The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan is gaining speed. Just recently, the Pentagon began the relocation of its forces from the Manas transit centre in Kyrgyzstan, which will be transferred to local authorities by July 2014. By that time most of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will have left Afghanistan, leaving the country in a state of civil war, with economic backwardness, and lacking any signs of a civil society.

Those are the results of the 12-year stay of foreign forces, and future prospects look even bleaker. Most experts around the world agree that Afghanistan could again become a base for international terrorism, which will threaten not only neighbouring countries. It is known that terrorist activities are financed by the drug trade, and Afghanistan produces more drugs than any place in the world. Considering this, a reasonable question for American policymakers and strategists would be how did the U.S. plan to win in Afghanistan without a determined fight against Afghan drugs?

It's no secret that over the 12 years the ISAF troops spent in Afghanistan, the country produced and exported more heroin than any other country in the world. The Americans set foot on Afghan soil right in 2001 when the country had produced the least amount of raw opium since 1992, only 185 tons, which was grown on less than 8,000 hectares. Over the years of foreign occupation, drug production increased almost 40-fold, reaching an unprecedented scale. The ISAF turned a country that was under its control into the largest seller of narcotics on the planet; 80% of the world’s opium poppy crop is harvested in Afghanistan. The income of Afghan drug lords exceeds $3 billion per year, which is 10-15% of Afghanistan’s GDP. For comparison, note that in Colombia cocaine production at its peak was only about 3 percent of the national economy. Now the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan exceeds the area of coca cultivation in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia combined. To date, according to the Russian Federal Service for Narcotics Control, up to 40,000 tons of opium is illegally stored in Afghanistan.

Experts estimate that about a fifth of the drugs produced in Afghanistan are transported via the "northern route" through Central Asia into Russia's black market, whose residents consume annually 70 tons of heroin, and the number of users has reached 1.6-1.8 million people, or 1.3% of the population. Every year in Russia up to 100,000 people die from drugs. It is especially worth noting that Afghanistan heroin robs Russia of seven times more lives each year than the Soviet Union lost during nearly 10 years of war with the Afghan mujahedin. According to the Ministry of Defence of the Soviet Union, personnel losses of the limited force of Soviet troops in the Republic of Afghanistan totalled 13,833 people killed and 49,985 wounded. When Russia has asked the United States why Americans refuse to stop the deadly industry in occupied Afghanistan, there has been no official response from Washington. The answer can be found in the works of American experts and politicians, who have no doubt that the organised flow of drugs into Russia is part of a secret CIA operation that dates back to Soviet times.

In 1995 the head of CIA operations in Afghanistan, Charles Cogan, admitted that at the time the CIA sacrificed the war on drugs in order to achieve victory in the Cold War, making the Afghan-Pakistani border into the greatest producer of heroin in the world. Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin Alfred McCoy also writes that U.S. officials failed to investigate allegations of drug trafficking, since the U.S. policy on drugs in Afghanistan was
subordinated to the interests of the war against Soviet influence. In this regard, we note that when Soviet troops entered Afghanistan, Kabul's opponents did not have a financial interest in an enormous expansion in the cultivation of opium. Over the years the amount of assistance given to the Afghan mujahedeen from the United States alone is estimated at 6.5 billion dollars according to various estimates. The CIA went to Afghanistan then to support the producers of opium. Even now, the degree of CIA participation in and responsibility for the unprecedented drug trafficking in Afghanistan remains a White House taboo, although the U.S. military fighting in this country now do not deny the fact that the lion's share of opium continues to be produced in Afghanistan’s provinces that border Pakistan and are under the control of U.S. troops.

It is not surprising, since the Americans fighting in these areas of Afghanistan are not trying to stop the production of drugs in the opium group, primarily heroin. Since the start of the intervention, the Bush administration has remained indifferent to the rapid growth in the production of heroin, because it is not a problem for the U.S. Afghan heroin does not reach the internal U.S. market, people are dying from it in Central Asia, Russia, and Western Europe, but not in the United States. Americans have proved they can handle plantations of plants for the production of drugs quite effectively. For example, in 2008 the United States destroyed approximately 75% of the coca plantations (229,000 hectares) in Latin America by spraying defoliants and by mechanical methods, while they destroyed a little more than 3% of opium poppies in Afghanistan in the same year.

It is believed that military solutions to this problem are at best ineffective and at worst, counterproductive. The argument in support of this position is the Taliban in 2001, which used very severe measures to reduce drug production in Afghanistan from 4,600 tons to 185 tons. It has been proposed to restore Afghan agriculture so that food crops would be grown instead of opium, which is now often the only significant income of local farmers. The vast majority of foreign observers would agree with this, but not the Afghans themselves. The fact is that on average, one hectare of arable land can yield up to 70 kg of raw opium, which is worth about $8,000 dollars on the black market, and the sale of wheat grown on the same area would bring in only $800.

Alternative farming practices prove to be unprofitable to the US-backed Afghan government as well, which controls most of the opium and heroin trade. Under Karzai, the Afghan economy has remained a drug economy. The share of the Taliban in the Afghan opium market is less than 5-10% and is thought to be about 200 to 400 million dollars. With this alignment of forces in the Afghan drug trade, a military solution to this problem is reasonable and could be quite effective, but only if there is political will to deal with the dissatisfaction of the local population, considering that over three million Afghan farmers are involved in the cultivation of opium.

The Obama administration, which is poised to withdraw its forces, does not want to aggravate the Afghan people, which means in 2014 the world will witness a new record opium economy in Afghanistan. The reality may surpass even these expectations. One of the registered candidates for president of Afghanistan (April 2014) is Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, known not only as a hard-nosed leader of the Mujahedeen during the Soviet invasion of the country, but also as one of the leading Afghan drug traffickers. However, Afghanistan is not the only country corrupted by drugs. There they are cashing in on the production of heroin, and wherever these drugs are transported, distributed and used, there is local corruption. About 80% of the profits from the drug trade come from the consumer countries and reach approximately $65 billion.

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