

Illicit Drug Production in Afghanistan: a Situational Analysis

Ауғанстанда заңсыз түрде есірткі өндіру: ситуациялық талдау

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Мақалада дүние жүзіндегі заңсыз түрде айналымдағы есірткіні өндіруші қазіргі кездегі жетекші мемлекет болып отырған Ауғанстанның жағдайы сарапталады. Есірткінің түрлерін заңсыз жолмен өсіру, оны өндіру және айналымға шығару тек Ауғанстанның тұрақты дамуына, қауіпсіздігіне, басқару жүйесіне кері ықпал етіп қана қоймай, көрші мемлекеттерге де әсерін тигізуде. Автор ауған есірткісін қолдану дүние жүзіндегі адамзат баласы денсаулығының проблемасына себепші және денсаулық үшін қауіп-қатердің алдыңғы қатарлы 20 факторының бірі екендігін атап көрсетеді.

В статье анализируется положение Афганистана, который в настоящее время является ведущим производителем незаконного оборота наркотиков в мире. Незаконное культивирование опиатов, производство и оборот оказали негативное воздействие на систему управления, безопасности, развития и стабильности не только в Афганистане, но и в соседних странах. Автор отмечает, что потребление афганского опиума является причиной проблем со здоровьем человечества во всем мире и одним из 20 ведущих факторов риска для здоровья.

Context

Afghanistan presently has emerged as the leading producer of the illicit drug trade in the world. The illicit opiate poppy cultivation, production and trafficking has adversely impacted the governance, security, development and stability not only in Afghanistan but also its neighbors. However, the threat of the illicit opiate business on the social and individual life is of a colossal nature. Afghanistan opiates possess significant health challenges to humankind all around the world, affecting the populace of Afghanistan and its neighbors to a large extent.

The establishment of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan during 1996–2001 led to the recognition of the cultivation of poppy as a legal crop, specifically in 1997. Despite a strong believe and hope, for eradication of poppy cultivation and destruction of the drug lab in Afghanistan, the cultivation, production and trafficking has had a gradual move upwards since 2001. Neither has there been any decision that has been undertaken seriously nor has there been any practical strategy adopted for the obliteration of the crop.

According to reports [1], no substantial changes have been notice since 2001. However, the trend of poppy production shows a progressive increase. Approximately around three to five hundred laboratories operate with an estimated output of 380–400 tons of heroin per year in Afghanistan. On the other hand, there was only about 123,000 hectares of land under poppy cultivation in 2009 and 2010 [1] while the opium poppy cultivation reached 131,000 hectares in 2011, with 7 percent increase than 2010. This was 2.26 times more in comparison to 1997 (58,000 ha), and a time when opiate poppy cultivation was recognized as a legal crop by the Taliban.

Purpose

The present paper attempts to examine the threat of illicit drug cultivation on the human security in Afghanistan. The paper focuses on the security aspects of drug's cultivation, production and trafficking in Afghanistan. This paper has been attempted in three sections. The first section deals with the historical background of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The next part assesses its impact on the security, stability and development of Afghanistan and discusses the trafficking routes, destinations and heroin consumption markets. The last section examines all the strategies evolved to suppress drug cultivation, production and trafficking in Afghanistan.

Opiate Users

The United Nations Organization for Drug and Crimes (UNODC) [2] shows an estimate of 172–250 million people used opiate in 2009, of whom between 18 and 38 million were drug dependent. Nonetheless, consumption of opiate is one of the top 20 risk factors for health globally, and among the top 10 amongst the developing countries. The use of illicit drug not only causes threats to life of the individuals but also adversely impacts their family and the society as a whole.

However, the damaging impacts of drug are not limited to a single country, where it is produced. On the other hand it can be seen that trans-regional drug trafficking and the growing drug consumption pose a danger to the security of humankind throughout the whole world, particularly the countries of production and transit. The impact of drug production and trafficking gradually changed Afghanistan and its neighbors as a huge consumer themselves (Table № 1). According to the 'Drug Abuse Survey' conducted in 2009, Afghanistan with 2.65 percent opiate consumer prevalence rate is currently the highest worldwide [3].

Table 1

Opiate Consumption in Afghanistan and its Neighbors (in tons), 2009

	Opiate users	Heroin consumption	Opium consumption
Afghanistan	350,000	5	230
Pakistan	727,500	20	132
Islamic Republic of Iran	1,200,000	16	476
Central Asia	358,000	11	36
Total (rounded)	2,635,000	53	874

Source: UNODC, 2009, *Drug Use in Afghanistan: 2009 Survey and World Drug Report*, 2010.

Meanwhile, the estimated number of heroin users in other parts of the world, shows Asia as the highest with 5,917,000 people. Africa has 1,763,000 people, America has 1,672,000, Europe has 2,982,000 and Oceania has 69,000 persons. The total world heroin user is to the tune of 12,376,000 with a consumption of 375 tons of pure heroin annually.

Globally some 16.5 million people use drug annually, while, the global opiate market generated USD 68 billion in 2009. According to UNODC in 2011, the transitional organized groups were the main beneficiaries of the USD 68 billion trade of 2009, which they supplemented with other forms of crime such as illegal arms trafficking, terrorist activities and human smuggling [3; 7,8,17].

Afghanistan as the Dominant Opiate Producer

Illicit drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan is one of the major factors for fueling insecurity, insurgency and terrorism. However, the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet Union in 1979 and the involvement of CIA ensured that the region comprising of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan would soon become the greatest producer of opium in the world. In fact the region came to be known as 'the Golden Crescent' and replaced 'the Golden Triangle' of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand as the leading producer of opium [4]. However Afghanistan was never the prominent opium producer among the 'Golden Crescent' countries before 1979. Iran was producing an estimated 600 tons of opium annually, Pakistan 500 tons, while Afghanistan roughly produced 300 tons per year. Certainly Afghanistan's opium production increased when Iran started to curb the opium production after the Islamic revolution of 1979. Meanwhile Pakistan introduced the 'Hadd Ordinance' during the same year [5]. Thus the executive heroin production had first begun in Pakistan. In 1986 Pakistan produced more than 800 tons of opium, which amounted to 70 percent of the world's heroin supply. The Afghan commanders then transplanted the crop into southern Afghanistan where it was made into a paste and then carried back into Pakistan and exported for consumption. The profits made out of this sale were later used by the Mujahedeen to fund their ongoing war with the Soviet Union. Both the CIA and the ISI remained purposefully blind and chose to ignore these trade games. On the contrary, the ISI used some of the money generated from the drug trade to fund many of its covert operations, while, the CIA played a dubious role as it had done earlier in Vietnam, condemning the trade but allowing it to flourish. Moreover there have been several other domestic factors that contributed for the increasing opium production in Afghanistan. These are [6]:

- Favorable cultivation condition caused a consistently higher yield of opium in comparison to other opium producing countries. Nonetheless, over the period of 2000–2004, the yields were more than twice those in Latin America, more than three times those in Myanmar and more than four times than those in other Asian countries.

- Afghanistan's opium consists of high morphine content. However, in many opium producing countries, specifically in South Asia, about 10 kg of opium is needed to produce only one kg of heroin. While, 6 to 7 kg of Afghanistan's opium is needed to produce one kg of heroin.

- Insecurity, institutional weaknesses and absence of rule of law due to three decades of war is another cause for the rise of drug production. Even following the fall of the Taliban regime, insecurity and the weak central government control, along with widespread corruption continued, which contributed to further development of illicit drug production in the country.

- Poverty could be observed as the main factor as well. The decision by many farmers to cultivate opium is primarily dictated by the lack of alternative sustainable livelihoods.

- Poor infrastructure in terms of agriculture also paved the way for cultivation of opium, since, opium is relatively drought resistant. However, this is making its cultivation easier than any other crops where irrigation is limited.

- Climate change and the continuous severe droughts, which affected farmlands and livestock throughout the country [5; 220].

Afghanistan during the Taliban rule and specifically during 1997 was announced as a free region for cultivation and production of poppy, the opium was known as a legitimized product. Only a 20 percent taxes on the farmers and drug traffickers was assigned.

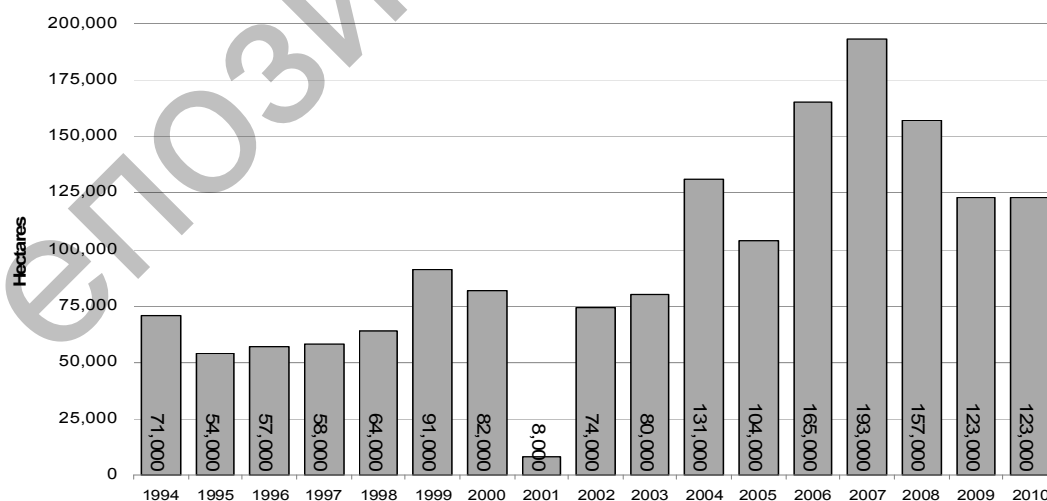
The intervention of the USA and the international community didn't have much positive impact on either the eradication of poppy cultivation or on the drug trafficking in Afghanistan and its region. On the contrary it increased further, due to, the absence of a practical and consensus strategy within the international community [7]. United State even refused to acknowledge that drug was a problem. Even the Defense Secretary of the United States, Donald Rumsfeld claimed that, the opium is an unimportant social issue unconnected to terrorism and insecurity [4; 319, 324].

Bernard Frahi, the, regional chief of the UNODC in Islamabad was quoted that:

The Pentagon had a list of 25 or more drug labs and warehouses in Afghanistan, but refused to bomb them, because some belonged to the CIA's new NA allies. The United States told its British allies that the war on terrorism had nothing to do with counter narcotics [4; 230].

According to the UNODC reports, no positive change could be observed since 2001, and the graph shows progressive increase till 2007. Even though, in year 2008 and 2009 the production had decreased to some extent (Refer Fig. 1), but the UNODC report (11 October 2011) shows opium poppy cultivation had reached 131,000 hectares in 2011, indicating 7 percent increase over the 2010 figure, due to insecurity and high prices.

Temporal Pattern of Poppy Cultivation



Source: UNODC (1994–2002), MCN/UNODC (Since 2003)

Fig. 1

The cultivation of poppy opiates mostly takes place in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Farah (Refer Table № 2).

Table 2

Main Opium Cultivating Provinces in Afghanistan (in Hectares) 2010

Province	2007 (ha)	2008 (ha)	2009 (ha)	2010 (ha)	Change 2009-2010
Hilmand	102,770	103,590	69,833	65,045	-7%
Kandahar	16,615	14,623	19,811	25,835	+30%
Farah	14,865	15,010	12,405	14,552	+17%
Uruzgan	9,204	9,939	9,224	7,337	-20%
Badghis	4,219	587	5,411	2,958	-45%
Day Kundi	3,346	2,273	3,002	1,547	-48%
Nimroz	6,507	6,203	428	2,039	+376%
Rest of the country	35,455	5,028	2,982	3,202	+7%
Total	193,000	157,000	123,000	123,000	0%

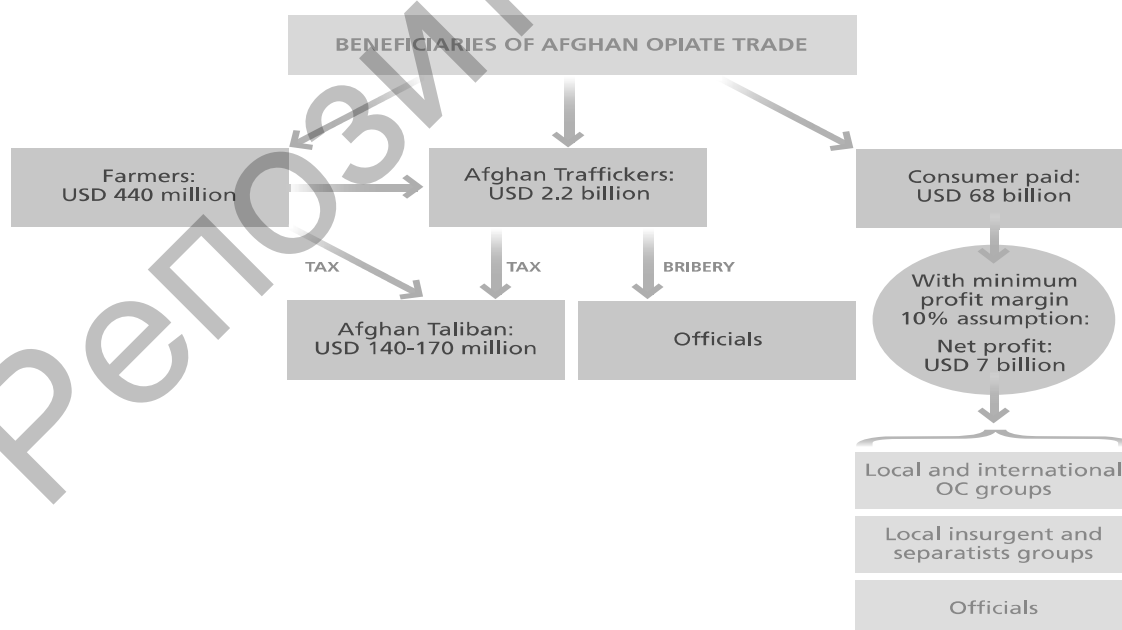
Source: Afghanistan Opium Survey, UNODC, 2010

According to the Executive Director of UNODC, «the Afghan opium survey, 2011 sends a strong message that we cannot afford to be lethargic in the face of this problem. A strong commitment from both national and international partners is needed».

Basically, the transnational organized crime groups are the main beneficiary of the large amounts of money, which comes out of the opiates trade. Out of 36 foreign terrorist organizations, 14 are now involved in trafficking narcotics [8]. Meanwhile, UNODC has reported that, Afghan Taliban was estimated to have earned around US \$150 million from the opiate trade, while the Afghan drug traffickers earned to the tune of US \$2.2 billion, and Afghan farmers earned US \$440 million [3; 8].

An overview of the beneficiaries of Afghan opiate trafficking, 2009 has been depicted in (Fig. 2).

An overview of the beneficiaries of Afghan opiate trafficking, 2009



Source: The Global Afghan Opium Trade, UNODC, 2011

Fig. 2

The opium poppy cultivation and production has emerged as a serious challenge for the populace in Afghanistan and even more than the threats from Taliban. Afghanistan had 230,000 opium abusers in 2009. While, it shows a 53 percent increase from 2005. In particular the number of consumers of heroin almost tripled and reached to 120,000 in 2009. Nonetheless, nearly 8 percent of the adult population is estimated to be drug user.

However, the security, geography and cultural challenges make implementation of a clear and accurate survey difficult. Otherwise, further research is required for a better understanding of the opiate consumers in Afghanistan, including the number per capita and the exact amount of consumption by drug abuser.

Global Heroin Producers (in tons and % Shares) 2009

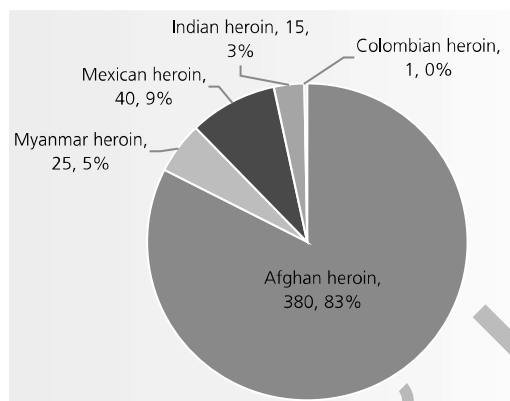


Fig. 3

Trafficking Routes

Afghanistan's geostrategic and land locked location has forced it to stay dependent upon the road transit via its neighbors' territory. Pakistan is located in the south and south east, Iran on the west and the three Central Asia states, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in the north of Afghanistan.

Since 1990s Afghanistan emerged as the dominant exporter of opiates in the world. As a result, all these neighbor states have become the main transit routes for the Afghanistan opiates to different destinations in the world. However, there are no fixed trafficking routes for consumer markets. But, it keeps changing depending upon the level of risk perception by the opiate traffickers. Afghanistan's opiate is directly trafficked to Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia and distributes from there on to the rest of the world.

During 2009 about 365 tons of heroin was exported from Afghanistan to the opiate consumer markets in different destinations through Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian republics.

- 160 tons via Pakistan
- 115 tons via Iran.
- 90 tons via Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan)

In addition some large amounts of opium, 1,200–1,400 tons were exported from Afghanistan. The majority of which estimated around 1,050 tons was smuggled to Iran. Whereas, the opium's trafficking routes is exactly the same as that of heroin.

Afghanistan's heroin is trafficking to every destination in the world, except South America. Despite the general complexity of heroin trafficking routes, still some global movement can be generalized. These include,

- From Pakistan the heroin moves on to Iran, China, North America, Africa and South East Asia and further to Oceania particularly Australia.
- From Iran the heroin is trafficked to Europe, Middle East and Africa.
- From Central Asia, the heroin is trafficked into the Russian Federation and China before moving along the 'Northern Route' across Eastern Europe, North Europe and into western and Central Europe.

It is not a matter of surprise that Pakistan serves as a major route of Afghanistan's heroin being transported to China and other South East Asian countries. Basically, a decline in the production of opium in Myanmar has a direct impact on the amount of Afghanistan's heroin shipment to that region. For instance, the heroin production has declined in Myanmar during 2009, and it was insufficient to meet the regional demand. Thereby, a large quantity of Afghanistan's heroin was trafficked into the region to fill the void.

Whereas, by 2010 the opium production increased in Myanmar by 76 percent and it resulted in less heroin shipment to China compared to 2009 [3; 14].

The heroin trafficking to Africa is not only for the use of the continent, but the region emerged as a cost effective heroin trafficking route for Europe, North America and Australia in 2009. Nonetheless, the following factors such as corruption, widespread poverty and limited law enforcement capacity; as well as, increasing pressures on the traditional heroin trafficking routes played a significant role. Meanwhile, the UNODC report, 2011 reveals that, the arrested drug traffickers divulged that particularly the 'West Africa Networks' were increasingly transporting Afghanistan's heroin from Pakistan into East Africa for onward shipment to Europe and elsewhere.

Strategies Adopted

Two types of regional strategies have been brought into use for fighting drug trafficking. Unfortunately neither of these efforts achieved to curb drug trafficking or production in Afghanistan. The first approach involved an attempt to create a security belt around Afghanistan to cut off the outflow of drug. In 2000 as part of the Tashkent Declaration on fundamental principles of peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, members of the six plus two group which was included China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, Plus Russia and the United States, expressed their deep concern at the increased cultivation, production and trafficking of illicit drugs in and from Afghanistan, and discussed the establishment of mechanism to enable them to cooperate more closely on counter narcotics issue. Meanwhile a regional action plan was provided in Sep 2000 by China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, United State and Uzbekistan to strengthen cooperation in drug control. But with the subsequent engagement of the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan in Oct 2001 the six plus two group plan was suspended [9].

There have been some bilateral initiatives as well. For example Russia's federal drug control service and Kyrgyzstan's drug control agency signed an agreement on cooperation in fighting the trafficking of illicit drugs psychotropic substances and their precursors. Tajikistan signed bilateral agreement with Kyrgyzstan in 1998, Uzbekistan in 1999 and Kazakhstan in 2000. A memorandum of cooperation was also signed by Afghanistan and Tajikistan to allow the representation of the Tajikistan drug control agency in Kabul and Afghanistan provinces. The Paris Pact which brought together more than 50 states and international organizations together to fight against Afghanistan's opiates at the regional level. The pact required joint cooperation initiatives like the Triangular Initiative including Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan as well as, the Central Asian Regional Information and Cooperation Center [10].

The second approach believed to overcome both opium production and terrorism in Afghanistan suggests that the government and the international community should focus on implementing a broad program of alternatives and expand development in the whole country rather than waging wars on drug and terrorism only. The second approach is based on liberal policies focuses on providing the poor drug producing and transit countries with alternative sources of livelihoods, decriminalizing the use of drugs, just as it was followed in some European countries. In contrast, the first approach based on zero tolerance concentrates on prevention and punishment of drug production, trafficking and usage of illicit drugs without considering the social and economical dimensions of this problem or offering any alternative source of livelihoods.

The second approach seems more effective, but the effects have been limited in practice, primarily due to the ineffective strategy on the ground, corruption in the national drug control and judicial organs and weak cooperation among the different law enforcement agencies in the region. The lack of capacity within Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior and also Ministry of Counter Narcotics is also responsible to a large extent. This is despite the fact that the Afghanistan government with the assistance from Britain and the U.S had released an updated five years strategy for tackling the illicit drug problem in 2006. However the core of this updated strategy does not differ substantially from its 2003 version. Indeed it just emphasizes again on the interdiction and eradication of opium cultivation and drug processing and trafficking in Afghanistan [5; 233].

Conclusion

There is no doubt that drug production, consumption and trafficking has turned into a vital issue threatening the security of humankind through the world. It stands in contrast to those who believe drug issue is an unimportant social problem. However, the powerful international drug mafia, terrorist groups, extremist insurgents, secret government agencies and other criminal networks are highly benefiting from production and trafficking of drugs all around the world. The cultivation, production and trafficking of drug could associate multi- social scourges in the individual level. Despite, demolishing the institution of family life, social relations and health threats, it also carries out social, economical, political destabilization for many states.

According to the UNODC survey of 2010, a substantial proportion of the farmers cultivate poppy due to the high price, lack of basic food and shelter for their families, lack of improved living condition and high income from small sized land.

The international community, as well as, the national and regional concerned organizations need to focus on multi-social and economic factors, such as a practical alternative program for agriculture, creation of jobs, maintaining security, education, and the enforcement of the rule of law rather than merely focusing on eradication of the poppy cultivated land, destruction of drug labs and tight security control on the borders. Avoiding attention to these factors could fail all attempts for permanent eradication and uprooting of the opiate problem both at the regional as well as the international level.

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