



Written by [Dennis Behrendt](#) on August 18, 2008

Afghan Narcotics Efforts Called Into Question

Although Afghan President Hamid Karzai has repeatedly defended his commitment to fighting corruption and combating the drug trade, Schweich remains unconvinced.

“Karzai was playing us like a fiddle,” Schweich claimed in an article that appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*. According to Schweich, “The U.S. would spend billions of dollars on infrastructure development; the U.S. and its allies would fight the Taliban; Karzai’s friends could get richer off the drug trade.”



Afghan officials have claimed that the growth of the drug trade and cultivation of poppies has been driven by poverty.

Schweich described a meeting in Brussels with one such antinarcotics official “who gave a speech in which he said that poor Afghan farmers have no choice but to grow poppies, and asked for more money.”

According to Schweich, when one European diplomat challenged that assertion, holding up a map to prove his point, the Afghan official “simply reiterated his earlier point that Afghanistan needed more money.”

Later, the Afghan official approached Schweich and told him: “I know what you say is right. Poverty is not the main reason people are growing poppy. But this is what the president of Afghanistan tells me to tell others.”

Despite the allegations, State Department spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos defended U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and argued that efforts to improve the country are genuine. According to Gallegos, those efforts should not be seen as a quick fix but instead are “a long-term commitment in terms of time and this is a large commitment in terms of dollars.”



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