

Who's Watching the Watchdogs?: Drug Trafficking in Central Asia¹

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A U.S. Customs Service agent won awards and accolades for seizing more than 100 tons of marijuana over four years—but was then found to have conspired with the drug traffickers themselves so that other, far more lucrative drug shipments would make it safely to the United States.² His story is far from unique. In early 2003, for the second time in six years, the Mexican government dismantled an elite federal anti-drug unit because the unit was found to be working closely with drug traffickers. “Virtually no Mexican anti-drug agency has remained free of infiltration by powerful drug gangs,” the American press reported, largely because of “scant public oversight.”³ A recent report on National Public Radio (NPR) describes “a systemic and ongoing problem of corruption among officers” of U.S. law enforcement agencies in charge of patrolling the border with Mexico. “Easy money is an obvious factor,” the report states, but blood ties among people with links on both sides of the border, as well as other factors, also play a large role.⁴ And even with tough legislation, independent judiciaries, and an aggressive investigative press, many other countries have discovered that corruption in counter-drug law enforcement units can still be exceptionally high.

But not in Central Asia, this author was told last spring.⁵ Or at least not until very recently. On the Tajik border of Afghanistan in May 2002, as they watched 55 kilograms of seized heroin, raw opium and hashish being incinerated in fat rubber tires, Russian military officials of the Moskovskii border guard detachment assured an onlooker that virtually none of Tajikistan’s border guards had been apprehended for involvement in trafficking, at least over the past decade. Perhaps in the 1980s, the officials considered, but they couldn’t remember.

Back in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, officials declared that corruption was categorically absent from the elite drug control units, and that government officials are uniformly committed to fighting this scourge. The same story was repeated by high government officials farther north in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It was the rare exception when someone went bad—a case of a bad apple, rather than the “bad barrels” reported by NPR.

In countries with only a limited free press and no investigative journalism, where the courts and entire judicial system are heavily in the hands of the state, where living standards are low and cross border ‘blood ties’ extensive, and where there is no independent oversight over law enforcement, how have they done it? Or how would one know? Recently, Tajik officials say they have started a crackdown in Tajikistan, and many offenders at all levels have been arrested. Why the sudden change?⁶

These questions lie at the heart of international counter-narcotics trafficking efforts in Central Asia today. The history of Central Asian drug trafficking, and the attempts to stop it, is one of smoke and mirrors; sorting through the nature of the problem itself and how best to address it has become an often unfathomable challenge. What is the nature and scale of the drug trafficking problem through Central Asia today? Where have local and international efforts been successful in combating this problem, and where has their impact been controversial, or even counterproductive? What does this say about the challenges being faced today?

Sparked by the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, the United States has increased significantly its previously modest commitment to fight the drug trade there. In 2002 alone, the United States committed close to \$100 million to counter-narcotics trafficking programs in Afghanistan and Central Asia,⁷ and an army of U.S., international and local Central Asian officials and specialists have been tasked to fight this trade. But with oversight extremely weak, both from within and without these countries, the allocation of greater resources also has meant greater challenges regarding how these resources should be applied. It is critical to examine these challenges, and to examine the record of the past, if the substantial investments being made today are to address the range of drug trafficking problems in this part of the world—and to avoid inadvertently making them worse.

Background

Opium poppy used to grow wild in Central Asia. Throughout the Soviet period, Soviet authorities declared their commitment to eradicate

drug cultivation on Soviet soil, but their efforts were slow in addressing this problem. However fairly or unfairly, most Central Asians believed that Soviet leaders themselves were benefiting from the drug trade. If leaders were really committed to wiping out the crop, the thought went, it would have been done much more quickly and effectively. Still, by the beginning of the 1990s, drug cultivation in Central Asia had been severely curtailed, and over the past decade, Central Asia has been relevant to the drug trade primarily as a transit point for narcotics from Afghanistan on their way to Russia, Europe and beyond. Some locals say the collapse of the Soviet Union triggered a commitment on the part of the leaders of these new states to eradicate the drug trade altogether; others more cynically suggest it triggered a commitment from those benefiting from the trade to shift their efforts to reap the profits from drug trafficking rather than cultivation. In either case, after a decade of wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent political unrest, economic strains, and social upheavals, the flow of raw opium and heroin from Afghanistan grew dramatically throughout the 1990s. Opium poppy production in Afghanistan reached a peak of between 2,900 and 4,600 metric tons in 1999 and 2000.⁸ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that by 2000 some three-quarters of the world's heroin supply was originating from opium cultivated in Afghanistan and smuggled through mountainous terrain that is particularly difficult to control.⁹

In early 2001, the Taliban regime began enforcing its long-stated but long-ignored ban on opium production. The sudden reversal of the Taliban, which since coming to power had drawn great profit from taxing the opium trade, led to an almost total eradication of the annual poppy crop in Afghanistan.¹⁰ But due to huge stockpiles, the trade did not diminish dramatically. With the onset of the war in Afghanistan and the defeat of the Taliban, Afghan farmers have renewed the planting of opium, bringing the 2002 harvest almost to its 1999-2000 record levels.¹¹ Afghanistan is again dominating the world market for opium, and Central Asia is experiencing, in the words of the United Nations (UN), "a dramatic increase in drug trafficking across all its five countries."¹²

While there is some disagreement over the actual volume of narcotics transported through Central Asia today, the role of Central Asia as a transit point has grown significantly. Until the turn of the twenty-first century, most of the drugs grown in Afghanistan reached Western consumers through Pakistan and Iran, but a clampdown on drug trafficking in Iran, and the increasingly porous borders of Central Asia, have shifted

that balance. By the turn of the century, the UN and others reported that as much as half to two thirds of all narcotics trafficked from Afghanistan passed through the Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan on their way to European and Russian markets as well as sometimes the United States and Canada.¹³ Others estimate that the actual proportion is lower but maintain that Central Asia's role remains significant.¹⁴ Most of this heroin finds its way to Russia and Western Europe, and often brings vast profits along the way. Some experts have estimated that by 2000, the opium cultivated in Afghanistan, sold in the form of heroin at retail prices, was worth roughly \$100 billion. In Afghanistan, one kilogram of opium cost about \$30; in Moscow, one kilogram of heroin (made from 10 kilograms of opium) cost up to \$30,000; and in Western Europe, the same kilogram of heroin, sold at the retail level in gram units or smaller, cost as much as \$150,000.¹⁵

These drug profits reportedly have been shared generously with local law enforcement and other key actors throughout Central Asia. Western observers have pointed to widespread corruption among police, border guards, customs and other government officials as one of the most important factors sustaining the large drug flow in Central Asia.¹⁶ Customs and other law enforcement officials in all five countries customarily pay some thousands of dollars in bribes just to get an entry-level job. Even though the salary is low, it is understood that they will earn back their investment in a short amount of time. Citizens who have been detained by customs officials for possession of small amounts of narcotics independently list the same types of bribes requested for different kinds of offenses. One destitute woman, who decided to make one run as a courier to make ends meet, was detained with 200 grams of heroin. She said she was told to pay \$5000 and the whole case would go away. If she had that kind of money, she lamented, she wouldn't have become involved in the first place. But clearly, she added, other people do pay.¹⁷

In elite forces where salaries are higher, former border guards report additional pressures to collaborate with traffickers, even for the disinclined. "Imagine a smuggler approaches," said one former border guard, describing how guards patrol in groups of two or three over sparse terrain. "He tells you that if you turn the other way for five minutes, you can be a millionaire. But if you don't, he will send your corpse to Moscow. What would you do? Two hundred dollars each month isn't enough to lose your life over."¹⁸ A recent U.S. government interagency report on heroin trafficking concluded that "increasing heroin transit

through Central Asia is contributing to endemic political and bureaucratic corruption, including in the security services and law enforcement agencies, throughout the region.”¹⁹

Indeed, even Central Asian leaders have criticized their own law enforcement officials for being deeply involved in the drug trade in one way or another. Yet many local observers believe that corruption and drug trafficking may be directed from top leadership levels as well. Customs officials and border guards say it is not uncommon to be called by “higher-ups” and told to look the other way when particular vehicles reach the border. A previous Tajik Minister of Interior was seen to be in charge of major trafficking operations; in Kazakhstan, a Tajik Ambassador was picked up with a stash of heroin in the trunk of his diplomatic car.²⁰ The president of Turkmenistan is himself accused of being a major drug kingpin, perhaps explaining why the Turkmen borders are so open to trafficking in the first place.²¹ The 2002 U.S. State Department report on narcotics control gives further credence to these kinds of allegations.²² A Russian correspondent who has lived in Central Asia for many years recently shared the same skepticism towards its leaders: borders could be kept much more secure, he said in June 2002, if there were not “high level interest” in keeping them at least partially open.²³

Yet the biggest offenders may be the Russians themselves, long-time locals lament, specifically the Russian military personnel stationed on Central Asia’s border with Afghanistan who allegedly have their piece of the action, too. High-ranking Central Asian officials and low-level citizens alike—from Osh, Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan—have long taken for granted the direct lines by which the Russian military allegedly ships heroin and other narcotics directly to Russia. At countless airports in Central Asia, locals have pointed out the Russian military helicopters that stop en route to Russia from Afghanistan: they refuel quickly and continue to Moscow; no one is allowed to check the cargo. These allegations have emerged recently into the open, prompted in part by a January 2003 article in the Russian newspaper *Trud* about the successes of Russian border guards in the fight against narcotics trafficking.²⁴ The article states that 90 percent of Tajikistan’s border guards are Tajiks under the command of Russians, of which two percent have connections with narco-businessmen. The article’s failure to address corruption among Russian border guards has sparked a firestorm of criticism, including allegations that Russian forces are more culpable of collusion with traffickers but ready to pass the blame to the Tajiks.²⁵

Few of these allegations can be confirmed, but they reflect widespread perceptions that large profits are made both within Central Asia and outside of the region. While only a small portion of these drug profits have made their way to farmers in Afghanistan and low-level couriers throughout Central Asia, the drug trade still has benefited them in crucial ways. Opium poppy cultivation has allowed Afghan farmers to make ends meet in a way that few other crops could. For some, advances paid for their opium crop have provided their only access to credit and sometimes their only source of survival during the winter months. In Central Asia, the drug trade has enticed a sometimes overwhelmingly destitute population to risk the harsh penalties imposed for drug trafficking—including the death penalty—in the hope of making ends meet. These couriers not only are the rural poor and uneducated but include educated professionals as well. A former secretary at the main university in Tajikistan, for example, could not support her two children on the token salary she received (the State has not, to this day, had the budget to pay anything but token salaries). After trying her hand at business and falling deeply into debt, she decided to make one drug run to Moscow in the mid 1990s to get back on her feet. In an obvious setup, however, she found herself in prison for three years for possession of 200 grams of heroin, before being amnestied in 2001.²⁶ As the former Kyrgyz chairman of the Commission on Drug Control admitted in 1997, “In some regions, the only way to survive is to take part in the drug trade.”²⁷

The Societal Toll

The secretary’s fate highlights the wide array of societal problems at all levels that the drug trade has produced. The growth in the proportion of Central Asian women involved in the drug trade; the growth in drug addiction, particularly among the young; and the concomitant growth in the spread of HIV/AIDS have led to serious social problems among rich and poor alike that may have serious political and societal ramifications in the not too distant future.

Although consistent figures are difficult to come by, all Central Asian governments have expressed serious concern about the growing involvement of women in drug trafficking, particularly as couriers, or so-called “camels.” In Kyrgyzstan, for example, an estimated 30 percent of drug addicts and drug traffickers are women; in Tajikistan, the proportion of women traffickers is estimated to be even higher and rising.²⁸ Most of these women, and especially rural women, are

enticed into the drug trade because of rampant poverty, discrimination and despair. Significantly, women have become particularly valuable to traffickers as a cover, or *shirma*, in a world where corruption and collusion between traffickers and customs officials is widespread. Customs officials allegedly are often informed in advance of whom to search so that the “bigger fish” carrying large amounts of drugs can pass through freely. The net result is that women increasingly have become the targets of law enforcement, and they comprise a growing proportion of Central Asia’s prison population. They are also increasingly subject to humiliating body searches and other indignities at Central Asian borders.²⁹

The impact on women is only compounded by other societal consequences of the drug trade. For example, more corrupt and stringent border control has decreased contact between family members on different sides of Central Asia borders; drug-related domestic violence is on the rise; and youth are becoming increasingly involved in trafficking. Indeed, the drug trade is now viewed as one of the key factors jeopardizing family life, traditional communities, and general social stability throughout Central Asia. This has only been further compounded by the rapid growth of HIV/AIDS associated with drug injection: Current estimates put the number of addicts with HIV/AIDS in Central Asia anywhere from about 1,500 to 10 times that amount. The rapid spread of AIDS over the past few years, however, has led adherents of even the most conservative estimates to predict a possible epidemic within the next decade.³⁰

In response to these challenges, the past few years have seen increasingly strong stated commitments by Central Asian leaders to attack the drug trade and its concomitant societal problems head-on. While a strong constituency in support of the drug trade survives among those reaping huge profits—and while some argue that by addressing serious gaps in the economy that the state cannot fill, the trade has been a stabilizing force in Central Asian society—leaders say they regard the trade today as inherently destabilizing. By widening the gap between rich and poor, sharpening rivalry among criminal groups, distorting and inhibiting any serious reform of the formal economy, and creating its own system of rules and laws that challenge those of the state, the drug trade is viewed as a threat to the very domestic stability it was previously believed to preserve. These concerns have come center stage with the recognition that drug trafficking now is likely a key source of financing for terrorism—and perhaps a key source of the very disaffection that can give rise to further terrorism in its own right.

International Counter Narcotics Program

Nonetheless, the commitment of Central Asian leaders to crack down on the drug trade has been uneven. Loath to address issues of corruption beyond a rhetorical level, Central Asian officials blame their countries' traditionally weak interdiction records on the difficult border terrain and the lack of funding needed for training border guards or for purchasing specialized equipment to challenge well-financed narcotics smuggling rings. Central Asian leaders have begun to warm up to the idea of addressing the problems associated with growing drug addiction, but this has been slow in coming. Again, they cite lack of funding and expertise as major impediments. They have turned increasingly to the international community for assistance with resources to fight trafficking on Central Asia's international borders and to help address the serious side effects of the drug trade at home.

Over the past decade, and particularly since September 11, the international community has tried to support Central Asia's struggle with trafficking and addiction. The impact of these efforts to date, however, has been decidedly mixed. Beginning in the 1990s, international donors instituted crop reduction programs in Afghanistan and institution-building programs in Central Asia to limit the flow of narcotics across the Central Asian-Afghan borders. Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency (DCA), created with UN assistance, boasts an impressive seizure rate. Recently, the focus of international programs has begun to include broader societal concerns as well, including greater attention to educating the young, supporting women's groups, and instituting other demand and harm reduction programs throughout the region. Yet while these endeavors have produced impressive successes, they also have been controversial; indeed, each new success has prompted criticism that Western programs may be a double-edged sword, where success in one arena may be balanced by inadvertent harm in another.

Throughout the 1990s, for example, international donors focused their efforts in Central Asia's drug battle on institutional development. In each country, donor programs have assisted in developing a centralized counter-narcotics infrastructure and have provided training and equipment to support those efforts. In addition to creating and sustaining the DCA, donors claim success in their efforts to strengthen indigenous counter-narcotics agencies; to help draft counter-narcotics legislation, such as laws on money laundering, asset seizure, and financial crimes; and recently, to establish special courts for prosecuting crimes associated with

narcotics consumption or trafficking. Today, each of the five Central Asian countries has a national drug control administrative structure, and with the help of international advisors, the Central Asian governments have set up inter-ministerial coordination bodies to centralize counter-narcotics policies and administration.

Donors also count among their successes the high number of law enforcement officials trained both domestically and abroad in counter-narcotics techniques and the large quantity of modern equipment provided to enhance interdiction and investigative capabilities among Central Asian law enforcement. Their programs have included training and equipment transfers to border guards, customs officials, and other counter-narcotic forces throughout the area, in addition to more equipment to improve forensic capacities and to store, analyze and destroy narcotic and psychotropic substances. From 1998 to 2000, for example, the U.S. State Department sponsored projects that trained some 500 Central Asian law enforcement and judicial officials per year, and these efforts are expanding. More recently, the United States has expanded its law enforcement presence on the ground in Central Asia, including the opening of an office of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and the placement of a regional narcotics officer in the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan to coordinate counter-narcotics activities throughout Central Asia.

These efforts have helped to raise interdiction rates significantly. UN and U.S. officials praise the high volume of drugs seized on the Central Asian and Afghanistan borders. According to the UN, Central Asian heroin seizures more than tripled between 1998 and 2000, rising from one to 3.2 metric tons, and continue to grow.³¹

But while some praise these efforts, others question whether quantitative indicators, such as the volume of narcotics seized, the number of people trained or the amount of equipment delivered, are useful measures to assess their full impact. Instead, some argue, they may mask serious failings that greatly impact the drug flow as well as exacerbate broader problems throughout Central Asian society.

For example, some observers question whether seizure rates on Central Asia's borders have increased significantly as a byproduct of higher trafficking rates rather than as a result of more effective law enforcement or border initiatives.³² Critics point out that while seizures may have increased, so, too, has drug production in Afghanistan, and to this day, the amount of drugs interdicted continues to represent a very small percentage of the overall amount of drugs trafficked. Critics also argue that the

focus on keeping interdiction rates high may have created detrimental side effects, such as further encouraging harassment by law enforcement officials of low-level drug traffickers, often women, in order to increase arrest totals; further eroding the fairness of interrogation and judicial proceedings in order to keep conviction rates high; and thus also contributing to growing incarceration rates in already overcrowded prisons.³³

The net effect, they believe, is ultimately weakening the war on drugs overall as well as hindering efforts to encourage democratic reforms and establish an effective rule of law.

For example, some locals and Westerners alike fear that providing training and equipment in a corrupt environment without highly intrusive local and international oversight could be feeding the drug trade with one hand as it tries to eradicate it with the other. They express concern that international donors, like their Central Asian counterparts, are sweeping aside issues of corruption while providing significant funds and equipment to entities widely regarded as complicit in the trade itself. How does one know, they ask, if such training is helping governments to eradicate drug smuggling or simply allowing one cartel to eliminate another? How can one evaluate whether training programs are creating more honest, efficient law enforcement or are only empowering officers involved in trafficking to smuggle more effectively? Or, like the U.S. customs officer mentioned in the introduction, could training and equipment be helping well-placed officials to play both sides?

Donors argue that international organizations have attempted to identify untrustworthy individuals through a vetting process, or, in the words of one agency head, through “intuition.” But donors also agree that both vetting and intuition are woefully inadequate in highly centralized and authoritarian countries where corruption is not an individual affair in the first place. Corruption in Central Asia is not a matter of corrupt individuals acting purely for personal gain; it is part of a highly organized system of economic crime that permeates all aspects of life.³⁴ Yet few international programs have had the capability, or the inclination, to sort through how this system works and apply that knowledge explicitly to donor programs. Limited resources and regional expertise often limit the ability of programs to assess who wins and who loses from the rampant trafficking in Central Asia—or from the Western programs introduced to combat it.

The same concerns have been expressed regarding the impact of counter-narcotics trafficking programs on human rights and other abuses.

Throughout Central Asia, the war on drugs often has been used for political ends—to repress political opposition, target particular religious and ethnic groups, limit civil liberties and tighten political control—as well as for extracting greater financial gain through bribes and extortion.

The possibility that international training and equipment may further empower authoritarian governments to crack down more forcefully on their own populations has raised new concerns. In Uzbekistan, for example, law enforcement officers are widely known to plant drugs on political opponents or religious figures and then prosecute them on trumped-up drug charges. The crackdown on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and on human rights activists has employed these tactics to increase sentences, as drug trafficking carries some of the most severe penalties, including death. Special drug courts reportedly avoid challenging police accounts or forced confessions, particularly in trials with political repercussions.³⁵

How then, skeptics ask, should one evaluate the impact of training and equipment transfers when the number of human rights abuses associated with interdiction may rise along with the number of drug seizures? How useful are new laws and new courts if there are few mechanisms to ensure that they are applied fairly? And how does one prevent the courts from becoming new tools for state repression? Does the provision of more equipment to law enforcement—widely viewed as corrupt—run the risk of further strangling citizens' rights? One U.S. State Department official stated, off the record, that transferring night vision goggles to a repressive government is “abhorrent.” “They might be used to fight drugs,” he said, “but they’re just as likely to be used to fight the opposition.”³⁶

These questions rarely have played a role in international law enforcement programs, which traditionally have viewed their mandate as transferring interdiction capabilities and encouraging high incarceration rates. Instead, observers and participants in these programs state that Western trainers tend to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses when they may interfere with the main goals of interdiction.³⁷

Recently, international organizations have made a more concerted effort to address the range of societal problems emerging from the drug trade. The UNODC and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)—one of the key organizations dealing with human rights as well as a range of other concerns in Central Asia—have begun efforts to coordinate more closely on the ground. They have sponsored meetings and conferences to discuss such issues as the role of the mass media in countering drug-related problems and corruption, and the root

causes and economic impacts of the drug trade. The UNODC states that it recently has instituted an educational project on prevention through mass media and public events. U.S. State Department officials tasked with drug trafficking issues have spoken of the need to coordinate more closely with the State Department's human rights bureau, and U.S. aid programs have initiated seminars on promoting drug-free schools, including tips on fighting drug trafficking. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has contributed funds to needle exchange and other harm reduction programs in Central Asia conducted by the Open Society Institute and others.

Most of these efforts, however, are in their infancy and face major hurdles in the years ahead. One of the key points to emerge from media and corruption conferences, for example, is that the media is extremely reluctant to cover corruption and at times may be deeply corrupt itself. Education and public relations programs require far more funding to impact societies where, in a race against time, drugs are assuming an increasingly entrenched role. And an equally difficult hurdle is determining how to design and shape law enforcement programs themselves so that they incorporate these concerns and fit the informal economic and political realities of the Central Asian countries themselves.

Conclusion

What began as a law enforcement challenge in Central Asia, then, has unfolded into a multifaceted set of challenges—social, economic, political and security—emanating in all directions. Drug trafficking in Central Asia has been defined as a target of the war on terrorism, as a key component in the struggle for human rights, and as a part of one of the most serious health tragedies to beset our planet. It is potentially destabilizing at a time when the need for stability in this part of the world is at a premium. And it embraces such issues as widespread corruption that traditionally have been swept under the rug by all parties.

As U.S. policy makers and the international community commit to major investments to address this challenge, it is critical that strategies be refined, particularly in assessing priorities when these goals conflict. Past experience in other parts of the world demonstrate that supply reduction cannot work without a concurrent reduction in demand; but it is unclear what the balance should be between interdiction efforts on one hand, and demand and harm reduction programs on the other. Drugs and terrorism have been linked in U.S. policy as if they are part of the same battle, but they can be qualitatively different battles, where the strategies and tactics

for combating one may conflict with those of the other. Which should take precedence? The same question can be asked for human rights, stability and humanitarian concerns.

At the tactical level, programs and projects demand far more attention, particularly in how they are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated.³⁸ Perhaps most glaring is the need for greater local and international oversight and evaluation—particularly at a time when the trend has moved in the opposite direction. To date, mechanisms have been weak in this area, and resources for evaluations and follow-up have been limited on the part of implementing agencies. The U.S. State Department and law enforcement officials acknowledge that no formal evaluations of the counter-narcotics programs have been carried out to date in Central Asia; that they have yet to develop a standard mechanism for reporting and evaluation in the first place; and that the few evaluations that have taken place have been cursory “trip reports,” focusing on numbers of people trained and equipment transferred. Other donors have conducted more formal evaluations, but the evaluation teams rarely, if ever, include any expertise on the region or local language capability, limiting their ability to conduct any kind of independent investigation.

In a region of “smoke and mirrors,” programs must be closely monitored to ensure that equipment and training are applied as intended. While this should be done through both local oversight and Western personnel on the ground, ultimate responsibility for oversight and monitoring should lie with the donors who design and implement the programs.

In short, then, with record opium poppy yields and limited governmental control in Afghanistan, there is more pressure than ever before on the Moskovskii border guard detachment mentioned at the beginning of the chapter—and every detachment along the border of Afghanistan—to interdict some of the largest estimated drug flows in Central Asia’s history. Donor organizations and local drug-control agencies have made important strides in Central Asia, but this should be seen as just a beginning. For these border guards and the multitude of others fighting the drug trade to succeed, much more is needed. Donor efforts must be broadened and made more nuanced and transparent, with particular attention paid to the impacts of counter-narcotics trafficking programs on corruption, as well as on human rights, gender, local economies and the like. More funding must be targeted from the international community, not only for the expansion of programs, but to support broadened oversight, transparency, and accountability on the ground. And a wider range of international and regional actors must become more involved if any “war on drugs” is to

have a chance of success. Specialists in the informal workings of these societies must be encouraged to work hand-in-hand with technical experts to create programs that neither can accomplish alone; and the Central Asian public must be engaged to inject far more public oversight, both local and international, into every program. The confluence of drug money and terrorism, coupled with burgeoning societal ills in this part of the world, suggest the stakes may never have been higher.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, no. 2, Spring 2003..

² John Burnett, "Corruption at the Gates," Two-part Series for National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, September 12-13, 2002.

³ Kevin Sullivan, "Citing Corruption, Mexico Shuts Drug Unit," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2003, A14.

⁴ John Burnett.

⁵ For the purposes of this article, Central Asia is comprised of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

⁶ For a good review of questions concerning drug trafficking, including corruption, in these countries and Western assistance, see U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2003, at <www.state.ov/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2002/pdf>.

⁷ The 2000 Congressional Supplemental allocates about \$60 million to counter-narcotics and law enforcement efforts in Afghanistan, \$22 million to counter-narcotics and law enforcement in Central Asia, and additional funds to the Caucasus. Coupled with prior 2002 appropriations and other agency and security funds applied to counter drug trafficking in this area, the total begins to approach \$100 million--if not, some say, exceeding it.

⁸ Estimates for 1999 range from 2,700 to 4,600 metric tons, and for 2000, from 3,300 to 3,700 metric tons, due to discrepancies between U.S. and UN estimates. In 1999, the U.S. estimate was 1,700 metric tons, subsequently revised upward to 2,860 metric tons, but was still only some 60 percent of the UN estimate. In 2000, however, the U.S. estimate of 3,700 metric tons exceeded the UN estimate of 3,300 metric tons. The discrepancy is due largely to different methodologies used by the different agencies.

⁹ UNODC (formerly UN Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP)), World Drug Report 2000, 160, at <<http://www.unodc.org/odccp/world-drug-report.html>>.

¹⁰ Barbara Crossette, "Afghan Heroin Feeds Addiction in Region, UN Report Declares," *New York Times*, February 29, 2000; John Pomfret, "Drug Trade Resurgent in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2001. Although the Taliban blamed opposition forces for the high production and trafficking of opium and state its commitment to eliminate opium cultivation, the Taliban government, in fact, sanctioned the growth of opium through the late 1990s. It reportedly imposed, as on other agricultural goods, a 10 percent tax on the opium poppy and a 20 percent tax on its production and trade. Estimates of revenues the Taliban received from the opium trade range from \$30 million to as high as \$75 million--funds which enabled the government to finance ongoing wars against opposition forces and terrorist activities. UNODC estimates the farm-gate value of the 2000 crop of opium at roughly \$91 million. See UNODC (formerly ODCCP), Afghanistan Annual Opium Poppy Survey 2000. Some argue that incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Central Asia at the end of the 1990s were not intended to found an Islamic state, but instead sought to open

new drug routes. See Scott Peterson, "Fabled Silk Road Now Paved With Narcotics," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 8, 2000.

¹¹ The UN reports 2002 production at 3,200 to 3,600 metric tons; other sources claim it may be as high as 4,000 tons. See UNODC (formerly ODCCP), Strategic Programme Framework: Strengthen Drug Control and Crime Prevention Activities in the Central Asian States: 2002-2005; and "Afghan Drug Crop Increasing," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Crime and Corruption Watch 2, no. 8 (October 25, 2002).

¹² UNODC, Strategic Programme Framework, 6.

¹³ Some experts assert that as much as 50 to 60 percent of all drugs produced in Afghanistan are trafficked through Central Asia. For the 50 percent estimate, see, for example, Prepared Testimony of Ralf Mutsche, Assistant Director, Criminal Directorate International Criminal Police Organization Interpol General Secretariat, before the House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, December 13, 2000; for the 60 percent estimate, see U.S. Government Accounting Office, "Southwestern Asia Heroin Production," June 21, 2000.

¹⁴ See, for example, David Mansfield and Chris Martin, *Strategic Review: The Role of Central Asia as a Conduit for Illicit Drugs to Western Europe*, April 2000; Peter Reuter, RAND Corporation, private communication to author.

¹⁵ See "As Kyrgyzstan Calculates Drug Barons' Profits," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newsline* 4, no. 204 (October 20, 2000). The international drug trade was estimated to produce \$400 billion per year for criminal syndicates.

¹⁶ See survey results from Central Asian law enforcement personnel and the general population in Nancy Lubin, *Central Asians Take Stock: Reform, Corruption and Identity* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1995).

¹⁷ Private communication to the author.

¹⁸ Private communication to the author.

¹⁹ Cited in Nancy Lubin, Alex Klaitis and Igor Barsegian, *Narcotics Interdiction in Afghanistan and Central Asia: Challenges for International Assistance*, Open Society Institute, January, 2002. See also *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2003.

²⁰ See, for example, Marat Mamadshoyev, "Tajik Drugs in Kazakh Capital: A Victory for the Special Services or for Diplomatic Intrigue?" *Eurasia Insight*, June 15, 2000, at <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insigt/articles/eav061500.shtml>>.

²¹ See, for example, Rustem Safronov, "Turkmenistan's Niyazov Implicated in Drug Smuggling," *Eurasia Insight*, March 29, 2002, at <<http://www.eurasianet.or/departments/insight/articles/eav032902.shtml>>.

²² Regarding Tajikistan, for example, the report states: "It is impossible to determine how pervasive drug and other forms of corruption are within government circles; salaries for even top officials are extremely low and, at times, clearly inadequate to support the lifestyles many officials maintain. Even when arrests are made, the resulting cases are not always brought to a satisfactory conclusion... The lavish lifestyles of some, as noted, do give some credence to corruption allegations." See U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, ix-120.

²³ Private communication to the author.

²⁴ Rakhim Abdukholikzoda, "Ch to skryvaet 'geroinovaia zavesa,'" (What's Behind the 'Heroin Veil?') January 28, 2003.

²⁵ E-mailed commentary on "Chto slcryvaet 'geroinovaia zavesa,'" ("What's Behind the 'Heroin Veil?")

²⁶ Author's interview with courier, May 2002.

²⁷ "The Right Moves Aren't Working ... So the Drug Trade is Roaring," *Business Week*, June 23, 1997.

²⁸ Open Society Institute employee interview with Kyrgyz counter-narcotics official. For further discussion of these issues, see Lubin, Klaitis, and Barsegian.

²⁹ See Erika Dailey, "Drug Searches and Human Rights Violations on the Tajikistan Border," *EurasiaNet*, February 18, 2000, at <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/hrr021800>>.

shtml>; see “Governmental and International Responses to Human Rights Abuses at Tajikistan’s Border Crossing,” *EurasiaNet*, May 16, 2000, at <<http://www.eurasianet.org/Departments/rights/articles/hrr051600.shtml>>. For an excellent discussion of women and the drug trade, see Tatiana Bozrikova, “Women and Drugs in Tajikistan,” Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, Tajikistan, February 2001. Many women view strip searches as so common they avoid cross-border travel whenever possible. The situation has contributed to further destruction of formerly strong social ties that united relatives living in different republics. Private communications to the author.

³⁰ The UN estimates that some 7,500 people were living with HIV/AIDS in Central Asia by 2001, most of whom were injecting drug users. Given methodological problems in assessing these totals, however, others believe that the actual number may be 10 times that amount. See, for example, Interfax-Kazakhstan News Agency, Almaty, reported in Russian, May 21, 2002 and reported by the BBC, May 21, 2002.

³¹ UNODC, Strategic Program Framework, 6.

³² Janeis Makerenko, *Intelligence Review* 12, no. 1 I (Nov 1, 2000). At the global level, this is what UNODC reports in the 2000 World Drug Report.

³³ See Lubin, Alex Klaitis and Igor Barsegian, *Narcotics Interdiction in Afghanistan*.

³⁴ For broader description, see Lubin, “New Threats in Central Asia and the Caucasus: An Old Story with a New Twist,” *Russia’s Total Security Environment*, Institute for East/West Studies, 1999.

³⁵ For fuller discussion, see Lubin, Klaitis, and Barsegian.

³⁶ Cited in Lubin, Klaitis and Barsegian.

³⁷ Private communications to the authors and their first-hand experience in these programs.

³⁸ Previous testimony and reports by JNA Associates outline specific recommendations. See Lubin, “U.S. Policies in Central Asia,” and “Aid to the Soviet Union,” Congressional Testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on International Relations, March 17 1999; and JNA Associates, Inc., *U.S. Assistance to the Former Soviet Union: When Less is More*, 1996.