



## DRUGS PROBLEMS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Kazakhstan continues to be a popular drug corridor for trafficking from major drug producing countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan to Russian and western European markets. In 1997, the number of international drug trafficking rings operating in the region increased, including rings from Nigeria and Brazil. The volume of drugs produced and smuggled also increased. Marijuana harvested in the Chu Valley of southern Kazakhstan in 1997, for example, was estimated at 500 metric tons. However, the official statistics for 1997 will not be available until early 1998. The Government of Kazakhstan approved a national program to combat illicit drug trafficking and abuse.

Drug trafficking from Afghanistan and Pakistan continued to increase, according to local law enforcement officials. In addition, cocaine from Brazil has been confiscated at the Almaty airport. The most popular means to transport drugs through Kazakhstan is on northbound trains from Kazakhstan to Moscow, using adolescent and/or elderly people to smuggle the goods in their baggage or on their persons. Drug abuse among Kazakhstani citizens under the age of 30 continued to rise. Money laundering is easily accomplished in Kazakhstan due to a lack of banking regulations and infrastructure, and often goes hand-in-hand with drug trafficking... There are reports that due to increased police surveillance in the Chu

Valley, marijuana plantations are being developed in the Dzhambyl Region of southern Kazakhstan....

## **1.- KYRGYZSTAN.**

Kyrgyzstan continues to be a significant transit point for narcotics from Afghanistan and Pakistan en route to Russia and Western Europe....

Cannabis grows wild throughout the country, and there may be as many as 40,000 hectares growing....

Kyrgyzstan's location makes it geographically convenient as a transit point, as opium and heroin traffickers seek new routes from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Russia and the west and hashish traffickers from Kyrgyzstan to Russia. Given the relatively limited resources of Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies, as well as the continuously disruptive society in neighboring Tajikistan, there is reason to believe that trafficking will continue....

Officials report there are many trafficking groups operating in Kyrgyzstan, all centered in Osh, which repackage Afghan opiates and smuggle them north using a variety of transportation methods. Recently, police officials have noticed an increasing trend of using individual carriers who cross the mountains with drugs in backpacks, as well as an increasing number of women (up from 3 percent to 10 percent) who exist in poverty and carry drugs to earn money. Although official estimates of users are based on limited factual information and have remained around 50,000 for a number of years, the Kyrgyz government is increasingly concerned about the possible burgeoning use of narcotics among its own citizenry. The unofficial estimates of users declaring themselves to the authorities has doubled from 1996 to 1997. New drugs are also appearing in the country. The price of opium in Kyrgyzstan has increased significantly during the past year....

**CORRUPTION.** Arrests of government officials involved in narcotrafficking continued to support evidence of narcotic-related corruption. For example, in February 1997, MVD officers in Osh were accused of providing information to drug carriers. In September, a Ministry of National Security (MNB) officer was arrested with 15 kilograms of opium....

**CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION.** Although Kyrgyzstan was once a key supplier of licit opium poppy for the Soviet Union, the GOK has in recent times banned the cultivation of the opium poppy. Although there are no reports of opium production, there are indications that the opium poppy is growing on a limited basis in back yard gardens. There have been no reports in the past two years of illicit opium cultivation. ...

Ephedra grows wild everywhere in Kyrgyzstan. It is used in the production of Ephedrine, a mild stimulant for medicinal purposes. Locally it is often brewed into "Ephedrone" which is used by injection. Kyrgyz authorities consider this an extremely dangerous drug....

Cannabis also grows wild in much of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz officials estimated in 1994 that such wild growth of cannabis totaled approximately 60,000 hectares and that the product was consumed primarily in central Asia and the CIS. This year, the GOK says they eradicated 15,000 hectares....

## 2.- TAJIKISTAN.

Tajikistan produces a limited amount of opium, but increasing quantities of opium and heroin transit the country, originating in Afghanistan enroute to Russia and Western Europe. Significant seizures show a government effort to control the trade, but limited law enforcement resources as well as corruption limit the effectiveness of this effort. With Russian officers commanding the border guards stationed along the border with Afghanistan, the Government of Tajikistan is not in a position to control cross-border activity....

Tajikistan continued its trend of annual increases in drug seizures, with a noticeable increase in heroin as well as raw opium. The illegal drugs, almost entirely from Afghanistan, flow principally along two routes: through the mountainous Gorno-Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan, then north through the city of Osh in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and on to Tashkent and beyond, or into southern Tajikistan and from there to the capital Dushanbe, from which it moves by rail, truck or air on to Tashkent and beyond. Drug trafficking groups have established links with elements of the Russian and Tajik border guards, armed Tajik opposition groups, Tajik government officials and Afghan armed groups. They are believed to have links with trafficking organizations extending into Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union....

There is a limited amount of opium cultivation in Tajikistan, principally in the Penjikent Valley where opium was licitly cultivated when such production was permitted. Due to limited resources both to survey and to eradicate this cultivation, precise data is lacking. While anecdotal claims suggest an increase in production, the total appears to still remain small, particularly in comparison with the amounts available elsewhere in the region....

Tajikistan's economy and banking structures are not conducive to money laundering: the country is isolated, the banking system undeveloped, and the economy lacks extensive international links. Tajikistan does not significantly produce or participate in the transit of precursor chemicals, nor is any narcotics refining believed to take place on its territory....

**CORRUPTION.** Corruption exists in Tajikistan, and plays a significant role in facilitating this illegal trade.

A Ministry of Internal Affairs official was arrested in northern Sughd (former Leninabad) province in September for narcotics trafficking, and a number of Tajik and Russian military and police personnel have been arrested during the year,

demonstrating both that the problem exists and that the Government of Tajikistan is capable of taking at least some actions against it...

### 3.- TURKMENISTAN.

Turkmenistan continues to be used by drug traffickers as a conduit to smuggle illicit drugs to the West, and precursor and essential chemicals to producers in southwest Asia. Traffickers are making additional efforts to open new markets and cultivate opium. Currently, the greatest challenge to the Government of Turkmenistan is from international drug smugglers seeking to move opium and/or heroin from Afghanistan to Western markets and precursor chemicals to the East. The continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan has exacerbated these problems. Turkmen officials are also concerned that domestic drug cultivation and use appear to be on the rise, although statistics on both are hard to obtain. The growing number of casinos and foreign-run luxury hotels raises questions about Turkmenistan's vulnerability to money laundering activities associated with the narcotics trade, although no official cases have been reported...

Although health authorities indicate that domestic narcotics consumption is not a major problem at the present time, traditional cultivation and use of opium poppy, and lack of sufficient resources to monitor the borders, make Turkmenistan increasingly vulnerable to the narcotics industry. Turkmenistan health authorities have indicated that there is a small domestic opium addict population. Information gathered during embassy officials' travel to the border area with Afghanistan corroborates this. Opium was traditionally smoked, brewed or processed into a beverage for celebrations, medicine, or daily use by Turkmen tribal groups. Health officials do not have any statistics on use. They believe that many opium users in urban areas now inject opiates. Intravenous opium use in rural areas, once practically non-existent, is also increasing. Marijuana and hashish use is increasing, though remains at relatively low levels....

Seizure patterns indicate that opium from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran transits Turkmenistan enroute to markets in Russia, Turkey and Western Europe. Direct air routes now link Ashgabat with Tehran, Istanbul, Karachi, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Moscow, London, Birmingham, Abu Dhabi, New Delhi, and Frankfurt. A railway line connecting Turkmenistan to Iran was officially opened in 1996, and currently is open for cargo traffic. Truck transport to Europe is steadily increasing. Truck traffic from Iran remained heavy in 1997....

Turkmen authorities remain concerned that crime groups may be laundering funds through casinos and hotels. For example, the two largest luxury hotels in Ashgabat are managed by the family of a Turk (now deceased) who had a conviction for heroin trafficking in the United States....

Despite limited enforcement resources, the Government of Turkmenistan continues to seize impressive quantities of Afghan opium and Pakistani hashish bound for

Russia, Turkey and Western Europe in cars, trucks, and train cars. For example, in October 1997, the Government seized 78.5 kilograms of various narcotics, including 9 kilograms of heroin, 32.5 kilograms of opium, and 37 kilograms of marijuana. Concern about drug trafficking across the Afghan border has led to an increased deployment of border troops in the region of Kushka....

**CORRUPTION.** President Niyazov severely criticized law enforcement bodies, during April 2 and 3, 1997, meetings with Mejlis (parliament) deputies, employees of the General Procuracy, and high officials in the military and security organs. He singled out collusion in drug smuggling as one of their main failings. Also, he charged that this is going on "in practically every (law enforcement and military) organ." As a result, a number of high-ranking law enforcement officials were fired, including the Procurator General....

**CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION.** Cultivation of opium is illegal in Turkmenistan, however, it does occur, particularly in remote mountains and desert areas. Although no statistics on the extent of such cultivation are available, authorities report that most opium is cultivated along the Iranian border in the Ahal Velayat (region), which includes Ashgabat, and in the eastern parts of Lebap and Mary Velayats. Opium poppies cultivated in Turkmenistan are grown almost exclusively on very small plots of land that are rarely larger than a few hundred square feet. Most production is intended for the personal use of the grower and his or her family. There is also some processing of opium resin and poppy straw extract for domestic consumption. Cannabis is also present in Turkmenistan....

#### **4.- UZBEKISTAN.**

Uzbekistan is part of an important transshipment route for Southwest Asian narcotics heading for Russia and Europe. While the government continues to profess its commitment to the fight against drugs, it made virtually no progress on counter narcotics legislation or a counter narcotics master plan in 1997. Law enforcement agencies seized some two and a half tons of illicit narcotics, but limited resources hamper their efforts and a lack of coordination among the various agencies assigned counter narcotics responsibilities. The Government of Uzbekistan is talking about devoting additional resources to demand reduction, but education programs are in their infancy and treatment has not advanced beyond Soviet methods.

Uzbekistan is part of an attractive and increasingly important transshipment route for opium and cannabis products moving from southwest Asia toward Russia and Europe. Precursor chemicals that originate in Russia, Ukraine, and East Asia also move through the country to heroin laboratories in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Uzbekistan was formerly a moderate producer of opium poppies, but government programs have all but eradicated the crop in recent years.

Uzbekistan's various law enforcement agencies seized 2.5 million metric tons of illicit drugs in 1997, roughly three-fourths of it opium. This represents a considerable decline from the more than seven tons seized last year, but the decline is probably attributable more to the absence of any one large seizure than to any decline in trafficking activity or effectiveness in Uzbek law enforcement efforts. The closure of the Uzbek-Afghan border at Termez because of fighting in northern Afghanistan may also have contributed to the decline....

**CORRUPTION.** Uzbekistan has laws against corruption, but none specifically targeting narcotics-related corruption. There were no major narcotics-related corruption cases in 1997. Customs and, to a lesser extent, the MVD have reputations for corruption. Law enforcement officials' low salaries--which are often received several months late--make them susceptible to bribery and other forms of corruption....

**CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION.** Until the mid 1990s, Uzbekistan produced a moderate opium crop, mostly in the Samarkand region near the border with Tajikistan. Government's eradication efforts have been very successful in recent years, and today only small, scattered plots remain. Uzbekistan's "Operation Black Poppy-97" eradicated 3.7 hectares of opium poppy and 0.5 hectares of cannabis....

Uzbekistan sits astride several routes through which southwest Asian opium and cannabis reach Russia and Europe. The level of drug trafficking remained steady, or perhaps even increased slightly, in 1997....

Currently, the key route from Afghanistan is via the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, through Osh in Kyrgyzstan, and on into eastern Uzbekistan's Andijon region. A secondary route from Afghanistan, but one of growing significance, is through Turkmenistan, with the drugs generally entering Uzbekistan through the lightly guarded Bukhara region. The direct route across the Afghan-Uzbek border through the city of Termez has become less appealing to traffickers now that the Government of Uzbekistan, driven by concerns about fighting in northern Afghanistan, has tightened security along that border, effectively closing it. However, the concentration of resources along the Uzbek-Afghan border has left the other border crossings even more vulnerable. All of these drug trafficking routes continue from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan and Russia....

In addition to this southwest Asian traffic, narcotics grown in Tajikistan also transit Uzbekistan en route to Russia. The main growing area in Tajikistan is located just across the border from Uzbekistan, and there have been numerous seizures along that border, particularly near the towns of Urgut and Sariasia. In addition, Uzbek transport police regularly apprehend drug smugglers on the Dushanbe-Moscow train....

In recent years, a reverse traffic in chemical precursors has begun to appear in Uzbekistan. These chemicals transit Uzbekistan en route from plants in Russia, Ukraine and East Asia to laboratories in Afghanistan and Pakistan....

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