**Profiteers of war**

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As the competing European colonizers became dependent on tobacco revenue, Napoleon III is known to have quipped, “This vice brings in one hundred million francs in taxes each year. I will certainly forbid it at once, as soon as you can name a virtue that brings in as much revenue”.

During the Vietnam War, more American troops were dying of heroin overdose than actual combat. Frank Lucas was a 1970s’ Harlem-based drug kingpin. Blue Magic, his signature brand of heroin, was the East Coast rage. When he was finally apprehended, it was found that this heroin was being transported by US military personnel on military planes from Vietnam. It was the largest heroin smuggling operation in American history.

When US led forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, the Taliban had eradicated poppy cultivation, a fact acknowledged by UNODC and all other international monitoring agencies. However, Washington launched Iron Tempest, a drug eradication campaign. It saw F-22 stealth fighters, costing more than 60,000 dollars and B-52 bombers about 70,000 dollars per flying hour, dropping tons of munitions including 500-pound ones on “processing labs and poppy fields”. Many innocent Afghans perished in these Don Quixotic forays.

The Iron Tempest bill was a staggering 8.9 billion dollars of American tax-payer money. A Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report branded it “a total waste of resources”. This indictment is cemented by latest figures showing poppy cultivation on 328,000 hectares – 1,266 square miles in Afghanistan after 20 years of occupation. A 2017 SIGAR report cites, “590,000 full-time drug trade jobs, as against 307,000 of the (vanished) total Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces”.

The year 2018 alone saw Afghanistan produce 6,400 tons of opium. This accounts for 90 percent of the world’s total heroin production. The UNODC puts the global annual heroin market at 55 billion dollars; Afghanistan’s 90 percent drug haul amounts to almost 50 billion dollars. Some independent analysts put this figure at an annual one trillion dollars – the wages of Washington’s atrocious wars.

Thomas Schweich was special ambassador to Afghanistan during the Bush years. He admitted that top Afghan officials were involved in the drug trade. It is said that the drug kingpin in the Karzai years was none other than Ahmed Wali Karzai; Hamid Karzai’s brother. In 2005, British forces impounded 20,000 pounds of opium from the office of Helmand governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada, another close ally of Karzai.

In 2007, Hamid Karzai appointed Izzatulla Wasifi as head of Afghanistan’s anti-corruption commission; he was a convicted heroin dealer. The Americans then propped up Ashraf Ghani to rid Afghanistan of its maladies. Now Congress members are urging President Biden to investigate the doings of their vassal who, they say, fled with 169 million dollars leaving behind a destitute Afghanistan.

In the US, since 1999, nearly 841,000 people have died from a drug overdose; more fatalities than from all US wars; 70,630 deaths occurred in 2019 alone. Every 15 minutes, an American dies from a drug overdose, and every 25 seconds an individual is arrested for drug possession. Less than five percent of the world’s population, US citizens consume 80 percent of all opiates produced globally. This hydra costs the US 504 billion dollars annually in terms of healthcare and the justice system. The treatment of HIV caused by sharing drug syringes costs up to 618,900 dollars per affected individual.

The nexus between Washington’s wars and the drug trade is an established fact. The CIA trussed up General Vang Pao to help make Laos a crucial part of the infamous Golden Triangle, the world’s top exporter of heroin. During the 60s and 70s, the CIA itself was accused of plying heroin from this area. In the war against the communist Sandinistas in Nicaragua the US encouraged and helped the cocaine trade. It is a documented fact that CIA and Pentagon cohorts protected Nicaraguan allies from being prosecuted for smuggling cocaine into the US itself.

One of the reasons for Narendra Modi’s fractious and dubious role in Afghanistan came to fore recently. Originating from Afghanistan, three tons of heroin, worth three billion dollars, was seized at the Mundra Port in Modi and Amit Shah’s native Gujarat. The port itself is owned by Gautam Adani, Modi’s longtime multi-billionaire crony and financier. The Mundra Port land, spread over 6,456 hectares, was doled out to Adani for a pittance. Since Modi’s reign as CM Gujarat, as of January 2021, Adani’s coffers have swelled by 34 billion dollars.

It is time Washington and the West stopped waging atrocities and war just for the few profiteers of such wars. After being militarily vanquished, the West should not pursue sanctions and machinations to undermine the Taliban; it shall only make them up the ante on the trillion-dollar drug trade. The Taliban shall only repeat their proven feat of poppy eradication, if Washington and its allies have the heart to face the truth and help them achieve the same. Pakistan, with a 2640 kilometers border with Afghanistan, bore the devastating militant fallout of the 20-year war. It has also seen the nightmarish specter of drugs finding their way into homes and schools.

In a recent speech, President Biden defended their ignominious Afghanistan exit saying the US had spent 300 million dollars daily through the 20-year war. One can well imagine how 300 million dollars invested daily in the people could have transformed Afghanistan into a vibrant economy and a drug and violence free haven. All Washington had to show for this corrupted waste was death and destruction epitomised in the 13 star and stripes draped coffins received by their loved ones as over a hundred Afghanis lost their lives in the last occupation days. Prudence dictates that, given its defeatist knack at wars, Washington opts for a peaceful and viable Afghanistan.

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