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## Letting slip the drugs of war Is the CIA helping itself to the Afghan heroin harvest?

22 October 2007

No names, no pack drill, like we used to say in the army, but I had a client who wanted me to look into some aspects of the world heroin trade.

I googled a bit, and made a few phone calls and began to have disturbing suspicions.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime, which had seriously honoured an agreement to close down the trade, heroin production in Afghanistan has surged. In 2006 there was a 50 per cent increase in the poppy harvest and it created a new record for world production, my contact in the UN Office on Drugs and Crime told me. Afghanistan now accounts for 92 per cent of the world's illicit production. She expected it would take another leap upwards this year.

So where is the stuff ending up? So far, not in Australia, but that's only a matter of time. Once again, the streets of Western Europe and Russia are awash with the stuff and that fact got me thinking about the CIA.

The espionage game provides a powerful motive, superbly trained teams and the perfect cover for large-scale drug smuggling. It's hardly a secret that, in the past, the CIA has partaken of the feast and, collectively, it couldn't give a damn if the stuff gets dumped on the despised nations of 'Old Europe'.

The US clandestine agencies are a sprawling brotherhood of silence and trust. And it isn't just the huge bureaucracy of the CIA itself. Now, there's also a freelance parallel universe of 'special forces' and 'security contractors' – created by the neons for their War on Terror – doing everything from assassinations to 'interrogation'. No mainstream politician wants to know what these people are doing in their name.

For security reasons these organizations are rigidly compartmentalised. Everything is on a need-to-know basis; "Don't ask, don't tell" is the rule. When (somewhere in the world) a Learjet from one of the CIA's front companies rolls into the hanger at a US military airbase you just say "Hi, Raul" to the pilot and forget you saw the manacled guy being frogmarched down the steps, wearing a blindfold and earmuffs. You certainly don't ask what those big black duffle bags might contain.

And, of course, this vast bureaucracy has a limitless appetite for money – over and above the official budget, itself often partly concealed. We're talking about black, untraceable money. Money in quantities you can't achieve by any means other than drugs. We're talking hundreds of billions.

I read Amnesty International's 2006 report on the CIA's 'rendition' flights – *Below the radar: Secret flights to torture and disappearance* – and my suspicion deepened. Officially available flight details for known aircraft of the CIA's clandestine fleet combined with observations by Amnesty's global network of plane spotters reveal that these aircraft fly too often, and touch down far more often, than can be explained by the rendition of the hapless suspects they were carrying at the time. They often stopped at US air bases where the local authorities have no control over what gets loaded or unloaded.

I was musing on all this when a contact in the US emailed, drawing my attention to an 11 October piece in the *New York Times*.

"The director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gen. Michael V. Hayden, has ordered an unusual internal inquiry into the work of the agency's inspector general, whose aggressive investigations of the CIA's detention and interrogation programs and other matters have created resentment among agency operatives.

"A small team working for General Hayden is looking into the conduct of the agency's watchdog office, which is led by Inspector General John L. Helgerson. Current and former government officials said the review had caused anxiety and anger in Mr. Helgerson's office and aroused concern on Capitol Hill that it posed a conflict of interest."

It seemed that the General Hayden's investigation is particularly focused on complaints that the inspector general had not acted as a fair and impartial judge of CIA ops but was instead conducting a crusade against participants in controversial detention programs.

"Any move by the agency's director to examine the work of the inspector general would be unusual, if not unprecedented, and would threaten to undermine the independence of the office, some current and former officials say.

"A CIA spokesman strongly defended the inquiry ... saying General Hayden supported the work of the inspector general's office and had 'accepted the vast majority of its findings'.

"His only goal is to help this office, like any office at the agency, do its vital work even better", said Paul Gimigliano, the spokesman."

Yeah, I'll bet. Given that inspector general is appointed by the president and reports



### HISTORY

on the Nick Possum Home Page ...



### From under the linoleum

[Old newspapers show Mussolini's imperialism looked a lot like today's](#)

I sat on the floor and picked through the tragedy of the country we now call Ethiopia laid out on the yellowing pages. It was eerily reminiscent of the current Iraq adventure.

### A tale for our times

[The December 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov](#)

Seventy years on, the killing of Sergei Kirov casts an eerie light on the events of 11 September 2001, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the "war on Terror" and the state-sponsored hysteria surrounding the shadowy figures of Osama bin Ladin and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

### Ninety-three years of bombing the Arabs

It was the Italians, hell-bent on acquiring an African empire, who got the ball rolling. In 1911 the Libyan Arab tribes opposed an Italian invasion. Their civilians were the first people in the world to be bombed from the air.

### Dispossessed all over again

After spending nearly two months in the West Bank the pull towards my village was growing stronger, especially after being detained twice and threatened with deportation ... an Australian Palestinian returns to her ancestral home.

### The tragic inevitability of a forlorn hope [Australia slides further into the Iraq quagmire](#)

Cabinet documents recently released under the 50-year rule show that, in 1954, Liberal (conservative) Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and key figures in his Cabinet were extremely gloomy about the prospects for success in an American war against nationalists in Indochina. But eventually they went to the Vietnam War anyway.

### Bombing King David

to both the director of the CIA and to Congress, one would have thought that he had every right to check up on what was going on in the CIA's gulag archipelago.

But maybe that wasn't where he'd trespassed. Maybe, just maybe, John Helgerson, in the course of auditing the whole dirty rendition process had begun to have the same suspicions as I about an even dirtier secret.

[One man's freedom fighter is another's terrorist](#)

Some historians date the beginning of modern terrorism from the 1946 bombing by Zionist terrorists of the British military HQ in Jerusalem.

[Don't loiter near the exit](#)  
[Military debacle and economic decline haunt the Bush regime](#)

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When I was just a young cadet corps there was a hoary old war story that we all knew. It was almost certainly apocryphal, but it ruefully expressed a nasty historic truth about the US role in the demise of the British Empire.