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The Growth of Opium Trade in Afghanistan is a Direct Result of US Invasion

By Prof. James Petras

October 22, 2014

An American political commentator says the resurgence of opium trade in Afghanistan is a “direct result of the US invasion” in 2001.

“I think the growth of the opium trade in Afghanistan is a direct result of the US invasion of Afghanistan,” James Petras, retired Bartle Prof. of sociology at Binghamton University, told Press TV in an interview on Tuesday.

According to US federal auditors, Afghanistan’s opium industry is booming despite \$7.6 billion spent in US counternarcotics efforts since 2002.

The most recent report was released on Tuesday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

SIGAR said the net land area used for poppy cultivation in 2013 was more than 500,000 acres, a 36 percent jump from the previous year and a historic record.

The United Nations said that the majority of the cultivation happened in Helmand and Kandahar provinces that were the focus of the 33,000-strong American troop surge four years ago.

“The antinarcotics international agencies all noted that during the reign of the Taliban, there were [sic] virtually no poppies being grown,” Petras said. “The Taliban was strictly enforcing the outlawing of the growing of the narcotic plants.”

“Subsequent to the invasion, we have the breakdown of government responsibilities, the imposition of US rule through warlords and selected client regimes which had no authority, no influence over the countryside,” Petras continued.

He noted that the Afghan government under the influence of US presence had no influence on rural areas of the country and bribed tribal leaders by letting them grow narcotics.

“One way they attempted to secure the allegiances of various tribal and rural leaders was by tolerating the growth of opium and other narcotic plants as a way of trying to outlaw the Taliban,” he said.

Petras concluded that the end of the US military occupation in Afghanistan and large scale alternative farming and subsidies could end the “narcotics epidemic” in the country.