mujahedin to addict the Soviet troops.[42]

**America's Return in 2001, Again With the Support of Drug-Traffickers**

The social costs of this drug-assisted war are still with us: there are said, for example, to be now five million heroin addicts in Pakistan alone. And yet America in 2001 decided to do it again: to try, with the assistance of drug traffickers, to impose nation-building on a quasi-state with at least a dozen major ethnic groups speaking unrelated languages. In a close analogy to the use of the Hmong in Laos, America initiated its Afghan campaign in 2001 in concert with a distinct minority, the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance. In a closer analogy still, the CIA in 2000 (in the last weeks of Clinton's presidency) chose as its principal ally Ahmad Shah Massoud of the Northern Alliance, despite the objection of other national security advisers that "Massoud was a drug trafficker; if the CIA established a permanent base [with him] in the Panjshir, it risked entanglement with the heroin trade." [43]

There was no ambiguity about the U.S. intention to use drug traffickers to initiate its ground position in Afghanistan. The CIA mounted its coalition against the Taliban in 2001 by recruiting and even importing drug traffickers, usually old assets from the 1980s. An example was Haji Zaman who had retired to Dijon in France, whom "British and American officials...met with and persuaded ... to return to Afghanistan." [44]

In Afghanistan in 2001 as in 1980, and as in Laos in 1959, the U.S. intervention has since been a bonanza for the international drug syndicates. With the increase of chaos in the countryside, and number of aircraft flying in and out of the country, opium production more than doubled, from 3276 metric tonnes in 2000 (and 185 in 2001, the year of a Taliban ban on opium) to 8,200 metric tonnes in 2007.

Why does the U.S. intervene repeatedly on the same side as the most powerful local drug traffickers? Some years ago I summarized the conventional wisdom on this matter: Partly this has been from realpolitik - in recognition of the local power realities represented by the drug traffic. Partly it has been from the need to escape domestic political restraints: the traffickers have supplied additional financial resources needed because of US budgetary limitations, and they have also provided assets not bound (as the U.S. is) by the rules of war. ... These facts...have led to enduring intelligence networks involving both oil and drugs, or more specifically both petrodollars and narcodollars. These networks, particularly in the Middle East, have become so important that they affect, not just the conduct of US foreign policy, but the health and behavior of the US government, US banks and corporations, and indeed the whole of US society. [45]

Persuaded in part by the analysis of authors like Michel Chossudovsky and James Petras, I would now stress more heavily that American banks, as well as oil majors, benefit significantly from drug trafficking. A Senate staff report has estimated "that \$500 billion to \$1 trillion in criminal proceeds are laundered through banks worldwide each year, with about half of that amount moved through United States banks." [46] The London Independent reported in 2004 that drug trafficking constitutes "the third biggest global commodity in cash terms after oil and the arms trade." [47]

Petras concludes that the U.S. economy has become a narco-capitalist one, dependent on the hot or dirty money, much of it from the drug traffic.

As Senator Levin summarizes the record: "Estimates are that \$500 billion to \$1 trillion of international criminal proceeds are moved internationally and deposited into bank accounts annually. It is estimated half of that money comes to the United States"....

Washington and the mass media have portrayed the U.S. in the forefront of the struggle against narco trafficking, drug laundering and political corruption: the image is of clean white hands fighting dirty money from the Third world (or the ex-Communist countries). The truth is exactly the opposite. U.S. banks have developed a highly elaborate set of policies for transferring illicit funds to the U.S., investing those funds in legitimate businesses or U.S. government bonds and legitimating them. The U.S. Congress has held numerous hearings, provided detailed exposés of the illicit practices of the banks, passed several laws and called for stiffer enforcement by any number of public regulators and private bankers. Yet the biggest banks continue their practices, the sums of dirty money grows exponentially, because both the State and the banks have neither the will nor the interest to put an end to the practices that provide high profits and buttress an otherwise fragile empire.[48]

In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, this analysis found support from the claim of Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, that "Drugs money worth billions of dollars kept the financial system afloat at the height of the global crisis." According to the London Observer, Costa

said he has seen evidence that the proceeds of organised crime were "the only liquid investment capital" available to some banks on the brink of collapse last year. He said that a majority of the \$352bn (£216bn) of drugs profits was absorbed into the economic system as a result.... Costa said evidence that illegal money was being absorbed into the financial system was first drawn to his attention by intelligence agencies and prosecutors around 18 months ago. "In many instances, the money from drugs was the only liquid investment capital. In the second half of 2008, liquidity was the banking system's main problem and hence liquid capital became an important factor," he said.[49]

### **The War Machine and the Drug-Corrupted Afghan War**

Thus the war machine that co-opted Obama into his escalation of a drug-corrupted war is not just a bureaucratic cabal inside Washington. It is solidly grounded in and supported by a wide coalition of forces in our society. For this reason the war machine will not be dissuaded by sensible advice from within the establishment, such as the recommendation for Afghan counterterrorism from the RAND Corporation:

Minimize the use of U.S. military force. In most operations against al Qa'ida, local military forces frequently have more legitimacy to operate and a better understanding of the operating environment than U.S. forces have. This means a light U.S. military footprint or none at all.[50]

It will not be dissuaded by the conclusion of a recent study for the Carnegie Endowment that "the presence of foreign troops is the most important element driving the resurgence of the Taliban." [51] To justify its global strategic posture of what it calls "full-spectrum dominance," the Pentagon badly needs the "war against terror" in Afghanistan, just as a decade ago it needed the counter-productive "war against drugs" in Colombia.

Full-spectrum dominance is of course not just an end in itself, it is also lobbied for by far-flung American corporations overseas, especially oil companies like Exxon Mobil with huge

investments in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in Central Asia. As Michael Klare noted in his book *Resource Wars*, a secondary objective of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan was "to consolidate U.S. power in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea area, and to ensure continued flow of oil." [52]

### **The Ambiguous Significance of Obama's Last Troop Increase**

Last July Rory Stewart, an intelligent observer whose experience of Afghanistan has included an epic walk across it, argued that America should abandon the illusions of dominance and nation-building in Afghanistan, and adopt more modest goals:

The best Afghan policy would be to reduce the number of foreign troops from the current level of 90,000 to far fewer – perhaps 20,000. In that case, two distinct objectives would remain for the international community: development and counter-terrorism. Neither would amount to the building of an Afghan state. ...

A reduction in troop numbers and a turn away from state-building should not mean total withdrawal: good projects could continue to be undertaken in electricity, water, irrigation, health, education, agriculture, rural development and in other areas favoured by development agencies. We should not control and cannot predict the future of Afghanistan. It may in the future become more violent, or find a decentralised equilibrium or a new national unity, but if its communities continue to want to work with us, we can, over 30 years, encourage the more positive trends in Afghan society and help to contain the more negative. [53]

Stewart sees these recommendations as underlying Obama's December 1 speech authorizing a 30,000 troop increase, which was only 75 percent of what General McChrystal and the Joint Chiefs had called for.

Obama's central—and revolutionary—claim is that our responsibility, our means, and our interests are finite in Afghanistan. As he says, "we can't simply afford to ignore the price of these wars." Instead of pursuing an Afghan policy for existential reasons—doing "whatever it takes" and "whatever it costs"—we should accept that there is a limit on what we can do. And we don't have a moral obligation to do what we cannot do.... There was no talk of victory. His aim was no longer to defeat but to contain the Taliban: to "deny it the ability to overthrow the government." He explicitly rejected a long "nation-building project." He talked not of eliminating but of keeping the pressure on al-Qaeda.... Obama has acquired leverage over the generals and some support from the public by making it clear that he will not increase troop strength further. [54]

Stewart's confidence that Obama will hold troop strength at this new level, if true, will probably mean an impending confrontation with those of his generals convinced that counterinsurgency can work – a confrontation reminiscent of those experienced during the Vietnam War by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

However Stewart's confidence is not shared by Andrew Bacevich, another astute observer. Bacevich doubts

the very notion that we can ratchet up our involvement in Afghanistan and then state with confidence at this point that in 18 months we will carefully ratchet our involvement back down again. [Obama] seems to assume that war is a predictable and controllable instrument that can be directed with precision by people sitting in offices back in Washington, D.C. I think the history of Vietnam and the history of war more broadly teaches us something different. And that is,

when statesmen choose war, they really are simply rolling the dice. They have no idea of what numbers are going to come up. And their ability to predict, control, direct the outcome tends to be extremely precarious. So from my point of view, the President has drawn the wrong lessons from his understanding of the history of war.[55]

Asked by Amy Goodman about Obama's rejection of the Vietnam template, Bacevich responded,

Well I think the President is unfortunately misreading the history with regard to Vietnam. My sense is that the President has made this decision to escalate in Afghanistan with great reluctance. And it's worth recalling that Lyndon Johnson I think felt a similar reluctance about going more deeply into Vietnam. President Johnson allowed himself to be convinced that really there was no plausible alternative, that to admit failure in Vietnam would have drastic consequences for his own capacity to lead and for the credibility of the United States and so he went in more deeply. And he went in more deeply persuading himself that he, his generals could maintain control of the situation even as they escalated. I think that may well turn out to be the key error that Obama is also making.[56]

With more time to reflect on Obama's decision, Bacevich reached an even more pessimistic conclusion:

Historically, the default strategy for wars that lack a plausible victory narrative is attrition. When you don't know how to win, you try to outlast your opponent, hoping he'll run out of troops, money and will before you do. Think World War I, but also Vietnam. The revival of counterinsurgency doctrine, celebrated as evidence of enlightened military practice, commits America to a postmodern version of attrition. Rather than wearing the enemy down, we'll build contested countries up, while expending hundreds of billions of dollars (borrowed from abroad) and hundreds of soldiers' lives (sent from home). How does this end? The verdict is already written: The Long War ends not in victory but in exhaustion and insolvency, when the United States runs out of troops and out of money.[57]

Time will tell whether Obama will successfully resist all future demands for troop increases, as Stewart assumes, or will allow counterinsurgency to continue as our new Afghan strategy, which will make further troop increases necessary.[58]

Though always skeptical about anyone's ability to predict history, I will on this occasion predict that Bacevich's gloom will prove closer to the truth than Stewart's modified optimism. I predict this because of what neither Stewart nor Bacevich mentions: that the determining factor is less likely to be either the will of a reluctant president, or the reigning strategic doctrines of the Pentagon, but a third factor: the dominant mindset in Washington of a drug-corrupted war machine.

### **Drug Consequences of Our War in Afghanistan**

The global drug traffic itself will continue to benefit from the protracted conflict generated by "full-spectrum dominance" in Afghanistan, and some of the beneficiaries may have been secretly lobbying for it. And I fear that all the client intelligence assets organized about the movement of Afghan heroin through Central Asia and beyond will, without a clear change in policy, continue as before to be protected by the CIA.[59] And America's superbanks like Citibank – the banks allegedly "too big to fail" – are now since the downturn even more dependant than before on the hundreds of billions of illicit profits which they launder each year.[60]

In both Afghanistan and Laos (as opposed to Vietnam) heroin has been by far the principal export, and so important that simply to curtail the production of opium has risked impoverishing those in the areas where opium was grown. This was the reason given for not disrupting heroin flows in the severe winter of 2001-02, the first year of the American invasion of Afghanistan. The economy was so devastated that, without income from opium, large numbers of Afghans might have starved.

According to Australian journalist Michael Ware, Time Magazine's correspondent in Kandahar, opium is still the main support of the Afghan economy, as well the main support for both the Karzai government and the Taliban opposition:

You take away the opium and you suck the oxygen out of this economy and you'll be treading on the toes of significant players who have built empires around the opium trade, and that includes political and military figures as well as criminal and business figures here in Kandahar.[61]

A consistent bias of U.S. news reporting on opium and heroin in Afghanistan has been to blame the Taliban for their production, and not also the government. For example, the New York Times reported on November 27, 2008 that

"Afghanistan has produced so much opium in recent years that the Taliban are cutting poppy cultivation and stockpiling raw opium in an effort to support prices and preserve a major source of financing for the insurgency, Antonio Maria Costa, the executive director of the United Nations drug office [UNODC], says." [62]

But as Jeremy Hammond responds,

In commentary attached to the UNODC report, Mr. Costa asks, "Who collects this money? Local strong men. In other words, by year end, war-lords, drug-lords and insurgents will have extracted almost half a billion dollars of tax revenue from drug farming, production and trafficking." Notably, Mr. Costa does not answer his question with "the Taliban", but includes a much broader range of participants who profit from the trade that includes, but is in no way limited to, the Taliban.[63]

Citing the statistics in the UNODC's annual reports, Hammond estimates that the reported Taliban revenues from opium (\$75-100 million) are only about 3 percent of the total earned income in Afghanistan (\$3.4 billion), which in turn is only about five percent of the UNODC estimate of what that crop is worth in the world market (\$64 billion).[64]

It is because of the larger share of drug profits going to supporters of the Kabul government that U.S. strategies to attack the Afghan drug trade are explicitly limited to attacking drug traffickers supporting the Taliban.[65] Such strategies have the indirect effect of increasing the opium market share of the past and present CIA assets in the Karzai regime (headed by Hamid Karzai, a former CIA asset),[66] such as the president's brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, an active CIA asset, and Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former CIA asset.[67]

As I have observed elsewhere about the U.S. campaign against the FARC and cocaine in Colombia, the aim of all U.S. anti drug campaigns abroad has never been the hopeless ideal of eradication. The aim of all such campaigns has been to alter market share: to target specific enemies and thus ensure that the drug traffic remains under the control of those traffickers who are allies of the state security apparatus and/or the CIA. This was notably true of Laos in the

1960s, when the CIA intervened militarily with air support to assist Ouan Rattikone's army, in a battle over a contested opium caravan in Laos.[68]

### **Consequences for America of a Drug-Corrupted War**

But this toleration of the traffic has led to another similarity with Vietnam and Laos in the 1960s: the increasing addiction of GIs to heroin, Afghanistan's principal export. Despite the denial one has come to expect from high places, it is (according to Salon's Shaun McCanna).

not difficult to find a soldier who has returned from Afghanistan with an addiction. Nearly every veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom I have spoken with was familiar with heroin's availability on base, and most knew at least one soldier who used while deployed.[69]

And the reported easy availability of heroin outside Afghanistan's Bagram air base, like that four decades ago outside Vietnam's American base at Long Binh, points to another alarming similarity. Just as at the height of the Vietnam war, heroin was shipped to the United States in coffins containing cadavers,[70] so now we hear from General Mahmut Gareev, a former Soviet commander in Afghanistan, that

Americans themselves admit that drugs are often transported out of Afghanistan on American planes. Drug trafficking in Afghanistan brings them about 50 billion dollars a year – which fully covers the expenses tied to keeping their troops there. Essentially, they are not going to interfere and stop the production of drugs.[71]

Gareev's charge has been repeated in one form or another by a number of other sources, including Pakistani General Hamid Gul, a former ISI commander:

“Abdul Wali Karzai is the biggest drug baron of Afghanistan,” he stated bluntly. He added that the drug lords are also involved in arms trafficking, which is “a flourishing trade” in Afghanistan. “But what is most disturbing from my point of view is that the military aircraft, American military aircraft are also being used. You said very rightly that the drug routes are northward through the Central Asia republics and through some of the Russian territory, and then into Europe and beyond. But some of it is going directly. That is by the military aircraft. I have so many times in my interviews said, ‘Please listen to this information, because I am an aware person.’ We have Afghans still in Pakistan, and they sometimes contact and pass on the stories to me. And some of them are very authentic. I can judge that. So they are saying that the American military aircraft are being used for this purpose. So, if that is true, it is very, very disturbing indeed.”[72]

Another slightly different testimony is from General Khodaidad Khodaidad, the current Afghan minister of counter narcotics:

The Afghan minister of counter narcotics says foreign troops are earning money from drug production in Afghanistan. General Khodaidad Khodaidad said the majority of drugs are stockpiled in two provinces controlled by troops from the US, the UK, and Canada, IRNA reported on Saturday. He went on to say that NATO forces are taxing the production of opium in the regions under their control.[73]

I do not accept these charges as proven, despite the number of additional sources for them. None of the sources quoted here can be considered an objective source with no axe to grind, and worse charges still are easy to find in wilds of the Internet.

However the charges are plausible, because of history. Just as in Vietnam and Laos, the United States made its initial alliances in Afghanistan with drug traffickers, both in 1980 and again in 2001; and this is a major factor explaining the endemic corruption of the U.S.-sponsored Karzai regime today. There should be an official Congressional investigation whether the United States did not intend for its Afghan assets, just as earlier in Burma, Laos, and Thailand, to supplement their CIA subsidies with income from drug trafficking.

In short the impasse the U.S. faces in Afghanistan, in its efforts to support an unpopular and corrupt regime, must be understood in the light of its past relations to the drug traffic there – a situation which resembles the past U.S. involvement in Laos even more than in Vietnam. It is this sustained pattern of intervention in support of drug economies, and with the support of drug traffickers, that so depresses observers who had hoped desperately that, in this respect, Obama would bring a change.

The question remains: how many Americans, Afghans, and Pakistanis will have to die, before we can begin to end this drug-corrupted, drug-corrupting war?

*This essay is an excerpt from Peter Dale Scott's forthcoming book, *The Road to Afghanistan: The U.S. War Machine and the Global Drug Connection*. His website is <http://www.peterdalescott.net>.*

*Peter Dale Scott, a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, is a poet, writer, and researcher. He was born in Montreal in 1929, the only son of the poet F.R. Scott and the painter Marian Scott. His prose books include *The War Conspiracy* (1972), *The Assassinations: Dallas and Beyond* (in collaboration, 1976), *Crime and Cover-Up: The CIA, the Mafia, and the Dallas-Watergate Connection* (1977), *The Iran-Contra Connection* (in collaboration, 1987), *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America* (in collaboration, 1991, 1998), *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (1993, 1996), *Deep Politics Two* (1994, 1995, 2006), *Drugs Oil and War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, March 2003), *The Road to 9/11* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), and *The War Conspiracy: JFK, 9/11, and the Deep Politics of War* (Ipswich, MA: Mary Ferrell Foundation Press, 2008).*

## Notes

[1] John Nichols, "Obama's Campaign Merits a Peace Prize," Nation (blogs), October 10, 2009, [http://www.thenation.com/blogs/thebeat/482916/obama\\_s\\_campaign\\_merits\\_a\\_peace\\_prize](http://www.thenation.com/blogs/thebeat/482916/obama_s_campaign_merits_a_peace_prize).

[2] Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 65-69.

[3] Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, 66-67.

[4] Scott, *Road to 9/11*, 67-68, referring to the Rumsfeld Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States. Cf. Len Colodny and Tom Schachtmen, *The Forty Years War: The Rise and Fall of the Neocons, from Nixon to Obama* ((New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 365-66.

- [5] Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," *Military Review*, November-December 2009, 1.
- [6] Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 5, citing Jeffrey Record, "How America's Own Military Performance in Vietnam Aided and Abetted the "North's" Victory, in Marc Jason Gilbert, ed. *Why the North Won the Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 119.
- [7] *New York Times*, October 28, 2009.
- [8] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 239; A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 99; Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books/ Chicago Review Press, 2003), 203 (drugs).
- [9] McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 203.
- [10] Gareth Porter, "Tajik Grip on Afghan Army Signals New Ethnic War," *IPS News*, November 28, 2009, <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49461>.
- [11] Spencer Tucker, *Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 87.
- [12] Eric Bergerud, *The Dynamics Of Defeat: The Vietnam War In Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1991) 3; quoted in Johnson and Mason, "Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," 5.
- [13] Thomas H. Johnson, "Ismail Khan, Heart, and Iranian Influence," *Strategic Insights*, July 2004, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/jul/johnsonJul04.asp>.
- [14] Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 7-8.
- [15] Rory Stewart, "Afghanistan: What Could Work," *New York Review of Books*, January 14, 2010, 62.
- [16] Rory Stewart, "The Irresistible Illusion," *London Review of Books*, Jul 9, 2009, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n13/rory-stewart/the-irresistible-illusion>.
- [17] Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2009), 127-29.
- [18] The southern provinces were administered directly by a *résident supérieur* in Vientiane, who also supervised , but indirectly, the quasi-independent northern Kingdom of Louangphrabang.
- [19] Corruption within the U.S. Aid program (or boondoggle) in Laos, centered about bribes paid by CIA contractor Willis Bird, produced a Congressional investigation. See Scott, *Drugs, Oil and War*, 196, Martin E. Goldstein, *American Policy Toward Laos*, 186-87; U.S. Congress, House

U.S. Aid Operations in Laos, House Report no. 546, 86th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: GPO, 1959).

[20] Time, March 17, 1961; discussion in Scott, War Conspiracy, 78.

[21] Keith Quincy, Hmong: history of a people Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University, 1995), 163. To this day the CIA's fact sheet on Cambodia lists, as the chief environmental problem in Laos, "unexploded ordnance" (all of it American); see CIA, The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html>.

[22] Guardian (London), October 14, 1971. Cf. McCoy, Politics of Heroin, 320-21.

[23] Cf. Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1979).

[24] Mark Moyar, Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[25] McCoy, Politics of Heroin, 300.

[26] John Prados, Lost Crusader: the Secret Wars of CIA Director William Colby (New York: Oxford UP: 2003), 168.

[27] Scott, Drugs, Oil, and War, 40.

[28] McCoy, Politics of Heroin, 461; citing interview with Dr. David Musto.

[29] David Musto, New York Times, May 22, 1980; quoted in McCoy, Politics of Heroin, 462.

[30] Douglas Little, American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 223; Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, Out of Afghanistan: the Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16-17, 23-28.

[31] Scott, Road to 9/11, 77-79; Little, American Orientalism, 150.

[32] Scott, Drugs, Oil, and War, 46, 49; McCoy, Politics of Heroin, 475-78.

[33] New York Times, 3/13/94.

[34] Robert D. Kaplan, Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan (New York: Random House, 1990), 68-69.

[35] Brzezinski for example writes that "I pushed a decision through the SCC to be more sympathetic to those Afghans who were determined to preserve their country's independence" (Brzezinski, Power and Principle, 427). On the same page he writes that "I also consulted with

the Saudis and the Egyptians regarding the fighting in Afghanistan.” He is silent about the early, decisive, and ill-fated contact with Pakistan.

[36] Scott, *Road to 9/11*, 73-75, citing Christina Lamb, *Waiting for Allah: Pakistan’s Struggle for Democracy* (London: H. Hamilton, 1991), 222; cf. McCoy, *Politics of Heroin*, 479. Fazle ul-Haq was the governor of Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province; at the same time he was also an important CIA contact and supporter of the Afghan mujahideen, some of whom -- it was no secret -- were supporting themselves by major opium and heroin trafficking through the NWFP. However, after lengthy correspondence with Fazle ul-Haq’s son, I am persuaded that there are no known grounds to accuse Fazle ul-Haq of having profited personally from the drug traffic. See “Clarification from Peter Dale Scott re. Fazle Haq,” 911Truth.org, <http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20090223165146219>.

[37] Scott, *Road to 9/11*, 73-75; citing McCoy, *Politics of Heroin*, 475 (leading drug lords), 464 (60 percent).

[38] McCoy, *Politics of Heroin*, 461-64, 474-80; Lawrence Lifshultz, “Inside the Kingdom of Heroin,” *Nation*, November 14, 1988; Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, 37-39.

[39] Ralph Blumenthal, *Last Days of the Sicilians* (New York: Pocket Books, 1988), 119, 314.

[40] Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 128-29; Beaty and Gwynne, *Outlaw Bank*, 305-06.

[41] Beaty and Gwynne, 306; cf. 82; also Allix, *La petite cuillère*, 35, 95; Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, 45-46.

[42] Maureen Orth, *Vanity Fair*, March 2002, 170-71. A Tajik sociologist added that she knew “drugs were massively distributed at that time,” and that she often heard how Russian soldiers were “invited to taste.”

[43] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 536.

[44] Philip Smucker, *Al Qaeda’s Great Escape: The Military and the Media on Terror’s Trail* (Washington: Brassey’s, 2004), 9. On December 4, 2001, *Asia Times* reported that a convicted Pakistani drug baron and former parliamentarian, Ayub Afridi, was also released from prison to participate in the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (<http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/CL04Df01.html>); Scott, *Road to 9/11*, 125.

[45] Peter Dale Scott, “Afghanistan, Colombia, Vietnam: The Deep Politics of Drugs and Oil,” <http://www.peterdalescott.net/qov.html>.

[46] U.S. Congress, Senate, Minority staff report for Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Hearing on Private Banking and Money Laundering: a Case Study of Opportunities and Vulnerabilities (November 9, 1999),

[http://hsgac.senate.gov/110999\\_report.htm](http://hsgac.senate.gov/110999_report.htm). These figures are both much used and much disputed, along with their relevance. But even if the real figures are only half those estimated by the Senate report, dirty money would appear to be a structural part of the U.S. economy. Those who deny this remind me of the economists who, as late as the 1950s, argued that U.S. foreign trade (then listed at about 2 percent of GNP) was too small to be a significant element in the U.S. GNP. No one would make that argument today.

[47] Independent (London), February 29, 2004. Cf. Michel Chossudovsky, "The Spoils of War: Afghanistan's Multibillion Dollar Heroin Trade," GlobalResearch, May 5, 2005, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=CHO20050614&articleId=91>.

[48] James Petras, "'Dirty Money' Foundation of U.S. Growth and Empire," from La Jornada, May 19, 2001, Narco News 2001, <http://www.narconews.com/petras1.html>.

[49] Rajeev Syal, "Drug money saved banks in global crisis, claims UN advisor," Observer, December 13, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2009/dec/13/drug-money-banks-saved-un-cfief-claims>.

[50] RAND Corporation, "How Terrorist Groups End: Implications for Countering al Qaeda," Research Brief, RB-9351-RC (2008), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9351/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9351/index1.html).

[51] Gilles Dorransoro, "Focus and Exit: an Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2009, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan\\_war-strategy.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan_war-strategy.pdf).

[52] Michael T. Klare. Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict (Henry Holt, New York 2001; quoted in David Michael Smith, "The U.S. War in Afghanistan," The Canadian, April 19, 2006, <http://www.agoracosmopolitan.com/home/Frontpage/2006/04/19/01181.html>, emphasis added. Cf. Scott, Road to 9/11, 169-70.

[53] Stewart, "The Irresistible Illusion."

[54] Stewart, "Afghanistan: What Could Work," emphasis added.

[55] Andrew Bacevich, on Democracy Now, December 2, 2009, [http://www.democracynow.org/2009/12/2/vietnam\\_vet\\_scholar\\_andrew\\_bacevich\\_on\\_obama](http://www.democracynow.org/2009/12/2/vietnam_vet_scholar_andrew_bacevich_on_obama).

[56] Democracy Now, December 2, 2009.

[57] Andrew Bacevich, "Obama, Tell Me How This Ends," New York Daily News, December 23, 2009, [http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2009/12/23/2009-12-23\\_obama\\_tell\\_me\\_how\\_this\\_ends\\_is\\_afghanistan\\_just\\_a\\_new\\_war\\_of\\_attrition.html?page=1](http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2009/12/23/2009-12-23_obama_tell_me_how_this_ends_is_afghanistan_just_a_new_war_of_attrition.html?page=1).

[58] An article in the New York Times reports a new Army history of the Afghan War, in support of counterinsurgency doctrine: "This year, a resurgent Taliban prompted the current American commander, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, to warn that the war would be lost without an infusion of additional troops and a more aggressive approach to counterinsurgency. President Obama agreed, ordering the deployment of 30,000 more troops, which will bring the total American force to 100,000" (New York Times, December 31, 2009).

[59] "Deep Events and the CIA's Global Drug Connection," 911Truth, <http://911truth.org/article.php?story=20081012142525948>.

[60] U.S. Congress, Senate, Minority staff report for Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Hearing on Private Banking and Money Laundering: a Case Study of Opportunities and Vulnerabilities (November 9, 1999), [http://hsgac.senate.gov/110999\\_report.htm](http://hsgac.senate.gov/110999_report.htm).

[61] "Afghanistan - America's Blind Eye," ABC/TV (Australia), April 10, 2002, Reporter: Mark Corcoran, <http://www.mickware.info/2002/files/2b3c5632e1c8fa1ad68b6f83ae91a8c3-93.php>.

[62] Kirk Kraeutler, "U.N. Reports That Taliban Is Stockpiling Opium," New York Times, November 27, 2008.

[63] Jeremy R. Hammond, "New York Times Misleads on Taliban Role in Opium Trade," Foreign Policy Journal, November 29, 2008, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2008/11/29/new-york-times-misleads-on-taliban-role-in-opium-trade/>: "The Times misleads on other counts, as well. The UNODC does suggest that opium is being stockpiled as one possible explanation for why costs haven't dropped in direct correlation with the vast over-supply. Mr. Costa has said that "Lack of price response in the opium market can only be the result of stock build-ups, and all evidence points to the Taliban." But Mr. Costa himself appears to be politicizing the report's actual findings with this remark. The market price of opium against the estimated supply does suggest stocks are being withheld, and the Taliban does profit from the trade. But there appears to be only this circumstantial evidence that the Taliban is responsible for the theoretical stockpiling; and even if we assume that stockpiling is indeed taking place, there are also non-Taliban warlords and drug lords who may be responsible."

[64] Personal communication of December 29, 2009, citing UNODC Reports of 2008 and 2009.

[65] James Risen, U.S. to Hunt Down Afghan Lords Tied to Taliban, New York Times, August 10, 2009: "United States military commanders have told Congress that...only those [drug traffickers] providing support to the insurgency would be made targets."

[66] Nick Mills, Karzai: the failing American intervention and the struggle for Afghanistan (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2007), 79.

[67] New York Times, October 27, 2009.

[68] Valentine, *Strength of the Pack*, 333.

[69] Shaun McCanna, "It's Easy for Soldiers to Score Heroin in Afghanistan," *Salon*, August 1, 2007, [http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/08/07/afghan\\_heroin/](http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/08/07/afghan_heroin/). Cf. Megan Carpentier, "Is The Military Ignoring The Heroin Problem In The Ranks?", *AirAmerica.com*, October 20, 2009, <http://airamerica.com/politics/10-20-2009/military-ignoring-its-heroin-problem/?p=all>; Gerald Posner, "The Taliban's Heroin Ploy," *The Daily Beast*, October 19, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-10-19/the-heroin-bomb/full/>.

[70] Douglas Valentine, *The Strength of the Pack: The People, Politics and Espionage Intrigues that Shaped the DEA* (Springfield, OR: TrineDay, 2009), 171; cf. 103.

[71] Gen. Mahmut Gareev, "'Afghan drug trafficking brings US \$50 billion a year,'" *RussiaToday*. August 20, 2009, [http://russiatoday.com/Top\\_News/2009-08-20/afghanistan-us-drug-trafficking.html](http://russiatoday.com/Top_News/2009-08-20/afghanistan-us-drug-trafficking.html).

[72] Jeremy R. Hammond, "Pakistan: General Hamid Gul on Destabilizing Pakistan," *Foreign Policy Journal*, August 27, 2009, [http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article\\_56790.shtml](http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article_56790.shtml).

[73] "Occupiers involved in drug trade: Afghan minister," *IranPressTV*, November 1, 2009, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=110130&sectionid=351020403>.