

Kyrgyzstan's 'Roza Revolution': II

Washington, Moscow, Beijing and the Geopolitics of Central Asia

By F. William Engdahl, 26 May 2010

Part IV: Washington and the Kyrgyz future—Securing the Pivot

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 a prime strategic objective of the Pentagon and of US intelligence has been to deeply penetrate the former Soviet states of Central Asia. The Pentagon pressed for increasing US military presence in the region and succeeded in seducing four of the five central Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan, into NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994.

The US tactics for gaining strategic presence in Central Asia have included use of US-trained radical Islamic militants, including Osama bin Laden and CIA-trained Afghani Mujahideen, even well before the fall of the USSR. They were deployed to fuel the destabilization of the Soviet Union itself. The CIA instigated the 1980s Mujahideen guerilla insurgency in Afghanistan, code-named *Operation Cyclone*,¹ to drain over-stretched Soviet resources,² It was the largest and most costly operation in CIA history to that point. Pakistani veteran journalist Ahmed Rashid described the intimate relation of the Mujahideen and the CIA during the period Osama bin Laden was trained by them:

*"With the active encouragement of the CIA and Pakistan's ISI [Inter Services Intelligence], who wanted to turn the Afghan jihad into a global war waged by all Muslim states against the Soviet Union, some 35,000 Muslim radicals from 40 Islamic countries joined Afghanistan's fight between 1982 and 1992. Tens of thousands more came to study in Pakistani madrasahs. Eventually more than 100,000 foreign Muslim radicals were directly influenced by the Afghan jihad."*³

The Mujahideen-CIA model that proved so successful in Afghanistan against the Soviet Red Army was expanded to include US-trained jihadist Mujahideen networks that were infiltrated into Russia's Chechnya province during the 1990s. Given the region's fiercely independent Sunni Muslim population and vital Soviet-era oil pipeline, the Second Chechen War⁴ created yet more destabilizing unrest for the faltering Russian state during the Yeltsin era.⁵

Long-term Pentagon Plan for Central Asia

In 2003, Ariel Cohen -- Russia expert and Pentagon consultant from the defense industry-financed Heritage Foundation⁶ -- testified to the US Senate: "Since the fall of 2001, the US projected elements of air power and special forces into Central Asia..."⁷

Cohen confirmed that Pentagon activity in the former Soviet states of Central Asia -- including Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan -- had actually begun well before the War on Terror was declared in September 2001: "General Anthony Zinni, then-CINC (Commander-in-Chief-w.e.) of the Central Command, which is geographically in charge of Central Asia, started these contacts in the mid- and late 1990s...Off the record, Pentagon officials have said that while the US has not requested permanent basing rights in the region, its presence will be open-ended," he told the Senate.⁸

Cohen, a specialist on Central Asia as well as on Russia, went on to reveal the true Washington game in Central Asia: "US policy makers and officials have suggested different avenues of rationalization for the current and future presence. They named protecting energy resources and pipelines; deterring the resurrection of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia; preventing Russian and/or Chinese hegemony; facilitating democratization and market reforms; and using Central Asia as a re-supply depot for possible action in Afghanistan, as preferred rationale for US presence. Moreover, Central Asia was mentioned as a launching pad in the future operations against Iraq and Iran."⁹

In short, the Pentagon agenda for Central Asia is a long-term strategy of step-wise occupation and militarization of the entire region. Conveniently for the Pentagon, the instability and anti-Americanism created by US occupation and bombings of innocent civilians across Pakistan and Afghanistan also serves to supply a perfect pretext to expand the US militarization of all Central Asia. It's being done under the deceptive rubric of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) 'Peace Keeping' mission.

The turmoil and instability US or related military actions create are then used to justify the military "peace keeping." That's the dirty little secret of what today are termed PKOs or Peace Keeping Operations, whether by NATO directly as in Afghanistan or in Kosovo, or by the UN in oil-rich Haiti since 2004, or oil-rich Darfur in Sudan since 2007, or the mineral-rich Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1999.

Cohen's testimony was given almost seven years ago, in October 2003, as the Bush Administration was barely six months into its invasion and, evidently, permanent occupation of Iraq. One might ask the Japanese or Germans how difficult it is to get rid of an American military basing once it is established. The US strategy for Central Asia has little to do, it seems, with any recent Taliban regrouping or resurgence. It was planned long ago. It has to do with what the Pentagon calls Full Spectrum Dominance—total control of all land, sea and air.

In April 2009, General David Petraeus, head of the US Central Command -- which incorporates not only Afghanistan and Pakistan but Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and other former states of the Soviet Central Asia -- told another US Senate hearing: "Though Central Asia has received relatively less attention than other sub-regions in the AOR (Central Command's Area of Responsibility-w.e.), the US maintains a strong interest in establishing long-term, cooperative relationships with the Central Asian countries and other major regional powers to create a positive security environment."¹⁰

Petraeus then went on to identify the real focus of Pentagon and US interest in the region: "*Central Asia constitutes a pivotal location on the Eurasian continent between Russia, China, and South Asia; it thus serves as a major transit route for regional and international commerce and for supplies supporting Coalition efforts in Afghanistan.*"¹¹ (emphasis added-w.e.)

Petraeus' remarks were, if anything, an understatement of the actual strategic interest of Washington and the Pentagon in this region. Central Asia today is at the heart of the Pentagon's global strategy -- as it was for the British Empire a century before. As Central Asia goes, so goes the empire—the American Century -- or what George H.W. Bush proclaimed triumphantly in 1990 on the collapse of the Soviet Union as, 'The New World Order.'

Revealingly, Petraeus adopted the term used by Britain's Sir Halford Mackinder, the father of Geopolitics, when he described Central Asia as a 'pivot' for US interests on the Eurasian Continent. The US military command clearly is also well-schooled in the levers of geopolitical power in Eurasia as were the British a century earlier.¹²

Washington's interest in Kyrgyzstan is comprehensible only when we consider it in the context of this Great Game -- the Pentagon's Eurasian geopolitical strategy to militarize the Pivot Area, or Heartland, as Mackinder later named it.

Spreading a cancer across Central Asia

The current phase of this undeclared Pentagon irregular war clearly involves a carefully orchestrated strategy of deliberately spreading the war and fomenting various insurgencies across all of Central Asia -- from Afghanistan as the core, over the border to Pakistan and Iran, into Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and ultimately into Russia and China via the unstable Xinjiang province bordering Kyrgyzstan.

The tactics used to spread the US-backed militarization include igniting local tribal insurgencies by deliberately perpetrating civilian and other atrocities, terrorizing local populations and encouraging desperate acts of resistance—in brief, a policy of deliberately committing war crimes as official policy.

It's not that the Pentagon is averse to exposing its manpower to direct fire, nor that pilotless drone bombings are more precise or humane. The strategy is one of deliberately spreading insurgencies and inciting armed responses to atrocities, illegal and inhumane American and NATO actions. That provides the pretext to expand the NATO presence even further, under the rubric of the 'war on terror.' By such tactics, they create a war that can never be "won," and thereby create a pretext for permanent US and NATO presence.

By this time it is becoming clear to most intelligent observers that the US-declared 'War on Terror' is a farce. It's a farce however with a diabolical aim, a means to provide justification for Washington to militarize new conflict regions, step-by-step, as the Pentagon spreads its reach

across the globe under its doctrine of Full Spectrum Dominance.

Radical jihadist Islam, through the propaganda offensive launched after September 11, 2001, has also successfully replaced the bogeyman of Soviet Communism in the eyes of most unwitting Americans. Through this elaborate and cynical ideological deception, they are persuaded to send their sons and daughters to die for the noble cause of 'winning the war on terror.'

Since the Obama Administration took office in January 2009, the US war has been spread across the border, inch-by-inch, village-by-village, corpse by corpse, into Pakistani territory with little more than feeble public protest from Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari.

Zardari was the husband of the assassinated Benazir Bhutto. According to a US Senate investigation Zardari personally took up to \$1.5 billion of state funds as Development Minister when his wife was Prime Minister in the 1990's, earning the nickname "Mr Ten Percent" a reference to his demanded payoff for facilitating development contracts. He reportedly smuggled the funds out of his country illegally into private hidden accounts at Citibank in Switzerland and Dubai. At the time US authorities conveniently blocked investigation.

Today Zardari appears to be resigned to the US military presence in his country. Perhaps that's because Washington could easily blackmail him by revealing the details of his Citibank business from the past. ¹³

Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghani-American neo-conservative who had been one of the architects of the Afghan war in the Bush Administration, is said to have hand-picked his old friend, Hamid Karzai, to be the US-annointed puppet President in Afghanistan. Khalilzad also played a key role in the covert US backing of Zardari as Pakistani President in 2008 once Musharaff apparently became less reliable for some in Washington. ¹⁴

Conveniently enough for the Pentagon agenda, as President, Zardari has managed to foot drag on measures internally to establish a national counter terrorism agency. ¹⁵ Almost ten years into the US-initiated 'War on Terror' in which Pakistan has played a central role, the country still lacks an effective counter-terror strategy. Zardari recently called on Dennis Blair, Barack Obama's Director of US National Intelligence, to "help." ¹⁶

The gradual spreading of the US-led war into Pakistani territory via CIA drone strikes on innocent civilians and others, under the rubric of fighting Taliban terrorists, has already resulted in the US designating an AfPak Theater of the war, a subtle linguistic means of creating acceptance of the fact that the active war has now successfully spread to Pakistan.

The next phase of spreading the war across Eurasia will involve Kyrgyzstan and the neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan around the Ferghana Valley as the pivot for spreading conflict and with it, US and NATO military control ultimately to all Central Asia, the reason the US military presence there is of such strategic importance.

Spreading War via NDN

The US creation of agreements with the governments of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan for the northern supply route to Afghanistan is essential to this strategy. The new route is named the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), an innocuous-sounding cover for much more.

To enable the spread of Pentagon and NATO military presence -- via the euphemistically-named International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) -- across highly strategic parts of the Central Asian landmass, the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) is key. And the US presence in Kyrgyzstan is a key to the NDN.

The NDN involves a series of logistical arrangements connecting Baltic and Caspian ports with Afghanistan via Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

In addition to this vast NDN network, Iran and China are also being considered by Washington as possible transit states in an effort to open those critical countries to Pentagon logistics and likely more.

The NDN provides Washington with a dream too good to be true—a mechanism, costing just a few millions of dollars of transit fees, through which to penetrate deep into the entire Eurasian land space. The flow of war materiel and troops via the burgeoning NDN will be huge. As US presence in

Afghanistan under the Obama 'surge' increases, the anticipated demand for non-military supplies in 2010-2011 is estimated to be 200-300% more than in 2008.¹⁷

Richard Holbrooke, Obama's envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, toured the key countries in Central Asia in February this year to firm up the US ties to the Central Asian NDN countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹⁸

During his tour of Kyrgyzstan, Holbrooke had reportedly intended to have a secret meeting at Manas Airbase with members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an organization officially declared a "foreign terrorist organization" by Holbrooke's State Department back in 2002.¹⁹

The Holbrooke meeting at Manas reportedly was meant to discuss operations to launch guerilla sabotage of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China (TUKC) gas pipeline that recently began operations.²⁰ If true, that would indicate the true geopolitical aim of the US base at Manas and around Kyrgyzstan -- to sabotage Chinese and Eurasian vital energy pipeline flows under the cover of 'terrorist' attacks. These are classic 'false flag' operations, where true instigators hide behind false instigators.²¹

Paul Quinn-Judge, Central Asia director of the non-profit International Crisis Group, told *Time* recently that stepped-up US military-related shipping through Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asia region will lead to attacks on convoys by insurgent groups including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union. "The problem with the Northern Distribution Network is obvious. It turns Central Asia into a part of the theater of war," he emphasized.²²

Significantly, in March 2009, US President Barack Obama had announced provision of \$5.5 million to the Bakiyev regime for constructing a "counter-terrorism" training center in southern Kyrgyzstan, giving the Pentagon its second major military foothold in the country and a major staging area from which to spread the war.

The Pentagon and CIA's use of Islamic militants as elements of its covert foreign policy is a fact. The same military that 'trains' the terrorists also trains the 'anti-terrorists.' This seems a bizarre contradiction in policy only when we fail to grasp the essence of US and British-developed methods of warfare employed actively since the early 1950s.

Low Intensity Warfare and PKO

The method was originally termed Low Intensity Warfare by the British Army officer, Frank Kitson, who developed and refined the method for control of subject areas in Malaysia, in Kenya during the Mau Mau freedom struggles of the 1950s, and later for the British Army in Northern Ireland.

'Low Intensity Warfare' as Kitson termed it, ²³ involves use of deception, of infiltration by double agents, provocateurs, and use of defectors into legitimate popular movements such as those struggling for colonial independence after 1945.

The method is sometimes referred to as 'Gang/Counter-Gang.' The essence is that the orchestrating intelligence agency or military occupying force, whether the British Army in Kenya or the CIA in Afghanistan, actually controls the actions of both sides in an internal conflict, creating small civil wars or gang wars with the aim of dividing the overall legitimate movement and creating the pretext for bringing in outside military forces for what the US now has deceptively named "Peace-Keeping Operations" or PKO.²⁴

In his advanced course on American Military Intervention Since Vietnam, Grant Hammond of the US Air War College refers openly to Low Intensity Conflict, aka Peace Keeping Operations as, "war by another name."²⁵

Indeed, according to a variety of reports from Iraq after the 2003 US invasion of Afghanistan, US and British Special Forces have reportedly covertly armed the so-called insurgents against the US-backed regimes in Iraq or Afghanistan. This includes arming the Taliban at the same time it has been pouring millions into arming local 'anti-Taliban' fighters. ²⁶ If true, it would fit the textbook low-intensity warfare methods of Kitson to a T.

These Special Forces who are arming 'insurgents' include, most critically, private mercenaries or military contractors such as Blackwater (recently renamed Xe after its public exposure for brazenly murdering civilians in Iraq).

Training the police...

Central to the strategy of spreading the Low Intensity Warfare across Central Asia from Afghanistan, is the recent US program to 'train' Afghan police, allegedly to enforce order. According to a recent Afghan poll, less than 20 percent of the population in the eastern and southern provinces trusted the US-trained police. One taxi driver remarked, "Forget about the Taliban; it is the police we worry about."²⁷

Jeremy Kuzmarov, an American historian who has written extensively on the US military, has closely analyzed the deliberate pattern of US training of domestic police over the course of more than a century. He sees such training, seemingly innocuous and routine, as an essential means by which the United States creates a loyal internal security apparatus of client regimes, fortifying their power and repressing the political opposition. He notes,

*"As the US expands the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama administration has placed a premium on police training programs. The stated aim is to provide security to the population so as to enable local forces to gradually take over from the military in completing the pacification process. A similar strategy has been pursued by the United States in Iraq. In both, American-backed forces have been implicated in sectarian violence, death squad activity and torture. At the same time, the weaponry and equipment that the U.S. provided has frequently found its way into the hands of insurgents, many of whom have infiltrated the state security apparatus, contributing to the long-drawn out nature of both conflicts."*²⁸

The last point is the most essential—repression is a central weapon of US Low Intensity or irregular warfare, in addition to being an instrument for exercising state power. In Afghanistan repression serves to spread the war and domestic resistance to what the population legitimately sees as an intolerable US occupation force. That spreading resistance in turn serves to justify such expanded war operations as Obama's 'surge.' It becomes a self-feeding process of spreading conflict, a US aim in Central Asia since the end of the Soviet Union.

Despised and feared, the Afghan national police have been operated by ethnic warlords paid by the CIA, says Kuzmarov. They routinely do shakedowns at random checkpoints, shooting and killing unarmed demonstrators, stealing local farmers' land, terrorizing the civilian population while making house-to-house raids in US and Afghan military-assisted sweep operations. "These kinds of abuses fit with a larger historical pattern, and are a product of the ethnic antagonisms and social polarizations bred by the United States intervention, and the mobilization of police for military and political ends." he stresses.²⁹ The CIA's Operation Phoenix in Vietnam comes at once to mind.

A dubious Community Defense Initiative

The US Commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, has also earmarked \$1.3 billion over the past few months to fund local 'anti-Taliban' militias in fourteen areas across Afghanistan. The top-secret program is so secret that McChrystal refuses to disclose details to his NATO allies, even though McChrystal is head of NATO operations in Afghanistan. And who is to say that armed attacks against NATO forces by one or another of these US-funded 'anti-Taliban' gangs is 'Taliban' or 'anti-Taliban?' The Pentagon press office and its various embedded journalists will, no doubt, be the ones to say.³⁰

Reportedly the program, euphemistically dubbed the innocent-sounding Community Defense Initiative, is controlled by a newly created Special Forces Group that reports directly to McChrystal as head of US forces in Afghanistan. Revealing is that, despite the fact that McChrystal is also commander of the NATO mission in Afghanistan -- officially, the International Security Assistance Force -- other NATO members are kept entirely out of this particular operation of his US arming of local militias in the Community Defense Initiative.³¹

Perhaps one reason the US Command is so secretive towards its supposed NATO allies about the operation is the fact that there is strong opposition within other NATO member states to the idea of arming local militias.

McChrystal reportedly has outsourced the creation of his local militia operations entirely through Arif Noorzai, a highly controversial politician from Helmand province, coincidentally the largest opium producing region in the world. Arif Noorzai is widely distrusted, to put it mildly. This funding and arming of local Afghan groups seems to be an integral part of the Petraeus 'surge' strategy.

On May 19, the Pentagon press services reported that 'insurgents' had launched a bold assault on the massive US military fortress at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan, using rockets, grenades and small arms fire. Seven US servicemen were reported wounded and numerous insurgents killed. The previous day a group of suicide bombers had attacked a US military convoy in Kabul killing eighteen including five US servicemen. The US military also reported that the Taliban claimed credit.³²

Those are the reported surface facts. What is not at all clear is whether the 'insurgents' were in fact some of the thousands of freshly-armed locals recruited by Arif Noorzai in the loosely-supervised Community Defense Initiative, or Afghans genuinely resisting US military assaults and atrocities. Also not at all clear is whether the Taliban claim of masterminding the attacks was just political opportunism on their part, a ploy to make them appear stronger than they are in the eyes of other Afghans.

The Pentagon is well known to use private contractors in Afghanistan and elsewhere to do what under law the US Armed Forces are prohibited from doing—the privatization of warfare, if you will. Recent exposures in the *New York Times* have detailed secret and illegal Pentagon use of private military contractors under Lockheed Corporation -- with names such as 'Strategic Influence Alternatives' (sic) or 'American International Security Corporation' --to carry out secret operations in eastern Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan. One such network employing American, Afghan and Pakistani mercenaries is reportedly supervised by former high-ranking CIA veteran Duane "Dewey" Clarridge, a CIA 'counter-terror' expert who played a key role in the CIA's 1980s drug-running Nicaraguan Contras operations.³³

Arming local Afghan militias, deploying private military mercenary companies not bound by Geneva Conventions on warfare or any Afghan laws, comprised of Afghan and Pakistani mercenaries directed by veteran US intelligence officials—this is all a recipe with a colossal potential to spread wars and conflict like a wild brushfire. The record of the US military commands in Iraq, as well as now in Afghanistan, suggests this is in fact their intent—Low Intensity Operations as a method of expanding the war, all under the deceptive umbrella of the NATO 'Peace Keeping Operation.'

NDN is the Key

The states now involved in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) include: NATO member and former Soviet Union state Latvia; US-dominated oil producer Azerbaijan; US puppet state Georgia; Kazakhstan; Russia; Tajikistan; and Uzbekistan. In its finest Orwellian Pentagon linguistics, the US war bases have been deceptively renamed 'transit centers.' They are still US military bases despite the nominal change.

Russia's role in the NDN is complex. Moscow facilitated the establishment of the rail line that constitutes a major transportation route within the NDN from Latvia down to the Uzbek-Afghan border. The Putin government also worked with the Obama administration, agreeing to over-flights of lethal materials. Russian companies that have been struggling during the global economic crisis to stay afloat suddenly benefit from Pentagon logistics contracts that give them tens of millions of sorely-needed dollars. At the same time, however, Moscow tried to convince the Bakiev government in Kyrgyzstan to deny the US military further access to the Manas air base.³⁴ In this, Moscow was unsuccessful.

Additionally the NDN gives Washington an increasing lever over the under-developed and economically troubled economies of Central Asia. Transit agreements made with local carriers provide new economic ties to Washington and weaken ties to Russia in many cases or build an interest lobby within Russia to continue NATO cooperation. It does not take much imagination to see the potential of the NDN to create a counter pole to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the region's economy. Russian companies alone garner over \$1 billion a year in badly needed revenue for hauling Pentagon supplies across Russia via the NDN.³⁵

If the US succeeds in this mission of militarizing Central Asia outwards from Afghanistan, it will have achieved a 'checkmate' -- in effect, blocking any combination of nations on earth from opposing the Pentagon agenda of Full Spectrum Dominance. The ability of the nations of South America -- from Venezuela to Bolivia to Cuba or Brazil -- to follow an economic and political course independent of the dictates of Washington will be dashed. The ability of China to build a regional Asian economic zone of stability independent of the collapsing dollar will be gone. Russia will be broken into feuding pieces as tribal and ethnic and religious wars spread across the states of the former Soviet Union in the manner of a new Thirty Years' War. Hence the stakes for Washington in the seemingly remote events in Kyrgyzstan are of staggering geopolitical importance.

NDN and Kyrgyzstan's Batken 'Anti-Terror' center

In this context, the Obama Administration's new anti-terror training center at Batken in Kyrgyzstan which will train the "Scorpion" Special Forces units for "drug-interdiction and anti-terrorist operations," takes on strategic importance for future US Grand Strategy in the heart of Central Asia, and for a future control lever over all Eurasia from Russia and Kazakhstan to China itself.

Batken is the axis or pivot point for American operations in central Eurasia.

On March 17, 2010, the Kyrgyz Defense Ministry of the now-deposed Bakiyev government issued a statement that construction of the anti-terrorist training center in the Batken Oblast was, "the bilateral Kyrgyz-American relations project against international terrorism and religious extremism, transnational organized crime, prevention of drug smuggling, not oriented against third countries and does not conflict with national obligations under CSTO and other international organizations."³⁶

Unnamed sources in the Defense Ministry of Kyrgyzstan have said that the US-trained Kyrgyz 'anti-terror' soldiers will be involved in the possible 'local conflicts' -- and specifically in conflicts with Uzbekistan -- a very convenient pretext to spread the US-orchestrated conflict to the strategic Ferghana Valley.

The Kyrgyz Defense Ministry added that construction of the US training camp in the Batken Oblast was but "one of many joint projects of Kyrgyzstan and USA" in the military area, while "cooperation on military-technical matters has been implemented under the Pentagon's FMF (Foreign Military Financing) program since 1996."³⁷

Some military analysts in China and in Russia, with whom the author has spoken privately, believe that involving US-trained local soldiers in local conflicts serves the intent of the US Central Command -- to justify and spread NATO and US presence across the strategic corridors of Central Asia, positioning the US militarily to control future energy and political developments from Russia to China and across Eurasia.

Eurasia is the vast region identified by US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski as containing the only group of nations that could pose a challenge to America's global hegemony.

Brzezinski, the protege of David Rockefeller and a student of British geopolitician Mackinder, wrote in 1997:

*"America is now the only global superpower, and Eurasia is the globe's central arena. Hence, what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and to America's historical legacy...With warning signs on the horizon across Europe and Asia, any successful American policy must focus on Eurasia as a whole and be guided by a Geostrategic design...That puts a premium on maneuver and manipulation in order to prevent the emergence of a hostile coalition that could eventually seek to challenge America's primacy."*³⁸

Brzezinski added, in his most revealing book,

*"The most immediate task is to make certain that no state or combination of states gains the capacity to expel the United States from Eurasia or even to diminish significantly its decisive arbitration role."*³⁹

In this context the following actions assume a larger significance:

- In January 2009 the Commander of the US Central Command, General David Petraeus, announced that transit agreements had been signed with Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- In March the Uzbek government allowed US soldiers to be transferred to Afghanistan via the German base at Termez in German Luftwaffe planes.
- In May 2009 a US supply hub at the Uzbek airport of Navoi was created, using a South Korean transport firm as proxy.
- In June 2009, it was announced that the lease agreement for the US base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan would be extended after earlier announcements that the Americans would have to leave in August.

- And finally in July 2009 it became public knowledge that the US Air Force was running a small refueling and resupply operation at an unspecified location in Turkmenistan.⁴⁰

Pentagon planners began work on their Northern Distribution Network as early as 2006, when news of any Taliban insurgency was barely audible and the US military campaign was at a very low level. Significantly, as the US military presence in Afghanistan has since increased, the armed insurgency has also inevitably increased. As noted, that is more than coincidence. Gradually, stage by stage, US officials began making deals for rights of passage, crucially with Russia and other nations around Afghanistan.

Largely unnoticed, these bilateral accords finally took shape as a whole by mid-2008 in what the US military dubbed the Northern Distribution Network. A brief look at a satellite map provided by Google and by the NOAA in Washington makes the significance of the NDN clearer.



The NDN begins at one of two “western hubs” in Latvia or Georgia. From these secure starting points, the military cargo is transported by a combination of trains, trucks and ferries across Russian territory and the adjacent former-Soviet countries of Kazakhstan, Kryrgyzstan and Tajikistan or via Uzbekistan into Afghanistan. The publicly stated reason for the NDN routes is to insure safe supply routes to Afghanistan independent of Pakistan.⁴¹

Ironically, the most important NDN route begins in NATO member Latvia’s Baltic all-weather port of Riga where US-chartered container ships offload their cargo onto Russian trains that go south through Russia around the Caspian Sea through Kazakhstan and across Uzbekistan into north

Afghanistan. The Russian train-lines were built to supply Russia's own war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and today Moscow's cooperation is making them available for use by the US and NATO in their own Afghan campaign.⁴²

Another NDN route goes from Georgia, bypassing Russia from the Black Sea port of Ponti, to Baku in Azerbaijan where military goods are loaded onto ferries crossing the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan to be trucked to Uzbekistan and on to Afghanistan, presently accounting for one third of the total shipping via NDN. And a third NDN route bypasses Uzbekistan entirely and goes from Kazakhstan via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan.⁴³

From this geographically central point it becomes clear that Kyrgyzstan is shaping up to become the next theater of war in the Pentagon's Central Asia strategy, or as General Petraeus called it, the pivot of the Pentagon strategy. As Central Asia expert, Peter Chamberlain describes it:

*"The recent sudden realignment of Taliban and Pakistani interests (represented in the string of Taliban "arrests") is intended to provide the US and NATO with an excuse to open this new front in their terror war, by shifting the emphasis to protecting the new Northern Distribution Network (NDN) that parallels anticipated pipeline routes to the irresistible underground wealth that waits to be pumped from underneath the fertile Caspian basin soil. This attempted realignment on interior Asia was only made possible because American and Pakistani leaders decided to take advantage of Pakistan's continued friendly relations with the Taliban, instead of working at cross-purposes with each other."*⁴⁴

Opium in the Central Asian War

The 'glue' that clearly holds the entire US Low Intensity Warfare strategy across Central Asia together is opium.

As was the case with the British and the US merchant companies, backed by their governments in the notorious Opium Wars in China beginning the 1840s, opium plays an essential role in the US strategy for control over Central Asia today.

Washington investigative writer Wayne Madsen (of *the Wayne Madsen Report*) describes the role of opium in the 2001 US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan: "WMR has learned from a Delta Force veteran that when units of the elite military force were sent into Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, their first order from the CIA was to protect Afghan poppy fields. WMR's FBI sources confirmed that Afghanistan has replaced Khun Sa's poppy production operations in Burma's 'Golden Triangle' as the main source of opium and heroin for the CIA's narcotics trade."⁴⁵

In this decades-long CIA and Pentagon effort to train and infiltrate operatives masquerading as Islamic terrorists into Central Asia – particularly in the region from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan surrounding the uranium-rich Ferghana Valley -- a major player is the CIA-funded Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU, which has also been active across the border into Kyrgyzstan and throughout the Ferghana Valley, now funds itself with the lucrative opium traffic.

According to Interpol, the IMU is deeply involved in the Afghan heroin trade into and within Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and all across Central Asia. In US Congressional testimony, Ralf Mutschke, a senior Interpol anti-narcotics specialist declared, "Despite the political and ideological agenda of the IMU, this movement is not exclusively terrorist in nature, rather more of a hybrid organization in which criminal interests often take priority over 'political' goals. IMU leaders have a vested interest in ongoing unrest and instability in their area in order to secure the routes they use for the transportation of drugs."⁴⁶

Central Asia analyst Peter Chamberlain points to evidence that the IMU is a drug gang, created in all likelihood by the CIA:

*"There is every reason to believe that the IMU itself is a CIA creation. According to the definitive history on this topic, given by author Steve Coll in *Ghost Wars*, 'CIA Director William Casey, in a move exceeding his authority, decided to extend destabilizing propaganda measures inside the borders of the Soviet Union. To this end, the CIA promoted the Muslim religion in Uzbekistan, by CIA commissioning a translation of the Qu'ran into Uzbek by an Uzbek exile living in Germany, and then commissioning Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence to deliver 5,000 copies...From the very beginning, before the Soviets even invaded, the Afghan revolution was manufactured by a coalition of foreign powers led by the CIA. Even the political form of Wahabi "Islam" which was taught to*

combatants in local madrassas, using American-created "Islamic" textbooks from the University of Nebraska, was really a deviation from true Islam that incorporated behavioral modification techniques." ⁴⁷

Chamberlain adds,

"If the CIA did, in fact, supply the corrupted Islamic jihadi textbooks to the madrassas where IMU foot soldiers were indoctrinated in Uzbekistan, then it follows that whatever arose from them is also a product of the CIA...American military and drug-interdiction missions in hot pursuit of IMU terrorists and drug-dealers provide cover for Special Forces operatives, who scout-out local leadership for further development, or termination...The Partnership for Peace programs open the door for an influx of thousands of American and NATO trainers, giving them bases for operations for 'direct-action' missions, while it transfers tons of surplus military equipment to oil rich customers and sets the stage for joint military war games." ⁴⁸

US Ambassador and Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke announced in June 2009 that the US Afghan opium eradication campaign would be abandoned in favor of what the Pentagon calls a campaign of "interdiction." In a press comment Holbrooke told AP that Washington was phasing out opium eradication in Afghanistan. ⁴⁹

It has also been reported in the *New York Times* that the brother of US-installed Afghan President Karzai, Ahmed Wali, is a CIA asset on their payroll the past eight years, and that Wali is the drug warlord of Helmand Province. Among the things the CIA reportedly pays Ahmed Wali Karzai for is recruiting "an Afghan paramilitary force that operates at the CIA's direction in and around the southern city of Kandahar, Mr. Karzai's home." ⁵⁰

That makes the Afghan drug trade under the CIA alarmingly similar to their role in the Southeast Asian opium trade during the Vietnam War. The conclusion is overwhelming that neither case was an 'oversight' in pursuit of other, more military, goals, but rather an integral, central part of Washington's strategy.

Ahmed Wali has reportedly used his drug proceeds to fund state terror operations, including the intimidation of opponents in the rigged election of 2009. Karzai's 2007 appointment as anti-corruption chief, Izzatullah Wasifi, meanwhile, spent four years in a Nevada prison for trying to sell heroin to an undercover police officer. ⁵¹ Clearly the logic was something like, 'it takes a heroin dealer to catch one.'

Karzai's Helmand is no small part of the opium fields of Afghanistan. It represents the greatest concentration of opium production on the planet, producing some 40% of the world's illicit opium, according to expert US researcher and author John W. McCoy, who has tracked the role of the US intelligence in Asian drug trafficking since the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. In Helmand some 103,000 hectares of opium were cultivated in 2008 – two thirds of all opium in Afghanistan.

McCoy points out that during the CIA-backed Mujahideen guerilla warfare against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the CIA used drug money -- earned by the lucrative opium crops that were planted and harvested by the Mujahideen -- to finance the covert war, a war made popular by Hollywood's Tom Hanks as 'Charlie Wilson's War.' McCoy stresses that during the 1980's, "the CIA's covert war served as the catalyst that transformed the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands into the world's largest heroin producing region."

To defeat the Taliban in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, McCoy adds,

"The CIA successfully mobilized former warlords long active in the heroin trade to seize towns and cities across eastern Afghanistan. In other words, the Agency and its local allies created ideal conditions for reversing the Taliban's opium ban and reviving the drug traffic. Only weeks after the collapse of the Taliban, officials were reporting an outburst of poppy planting in the heroin-heartlands of Helmand and Nangarhar." ⁵²

It's a matter of established fact that at the time the US military drove the Afghan Taliban government into exile in late 2001, opium production under Taliban rule had been dramatically reduced. It is also a matter of established fact, and of UN Office on Drugs and Crime record, that in the period since the US-led NATO forces have occupied Afghanistan, the opium harvest has not only recovered, it has rebounded to its highest level in history, ⁵³ along with a staggering parallel rise in Afghanistan's opium production.

The Taliban in 2000 had completely banned the crop. Since the US took control of the country militarily, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Afghan opium harvest went from just 185 tons grown on less than eight thousand hectares of land in 2001 to 8,200 tons over 193,000 hectares in 2007. That translates into a forty-four-fold rise in opium harvest during eight years of US military occupation of Afghanistan. ⁵⁴

In 2008 US and UN authorities made much of the headline that acreages of opium poppy plantings were down some 19% from 2007, downplaying the fact that harvest yields at the same time improved by some 15% to keep Afghanistan the world's largest source of opium for heroin, with no other place even close. ⁵⁵

For the past five years, the Afghan opium harvest has accounted for as much as 50% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and supplies the base for over 93% of the world's heroin supply. ⁵⁶ It is incorrect to say that under the US military occupation since 2001 Afghanistan's economy has not grown. GDP had risen by an impressive 66%, all due to the booming, US-protected opium industry controlled by Washington's hand-picked Karzai regime. ⁵⁷

The head of Russia's Federal Narcotics Service estimated the value of Afghanistan's current opium crop at \$65 billion. Only \$500 million of that vast sum goes to Afghanistan's farmers, \$300 million to the Taliban guerrillas, and the \$64 billion balance "to the drug mafia." ⁵⁸

In a March 2010 meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, the head of Russia's Federal Drug Control Agency (FSKN) Victor Ivanov said, "Afghan opiates led to the death of 1 million people by overdose in the last 10 years, and that is United Nations data. Is that not a threat to world peace and security?" ⁵⁹

NATO has formally refused an appeal made by Russia for eradication of opium fields in Afghanistan. The reason? NATO (the US Command) claims eradication would destroy the "sole source of income in the region." The criminal absurdity of the Afghan mission of NATO is summed up in that simple statement.

At a recent meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, Ivanov called on NATO forces in their stated mission of "normalizing the situation in Afghanistan" to include "the elimination of drug production." ⁶⁰

NATO spokesman James Appathurai voiced "understanding" for Russian concerns, ⁶¹ given the country's estimated 200,000 heroin and morphine addicts and the tens of thousands dying each year as a result of their addiction. Significantly, since the US occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 a major destination of Afghanistan's revitalized opium industry has been Russia where the drugs are creating major social and economic problems.

The NATO official then said that the Afghan drug problem had to be handled "carefully" in an effort to avoid "alienating" local residents. In a masterpiece of NATO doublespeak, Appathurai stated, "We share the view that it has to be tackled. But there is a slight difference of views. We cannot be in a situation where we remove the only source of income for people who live in the second poorest country in the world without being able to provide them an alternative. That is simply not possible." ⁶²

US Military as Opium Exporter?

Opium would be the ideal glue for the US wars in Central Asia. It finances 'insurgencies' such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Up to 10% of the population of Afghanistan -- including the brother of the President and perhaps even the President -- live off the proceeds of the opium trade.

Moreover, creating opium and heroin addiction among the tribes and groups of the Central Asian region, as the British learned well during their 1840s Opium Wars in China, is an ideal way to subvert a country, creating both passivity as well as lawlessness and chaos that, in turn, can be used to justify an expanded NATO 'peace keeping' presence.

Using Kyrgyzstan migrations to flood China's Xinjiang and other provinces with opium would be one obvious strategy for Pentagon strategists to quietly 'encourage.' Already, Russian society is being devastated by a plague of cheap Afghan heroin, creating large populations of addicts, as well as crime and lawlessness.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Holbrooke and various Pentagon Central Command spokesmen claim that

Afghan tribesmen or Uzbeks or Tajiks are carting the opium on the backs of mules across treacherous land passes to Russia and other destinations. However, the reality seems to be quite different. It appears that the opium is being transported by means of the most modern military transport available.

The most explosive aspect of the story of US so-called 'benign neglect' of the growth of the Afghan opium harvest are the reports that the opium and refined heroin are transported by US military transport -- from sites such as the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan -- concealed and protected under national security secrecy.

Such use of US military transport, if true, would provide the perfect cover as US military aircraft are 'off limits' and no one is allowed near them or to search their contents. It would represent a large-scale repeat of the CIA's Air America flights of heroin during the Vietnam War in the 1960's.⁶³

The charge is made by a knowledgeable intelligence source from the region—General Hamid Gul, the retired former head of Pakistan's intelligence services (ISI) and Director-General of its military intelligence during the Afghan Mujahideen wars of the late 1980s.

"Abdul Wali Karzai is the biggest drug baron of Afghanistan," Gul stated bluntly in an August 2009 interview. He says 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."⁶⁴

Gul headed the Pakistan's ISI from 1987 through 1989 during the peak of the Mujahideen insurgency and worked closely then with the CIA. He has since been forbidden entry into both the USA and the UK, because, he says, he is too outspoken about the true US and British agenda for the region, which he believes also includes the systematic destruction of Pakistan as a nation.⁶⁵

Gul's charge that US military aircraft are being used to secretly transport Afghan opium and heroin through the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, as well as via the various routes of the Northern Distribution Network, has also been anecdotally corroborated by Afghani Tadjik sources, and by US military personnel speaking off-record, as well as by Russian reports.⁶⁶

This special role of the US base at Manas, in conjunction with the latest US moves to establish a "drug interdiction and anti-terror" training base at Batken in southwest Kyrgyzstan, bordering the volatile Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan, would fit nicely with the announcement by US Special Afghan Envoy Holbrooke that the new US policy on Afghan opium will be one of selective 'interdiction,' and not of eradication. Conveniently, the new Pentagon policy also leaves 93% of world opium untouched by US 'eradicators' and available for refining into heroin for sale on the markets of China, Uzbekistan, Russia and beyond, a form of new Opium War.

US mainstream media report that the Taliban is in control of the opium trade. However, According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Anti-Government Elements (or AGEs), which include but are not limited to the Taliban, account for just 2% of what the UN estimated was a \$3.4 billion annual drug revenue. That figure is backed up even by the US CIA and the DIA who estimate that the Taliban receives a meager \$70 million a year from the drugs trade. The real volumes of heroin and raw opium in Afghanistan are controlled by warlords linked to the Karzai machine.

The latest US strategy for dealing with the Afghan drug 'problem' is also carefully crafted. It puts drug traffickers with known ties to 'insurgents' on a list to be eliminated—i.e. killed. It excludes the vast majority of Afghan drug lords who garner some 98% of total opium and heroin revenues and who work with the drug-sotted Karzai family and Karzai's corrupt regime.

In effect, as one analyst put it, the United States military "would be assisting to eliminate the competition for drug lords allied with occupying forces or the Afghan government and helping them to further corner the market."⁶⁷



Craig Murray, UK Ambassador to Uzbekistan until 2004, claims that convoys under General Rashid Dostum — who was reappointed in 2009 as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Afghan National Army by President Hamid Karzai — would truck the drugs over the border.

According to Ambassador Murray, Dostum is a key figure running the Afghan heroin trade from his home near Mazar e Sharif. He was brought back from exile by Karzai, with US approval, for the recent elections where he duly delivered “100%” of the votes in key districts for Karzai. The Pentagon now proposes to supply weapons on a massive scale to Dostum’s private (drug) militia, ostensibly to “fight the Taliban.” That, despite the fact that Dostum remains nominal Army Chief of Staff, and despite the fact that Washington knows about his role in the Afghan heroin trade.⁶⁸

And President Karzai’s own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, long on the CIA Payroll according to the New York Times,⁶⁹ has been accused of being a major drug lord, making for a nice circle around the US-backed Karzai government.⁷⁰

Murray further emphasizes that Afghanistan “now exports not opium, but heroin. Opium is converted into heroin on an industrial scale, not in kitchens but in factories. Millions of gallons of the chemicals needed for this process are shipped into Afghanistan by tanker. The tankers and bulk opium lorries on the way to the factories share the roads, improved by American aid, with NATO troops....The four largest players in the heroin business are all senior members of the Afghan government. When we attacked Afghanistan, America bombed from the air while the CIA paid, armed and equipped the dispirited warlord drug barons.”⁷¹

Conclusion

A careful look at the map of Central Asia makes clear why Afghanistan is central to US Pentagon efforts to destabilize and militarize all of Central Asia and to threaten simultaneously China, Russia, Iran and the other neighboring countries -- notably, all members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Drugs proliferation and anti-drug interdictions, terror and anti-terror operations, deliberate local police brutality and control of Eurasia’s existing and future energy pipelines -- all are ingredients of the US-run NATO operations radiating out of Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan plays a 'pivot' role now in the expansion of that war across all of Central Asia. Moscow knows this; Beijing knows this. The stakes for Washington's Great Game in Kyrgyzstan and across Central Asia are nothing less than the ultimate survival of the American Full Spectrum Dominance goal of total global military hegemony.

Like the US war in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s, it is becoming increasingly clear that the US 'war on terror' in Afghanistan is deliberately designed by Washington to be another 'no-win war.'

The 'failure' of the Afghan war is being engineered to justify a spillover into Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Ferghana valley and from there across Central Asia. Before the popular protests in March this year drove the Bakiyev gang into exile, Washington was well on its way to broadening the war by means of the agreements with Bakiyev to build up 'anti-terror' training bases in the country. From there, control of the Eurasian land space from Xinjiang into Kazakhstan and Russia would be just a matter of time, given the spread of the opium drug routes.

This time, unlike the early 1970s, the stakes for American hegemony are vastly higher. The role of Kyrgyzstan's interim provisional government, the role of Moscow and of Beijing as well as Iran and Uzbekistan will be decisive in one of the world's most intensive centers of conflict.

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