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Addicted to War: America's Brutal Pipe Dream

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Looks like the "Good War" in Afghanistan is morphing even more directly into the "Drug War" that the U.S. government has been waging all over the world -- and especially against its own people -- for almost 40 years now, with all the attendant aggrandizement of authoritarian powers and degradation of civil liberties and human rights.

As [The Times reports](#), and Pentagon brass confirmed, the "continuity government" of the Obama Administration has drawn up yet another "hit list" of people to be arbitrarily assassinated: 50 "drug lords" allegedly associated with the Taliban. No doubt the many drug lords associated with the American-installed Afghan government -- and those cooperating directly with the Western occupation -- are exempt from this dirty laundry list.

Of course, the runaway cultivation of opium in Afghanistan -- which is now flooding not only the West but also vast swathes of Central Asia with cheap heroin -- is a direct result of the American invasion in 2001: an operation ostensibly designed to capture Osama bin Laden, who somehow curiously slipped away from the Americans' curiously porous encirclement, never to be seen again (except of course for a few curiously timed transmission that seemed, curiously enough, to be geared to the domestic political needs of America's militarist factions). Of course, before the invasion, the Taliban had largely -- if ruthlessly -- eliminated the cultivation of opium in the areas under its control. But the American military -- and its gung-ho CIA operatives ("We're killing people!" as one CIAer [exulted to the Boston Globe](#)) - - instead empowered the Northern Alliance: the Russian-backed conglomerate of warlords and druglords who were freely growing opium in their territories.

Now the Afghan insurgents -- themselves a loose conglomeration of factions given the conveniently misleading monolithic moniker of "the Taliban" -- have taken up the opium trade to help finance their operations as well. Meanwhile, poor Afghans are dependent on the opium trade, which fetches prices far above anything else they can grow. After all, their society and economy have been systematically destroyed by 30 years of savage war, kicked off not by the Soviet intervention in 1980 but by a terrorist campaign by religious extremists armed, funded and encouraged by the good Christian administration of Jimmy Carter, whose

"national security" honcho, Zbigniew Brzezinski, wanted to draw the Soviets into "their own Vietnam" in support of their client regime in Kabul. Now, as Jason Ditz – an indispensable chronicler of the Terror War in Central Asia – [points out](#), the Americans are adopting the Soviets' own failed strategy in Afghanistan: death-dealing military "surges" combined with wads of cash thrown blindly into the economic chaos caused by the military action.

But you can't "build" a state while you are simultaneously waging war inside it. And you certainly can't build it by [killing cucumber farmers](#), as U.S. forces did the other day. Expect even more of this as the Pentagon gears up its "Drug War" weaponry to eliminate the rivals of its favored criminals – sorry, I mean to wipe out the scourge of Afghanistan's Taliban drug lord devils.

If all of this seems grimly familiar, that's because it is. I've been writing about the merging of the Terror War and the Drug War in Afghanistan since... *November 2001*, a few scant weeks after the Bush Administration sent the "carpet of bombs" they promised the Taliban – back in June 2001; yes, before "the whole world changed" on 9/11 – if they didn't play ball on the oil pipelines that Western consortiums were looking to lay across Afghanistan. It was obvious even then where we were going, [as I noted in the Moscow Times](#), in that long-ago November:

Among the isolated, out-of-step losers who dare open their mouths to mutter "doubts" about America's military campaign in Afghanistan, you will sometimes hear the traitorous comment: "This war is just about oil."

We take stern exception to such cynical tommyrot. No one who has made a clear and dispassionate assessment of the situation in the region could possibly say the new Afghan war is "just about oil."

It's also about drugs.

For, although we must now hail the warlords of the Northern Alliance as noble defenders of civilization, the fact is that for some time they have also functioned as one of the world's biggest drug-dealing operations. Indeed, one of the main sticking points between the holy warriors of the alliance and their ideological brethren in the Taliban has been control of the profitable poppy, which by God's grace grows so plentifully in a land otherwise bereft of natural resources. (Always excepting the production of corpses.)

In the good old days, when the brethren were united against the Soviet devil, all shared equally in the drug-running trade, under the benevolent eye of that great lubricator of illicit commerce, the CIA. When the Northern Alliance was driven from Kabul – having killed 50,000 of the city's inhabitants during their civilized rule – the Taliban seized the lion's share of Afghanistan's opium production. The noble warlords managed to hold on to several prize fields in the north, however, and together with avaricious Talibs, they helped fuel a worldwide rise in heroin traffic.

Earlier this year, the Bush administration bribed the Taliban to stop growing opium – a most effective use of baksheesh, according to the UN, which found that Afghan opium production dropped from 3,300 tons annually to less than 200. But the Northern Alliance leapt manfully into the breach, engineering a threefold rise in opium output on their territory this year.

This note of praise for the Bush pay-offs to the Taliban was not ironic; I heartily approve of

the notion of large-scale bribery to achieve foreign policy objectives. It is much better – and in the end, far cheaper to the public purse – than the murderous ravages of war. Alas, the murderous ravages of war are all too often the actual *objective* of imperial foreign policy; the profits, power and domination that accrue to the warmakers are far more enticing than the non-violent ends that can be achieved by bribery (or even by, god forbid, actual diplomacy: negotiation, compromise, mutual respect, that kind of thing). Or as Cheritto put it so memorably to his fellow robbers in *Heat*: "You know, for me, the action *is* the juice."

And so on and on we go. The new head of the army of our Good War ally, Britain, is saying that the mission in Afghanistan "[might take as long as 30 or 40 years.](#)" By which time there will not be "tomb enough and continent to hide the slain."