

Russia, U.S. Raid Drug Labs in Afghanistan

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U.S. and Russian drug control agencies have raided heroin and opium labs in Afghanistan in an unprecedented collaborative bust, destroying \$250 million worth of drugs, officials said Friday.

Afghan forces also were involved in the raid on four laboratories near the Pakistan border, a U.S. Embassy spokesperson said on condition of anonymity.

"This operation significantly damaged heroin manufacturing capabilities ... and at the same time demonstrated the will of the Afghan nation and those allies who are impacted by drug trafficking to take necessary steps to bring stability to the country," the spokesperson said in e-mailed comments. "This was a very significant operation which could not have been done by one nation alone," the U.S. spokesperson said.

Viktor Ivanov, the chief of the Federal Drug Control Service, said his agency cooperated closely with U.S. counterparts to organize the bust, which ended Thursday and destroyed 932 kilograms of heroin and 156 kilograms of opium worth an estimated \$250 million.

Ivanov said in televised comments that 70 men, including U.S. and Afghan security personnel and four Russian drug agents, took part in the raid backed by nine U.S. helicopters in Nangarhar province.

Ivanov said that his agency provided the U.S. with information on the location of the labs hidden in the mountains near the border with Pakistan. He said the drugs and equipment to produce them were destroyed. He didn't report any casualties.

He said Russia may increase the number of its drug agents in Afghanistan in the future.

The raid came after Ivanov and other officials repeatedly criticized the United States of doing little to stem the flow of Afghan heroin into Russia, which now has roughly 2 million opium and heroin addicts.

Ivanov told The Associated Press in an interview last weekend that, months ago, he had provided U.S. officials in Kabul with the coordinates of 175 laboratories where heroin is processed and the United States failed to act.

He said on a trip to Washington that U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials have told him that they are waiting for U.S. military approval to take down the labs.

U.S. officials have argued in the past that destruction of poppy fields would drive Afghan farmers into the arms of the Taliban.

Leaders of the Cold War foes hail Afghanistan as a place of cooperation, with both countries concerned with wiping out terrorism and choking drug supply routes.

But until now that cooperation has mostly been limited to Russia providing its territory for U.S. military transit. The United States and NATO have pushed Russia to provide helicopters and training for pilots as a contribution to the Afghan war effort and to train counter-narcotics police.

Mikhail Margelov, the head of the foreign affairs committee in the Federation Council, hailed the drug bust, saying Friday that it showed that efforts to reset U.S.-Russian relations are now being backed by real action.

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