

Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications

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The link between armed conflict and the production and trafficking of illicit drugs has been much noted in the popular literature, and recent research tentatively indicates a link between lootable resources, including narcotics, and conflict duration. Yet the specific dynamics of the linkage between narcotics and conflict remain poorly understood. Evolving theory on the link between organized crime and terrorism enhances and supplements the debate on economic incentives in civil war, proposing mechanisms whereby insurgent groups interact with narcotics production—a crime–rebellion nexus. Studies of nine major narcotics-producing areas indicates strong support for this nexus. Rather than generating or being generated by drug cultivation, armed conflict qualitatively and quantitatively transforms existing drug cultivation. Importantly, armed conflict is itself deeply affected by the narcotics industry, which tends to strengthen the capacity of insurgent movements while weakening that of the state. A momentous aspect of the crime–rebellion nexus is the effect that the drug industry tends to have on the motivational structures of insurgent groups: criminal involvement in some instances creates an economic function of war and vested interests in the continuation of armed conflict. This has substantial implications for strategies to resolve armed conflict involving the production and trafficking of illicit drugs.

The relationship between economic incentives and armed conflict has been accorded considerable attention in recent academic literature. Indeed, following the end of the Cold War, economic motivations have increasingly been blamed for the actions of belligerent parties in intra-state armed conflict, especially in the developing world. In particular, the discourse has centered on the role of natural resources in the onset and duration of conflict, with African “conflict diamonds” being the perhaps most widely publicized example. An issue that has received considerable journalistic treatment but relatively scant systematic research is the relationship between illicit drugs and conflict.

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The interaction between protracted civil war and the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics is in fact increasingly observable around the world. This is particularly the case regarding coca and opium, the crops from which the most potent and profit-bringing psychotropic substances, cocaine and heroin, are produced. Today, the bulk of the global cultivation of opium and coca is taking place in conflict zones, while the trafficking of their derivatives has come to heavily involve insurgent and terrorist groups operating between the source and destination areas of illicit drugs. This was not always the case: in the 1960s, countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Bolivia produced much of the world's opium and coca without experiencing armed conflict. But presently, the production of these drugs is concentrated in Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia, and Peru—four countries that have been ravaged by some of the world's longest-lasting civil wars. This trend raises important questions as to the reasons behind this phenomenon and its implications.

In the instances where the academic debate has touched on this issue, drugs have been accorded interest as a limited part of a broader discussion on the economic explanations of civil wars and the relationship between natural resources and armed conflict. In particular, drugs have been included in subcategories such as “lootable resources” together with i.a. diamonds. The results of this research have tended to show that lootable resources, including drugs, have no link to conflict initiation, but that they are positively correlated with conflict duration.¹ The number of countries involved in large-scale production of opium and coca are nevertheless low, and obtaining reliable data on drug cultivation and production across time and space presents considerable difficulty. Consequently, these results remain tentative. But the suggested link raises a number of important questions regarding the dynamics whereby narcotics and conflict interact, which are presently not well understood. Existing research has contributed significantly to an understanding by showing that lootable resources such as narcotics do not cause but lengthen conflict, but the specific mechanisms whereby this takes place remain to be explained.

The assumption in the literature is that lootable natural resources extend conflict by strengthening the weaker party, normally the insurgent force, enabling it to escape defeat.² But does the interaction between narcotics and conflict alter the capabilities, cohesion, and motivations of parties to a conflict? Better understanding the specific mechanisms of interaction between the drug industry and armed conflict would provide important implications for prospects of conflict management and resolution.

This article proposes to investigate this linkage by incorporating recent theory from the field of transnational organized crime into the existing literature on civil war. It builds on the insights offered by recent quantitative research, but its ambition is to investigate the causal mechanisms and dynamics linking narcotics and conflict over time. In so doing, it seeks to trace these processes through a global survey of drug-producing areas and selected deep case studies. The article finds that where traditional and limited drug production exists, armed conflict tends to greatly increase the incidence of drug cultivation through the collapse of state law enforcement capabilities in specific territorial areas, and to facilitate the processing of finished products such as heroin and cocaine. Over time, insurgent groups tend to become increasingly involved in the drug trade. Beginning with tolerating and taxing the trade, insurgents tend to gradually shift to more lucrative self-involvement. Self-involvement, in turn, generates a risk of affecting insurgent motivational structures, tending to weaken ideological motivations and strengthen economic ones.

Natural Resources, Civil War, and the Crime–Rebellion Nexus

Traditional conflict theory has tended to focus on a “grievance” approach, seeing intra-state conflict as emanating from movements seeking the redress of injustice, or from collective

fear.³ Indeed, war has tended to be portrayed as a result of “information failure”: the underlying assumption being that war benefits no one, it must therefore be an outcome that actors seek to avoid, hence an irrational decision. By contrast, a number of emerging studies have focused on economic incentives as the driving force in intra-state conflict.⁴

Greed or Grievance?

Paul Collier and his colleagues have argued that many civil wars are caused by economic rather than sociopolitical factors, and by loot-seeking rather than by justice-seeking.⁵ As Collier and Hoeffler note, this economic approach to understanding civil war differs from political science approaches by focusing on a different motivation for violence—greed, not grievance—and a different explanation for the outbreak of war, atypical opportunities and not atypical grievances.⁶ The economic approach focuses on the opportunities that arise to belligerents, especially insurgents, during times of civil war. While war leads to great material losses on a societal basis, this does not mean that “war is a disaster for almost everyone concerned.” As David Keen argues, war is not simply the breakdown of order, economy, and social organization, but “the emergence of an alternative system of profit, power, and even protection.”⁷ To put it simply, war has functions for some actors. The insecurity and unpredictability of war, coupled with the breakdown or weakening of law and order, implies the turn to a more opportunistic society; an increase in criminality; the disruption of markets; and opportunities for what Collier calls “rent-seeking predation.”⁸ These consequences are immensely detrimental for society at large, but provide specific opportunities for armed groups to reap significant economic benefits: some people manage to do well out of war.⁹

This so-called greed theory of civil conflict has nevertheless been criticized as simplistic and not holding up to closer scrutiny, especially as regards the *onset* of conflict. Empirical research has argued that few if any conflicts have been initiated only or mainly as a result of economic incentives. An influential study argued that “combatants’ incentives for self-enrichment and/or opportunities for insurgent mobilization created by access to natural and financial resources were neither the primary nor the sole cause of the separatist and non-separatist conflicts analyzed”.¹⁰ Likewise, in a summary of the findings of 14 cross-national econometric studies of resources and conflict, Michael Ross concluded that “there appears to be little agreement on the validity of the resources-civil war correlation.”¹¹ Indeed, there is strong disagreement on whether natural resources at all increase the risk of war. As Ross argues, these inconclusive results are likely the result of differing methodologies and differing data.¹²

Differentiating Natural Resources

The lumping together of all kinds of natural resources does not appear to be meaningful. But the division of resources into smaller categories, especially the division of resources into lootable and non-lootable resources, generates more interesting results.¹³ Ross concludes from a study of 15 cases that alluvial diamonds and drugs are the resources most strongly associated with civil wars occurring between 1990 and 2000.¹⁴ He argues that the level to which a commodity is linked to conflict depends on its lootability, obstructability, and legality. Drugs, like alluvial diamonds, are easy to appropriate by a limited number of individuals, as compared to oil, gas, timber, or minerals, and are hence lootable. Given their high value-to-size ratio, they are not easily obstructable—unlike oil, minerals and timber, which require much more time and complicated enterprises to be looted. The illegality of drugs also makes them benefit insurgents disproportionately, because they are less susceptible

to be influenced by international prohibition regimes, unless governments (such as the Taliban in Afghanistan during 1996–2000) are willing to endure international sanctions.

But these results only indicate a link between lootable resources and the duration of conflict. Humphreys found no statistical link between diamonds and the initiation of war.¹⁵ Noting a link between “valuable contraband” and conflict duration, Fearon found that rebels relied extensively on contraband financing in 17 of 128 cases of conflict. These cases had median and mean conflict durations of 28.1 and 48.2 years, respectively, whereas the remaining 111 conflicts had 6.0 and 8.8, respectively.¹⁶ Indeed, as Ross sums up the field, most evidence suggests that gemstones and narcotics are linked to the duration of conflict, but not to the initiation of conflict.¹⁷

The Crime–Rebellion Nexus

These studies suggest a causal link between narcotics and enduring conflict. They do not, however, explain convincingly why this should be the case. The basic inference is that the presence of narcotics increases the capabilities of insurgents. But is this the entire story? Increased capabilities could be conceived to imply a greater possibility for a negotiated solution in protracted conflict, once both parties realize that there is little possibility of victory—William Zartman’s “hurting stalemate,”¹⁸ Why, then, should conflicts involving narcotics be so intractable? Recently emerging theory from the field of organized crime is helpful in suggesting an answer to this missing dimension.

Studies in the late 1990s observed a globally increasing linkage between organized crime and violent non-state actors, in particular terrorist groups.¹⁹ This term was initially coined by Makarenko for the study of terrorist organizations, but is equally applicable to regular insurgencies.²⁰ For the purposes of this article, the term “crime–rebellion nexus” is therefore more appropriate. The crime–rebellion nexus refers to an increasing confluence of groups originally espousing either political or criminal motivations. Ideologically and criminally motivated groups have traditionally been seen as forming opposing ideal types of armed groupings.²¹ The ideal type of groups that challenge state authority with violent means in the pursuit of a political goal is one of striving for a self-defined higher cause. Such groups are therefore traditionally understood as being disinterested in—or even principally opposed to—the pursuit of profit through organized crime, including drug trafficking. Transnational criminal networks, on the other hand, are motivated simply by the pursuit of monetary profit and status. Clearly, their interests may be more than simply economic because money is not necessarily an end in itself but a means to achieve status, influence, security, and even territorial control. Nevertheless, as Phil Williams noted, they are “economic rather than political organizations, [and therefore] do not pose the same kind of overt or obvious challenge to states that terrorist groups do.”²² Their primary aim, unlike terrorist or insurgent movements, is not to directly challenge the state. Bruce Hoffman eloquently noted the dividing line between these two opposing ideal types:

the terrorist is fundamentally an altruist: he believes he is serving a “good” cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency [whereas] the criminal serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation.²³

This traditional division into mutually exclusive ideological and criminal ideal types lies at the basis of the academic division between political science and criminology, as

well as bureaucratic divisions between law enforcement and national security. As Williams noted, the perception is that “crime is a domestic problem; and law enforcement and national security are based on very different philosophies, organizational structures and legal frameworks.”²⁴ As a result, transnational organized crime has not been viewed as a national, let alone international, security issue. This view has nevertheless become increasingly misleading, as the observable situation has changed. As Thachuk observed, organized crime groups traditionally “rarely co-operated with terrorist groups, or engaged in their activities, as their goals were most often at odds . . . many of today’s terrorist groups have not only lost some of their more comprehensible ideals, but are increasingly turning to smuggling and other criminal activities to fund their operations.”²⁵

Two separate phenomena have contributed to this: the decline in state funding for insurgency and the global expansion of transnational organized crime. The end of the Cold War drastically reduced the availability of state financing for terrorist and insurgent movements.²⁶ Without the bipolar confrontation, simply being in opposition to a communist or non-communist regime no longer translated into financial support from a superpower or its proxies.²⁷ Insurgent groups hence needed to find other sources of funding to survive. Organized crime appeared an attractive and lucrative way of obtaining necessary funds. International efforts to root out terrorism financing after 11 September, 2001 caused a further decline of state financing, pushing non-state violent actors further toward organized criminal financing.²⁸ Meanwhile, the rapidly developing processes of globalization, which have made transportation and communications easier, have enabled the gradual expansion of transnational organized crime globally.²⁹ From having been more geographically circumscribed and specialized, transnational criminal networks now operate across continents, in alliances with similar groups elsewhere, and engage in any form of criminal activity that combines high profit and acceptable risk.³⁰ The criminal opportunities arising to insurgent groupings therefore increased over the 1990s, and globalization opened markets to crime in the most distant conflict zones.

The interaction between criminal and political groups is therefore presently best conceptualized as a continuum rather than as separate phenomena. In this respect, Makarenko’s analytical construct of a security continuum that places pure organized crime at one end of the spectrum and pure ideological groups at the other is particularly useful.³¹ It shows the wide variety of possible interactions between criminal and political groups. Between the two ideal types, the continuum allows for a “gray area” where different variations and combinations of the two exists. Interactions between organized crime and ideological struggle can take place either through cooperation between criminal and ideological groups; or through the involvement of an ideological group in crime or vice versa, as suggested in the crime–rebellion continuum depicted in Figure 1.³²

Research has suggested that the practice of cooperation between groups at opposing ends of the spectrum tends to give way to self-involvement—mainly due to the lack of trust between groups, and the greater profitability of self-involvement.³³ If the need for sources of finance forms the first impetus for the involvement of politically motivated groups with organized crime, such involvement also tends to affect the motivational structures of originally ideologically motivated groups. Once involved in crime, groups

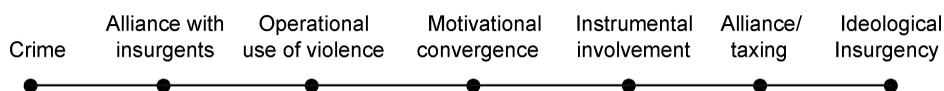


Figure 1. The crime–rebellion continuum.

can continue to further their original interests—but crime can also become an end in itself. Particularly in protracted conflicts, entire groups or parts of groups come to shift their focus increasingly toward the objective of profit. That is, the organization or movement either gradually shifts its nature to a predominantly criminal one, or acquires a criminal nature at the side of its ideological nature. Indeed, some groups are found in a situation where “organized crime and terrorism are indistinguishable from one another.”³⁴ Profit through crime, often specifically the drug trade, becomes a motivation in its own right for the existence and cohesion of the movement.³⁵ An added value of the continuum model is that it allows for the movement of groups across this continuum over time, enabling the tracking of the evolution of a group’s involvement in crime as well as of its motivational structures. Clearly, this issue is relevant not only for drug production or transit states but for insurgent/terrorist groups in the developed world as well—the Provisional Irish Republican Army being only one example of a movement appearing to be affected by this phenomenon.

Implications

Involvement in crime can be seen as fundamentally changing the equation of an armed group’s relationship to state and society. Whether or not its motivations are affected, crime enriches the group and its leaders, enabling the acquisition of more sophisticated weapons, the employment of more fighters, the corruption of state officials, and the better propagation of group ideology to the population. Hence crime and its proceeds makes the group a more dangerous adversary to the government, and often results in a further weakening of the state—particularly if it enables insurgents to assert territorial control over parts of the state’s territory that is usable for criminal activities. In this sense, crime and drugs are instrumental in enabling a group to threaten the security of the state at its very foundation—the monopoly of the use of force and control over territory.³⁶

The debate on natural resources and armed conflict does not significantly address the possibility of motivational change in insurgent groups. In fact, the literature generally takes a “snapshot” of a group, considering it either motivated by greed or by grievance, but does not consider the possibility of motivations changing over time. Indeed, the crime–rebellion nexus offers the possibility that insurgents may initially be motivated by grievance, but that the opportunity of economic profit in the course of conflict can change both the group’s financial condition as well as its motivational structure. This in turn affects the evolution of the conflict, the development of the group itself, and the prospects of various measures of conflict resolution. Indeed, asserting whether an insurgent group has gone through significant changes in motivation will have important implications for ways to handle the group. Simply put, offering redress to the stated grievances of an insurgent group will do little to end the conflict in case the group has changed its primary motivation to the criminal. Indeed, in such cases, the very proposition of political compromises, including offers of power-sharing or regional autonomy could be misplaced as the insurgent groups have developed an interest in the continuation of conflict. A traditional, grievance-based understanding of the conflict would hence be likely to lead negotiators in the wrong direction.

Conditions for the Crime-Rebellion Nexus

The crime–rebellion nexus can operate with any form of organized crime, but the specific case of illicit drugs stands out for a number of reasons. First, they are immensely profitable,

especially in processed form—few if any resources can compare in terms of profit margin. Second, they are renewable: “looting” is a misnomer for the cultivation of drugs, because the same plant can be continuously cultivated year after year, bringing continuous profit. Third, they are illegal: a strong international moral and legal regime outlaws the large-scale cultivation of drugs with very specific and controlled exceptions. As a result, more than any other activity including the sale of diamonds, weapons, timber, or oil, the drug industry requires territories outside state control.

Yet the crime–rebellion nexus is only likely to occur, as far as drugs are concerned, under certain conditions. Armed conflict and its consequences, such as the collapse of law enforcement and the loss of state control over territory, forms an impetus for the rise of organized crime and drug cultivation. But this option may not be present in all conflict areas. Drug cultivation is a relatively complicated process, connected with risk (most obviously eradication) and in most societies, attached to negative stigma. It is not technologically advanced, but does require certain skills. Opium cultivation, for example, is a complex, labor-intensive occupation, with many natural hazards.³⁷ The skills required can be transferred, but the very need for them makes drug cultivation likely to take place only where a previous tradition of cultivation of narcotic plants exists. This is all the more the case because such a tradition implies the existence of mechanisms to market the products onward toward consumer markets. In the absence of cultivation tradition and market outlets, armed conflict may still generate organized crime, but in other forms, involving other commodities including synthetic drugs.

In sum, few conflict zones experience drug production, but conflict and drug cultivation are still very likely to occur in the same place. Fifteen of 109 intra-state armed conflicts (13.7 percent) recorded by the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) in 1990–2003 took place in the 9 states out of a total of 190 (4.7 percent) that are drug-producing.³⁸ Of these 9 states producing opium or coca in significant quantities in 1990–2003, 6 experienced armed conflict. In other words, 13.7 percent of conflicts took place in the 4.7 percent of states that produce opium and coca.

This is not surprising because both the inherent political and economic consequences of armed conflict tend to generate conditions suitable for drug cultivation. In political terms, the weakness of the rule of law increases the opportunities for drug production. In economic terms, armed conflict generates considerable economic disruptions and curtails trade, thereby impoverishing people, increasing the likelihood of people needing to turn to the production of narcotics for survival. Still, armed conflict is likely to generate large-scale narcotics production only where it provides a profitable economic alternative to the producer, that is, where the lack of licit economic alternatives make drug production an attractive option. It is hence most likely in economically marginal, isolated, and rural inaccessible areas far from centers of population, where economic alternatives are few and the risk of eradication lower.³⁹ Moreover, the inherent characteristics of opium and coca both require a certain altitude to grow well.⁴⁰

Insurgent groups seeking sources of finances are likely to turn to narcotics only if that option is preferable to alternative modes of financing, which could include external support from states or diasporas, extortion of civilians, the exploitation of other natural resources, or other forms of smuggling or organized crime. If a diamond mine exists in their vicinity but no drugs are cultivated in the area, insurgents would rather seek to appropriate control over the diamonds than to train and force farmers to grow opium or coca. It is *opportunity* that makes insurgent groups turn to drugs.

The link between narcotics and conflict is plausible in both conflicts over territory and conflicts over government, but is likely to have different dynamics. In separatist wars,

insurgents are tied to a specific territory, and hence have little choice of terrain or theater of operations. They can protect local drug production to bolster legitimacy; and in a protracted conflict with control over territory, encourage drug production. In a conflict over government, however, insurgents have a greater potential to choose their theater of operations across the country, and a choice whether to press for territorial control over specific areas. This provides greater flexibility in selecting areas of drug production. Moreover, protecting drug cultivation would in these situations likely play a bigger role for building popular legitimacy, as rebels may have less inherent popular support than insurgents struggling for ethnic rights.⁴¹

Propositions

On the basis of findings of research on the natural resources and armed conflict, and the crime–rebellion nexus, a number of propositions for the relationship between drug cultivation and conflict can be inferred.

- The origins of conflict are based on grievance and not greed. Drug production is not a cause of conflict.
- The conditions of armed conflict provide an impetus for organized criminal activity and tend to generate an increase in drug production, if a previous growing tradition exists.
- Growing drug production forms a strong incentive for insurgent groups to involve in drug production to reap profits from the drug trade. This involvement tends to go from alliance with or taxing of producers to direct involvement.
- Once involved in the drug trade, insurgent groups tend to see their motivational structures affected, with elements of the group acquiring an economic motivation that compounds or supplants the ideological one.

Probing the Drug–Conflict Linkage

In the following section, the nine leading producers of coca and opium in 1990–2003 form the basis of an investigation that seeks to provide a rough indication of whether the propositions outlined earlier are in fact a correct approximation of reality (see Table 1). The low number of countries cultivating narcotics in significant amounts precludes statistically reliable results; yet it is possible, through a methodology of process tracing, to consider whether the propositions cited earlier stand up to closer scrutiny. In turn, they can then form the basis of case selection for deeper case studies.

Cultivation Patterns

A clear trend toward a further concentration of production than to the nine countries included in this study has taken place. Afghanistan and Colombia have consolidated their position as producers of the majority of the world's opium and coca, respectively. By contrast, Burma and Peru have gone from being major producers in the early 1990s to producing increasingly small amounts today in absolute and especially in relative numbers. In Burma, in spite of a ban on opium cultivation and lesser quantities of opium grown, a decrease of drug production has nevertheless not taken place, because Burmese actors have moved heavily into the Methamphetamine business, which is the drug of choice in Southeast and

Table 1
Survey of armed conflict and narcotics cultivation

Country	Type of drug produced	Cultivation tradition	Conflict	Temporal succession?	Insurgent groups	Insurgent involvement	Motivational change
Afghanistan	Opium	Yes, opium	Civil war, protracted, ongoing	Traditional cultivation, conflict, large-scale cultivation	Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) Taliban Shura-I-Nazar	Self-involve/ally Tax/ally Self-involve	No No Possible
Bolivia	Coca	Yes, coca	No	Traditional cultivation, conflict, large-scale cultivation	United Wa State Army	Self-involve	Significant
Burma	Opium	Yes, opium	Several separatist conflicts, protracted, ongoing	Traditional cultivation, conflict, large-scale cultivation	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army Shan State Army Kachin Defense Army	Self-involve	Significant Significant Significant
Colombia	Coca, opium	Yes, coca; No, opium	Civil war, protracted, ongoing	Traditional cultivation, conflict, large-scale cultivation	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejercito Nacional de Liberación	Self-involve/ally Self-involve/ally	Significant Significant
Laos	Opium	Yes, opium	Civil conflict, decreasing intensity	Traditional cultivation, conflict	Hmong Insurgents	Ally	Unlikely
Mexico	Opium	No	Minor conflict, terminated	Cultivation, conflict (unrelated)	Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional	No	N/A
Pakistan	Opium	Yes, opium	Minor conflict, terminated	Cultivation, conflict (unrelated)	Mojahir Quami Movement	Sporadic smuggling	Unlikely
Peru	Coca	Yes, coca	Civil war, terminated	Traditional cultivation, conflict, large-scale cultivation	Sendero Luminoso	Self-involve/ally	No
Thailand	Opium	Yes, opium	No				

East Asia.⁴² Bolivia has remained a stable mid-size source of coca. Laos, Mexico, Pakistan and Thailand are increasingly insignificant sources of world opium.⁴³

Cultivation patterns indicate that drug cultivation takes place almost exclusively in countries where a tradition of local cultivation exists either in-country or in its immediate vicinity. The case of Mexico is an anomaly, opium being an alien commodity brought into the country by Chinese migrants in the end of the nineteenth century, and grown for export to the United States since the early twentieth.⁴⁴ Likewise, opium is alien to Colombia, although it has been grown there in moderate quantities since the 1990s. But this can be considered a direct result of the existing Colombian drug industry's high level of organization, as the cocaine cartels simply decided to branch out into opiates at the side of their major business, cocaine, and acquired the necessary raw materials and know-how to do so. In all other cases, traditional cultivation and use of coca leaves or opium for medicinal or recreational purposes had been engrained in parts of society, often among minority or indigenous groups in inaccessible areas, for decades if not centuries. This confirms the earlier assumption that large-scale drug cultivation is likely to emerge primarily where there are regional skills and tradition to build on, whether or not a country is plagued by armed conflict. However, production is not directly correlated with strength of growing tradition: the current major producers do not have the strongest growing traditions. Peru and Bolivia have a longer tradition than Colombia, and Iran and Pakistan a longer one than Afghanistan.⁴⁵ This suggests that within reasonable distances and in all likelihood because of a strengthening international narcotics control regime, cultivation tends to migrate toward conflict areas. A conflict situation can hence appropriate and internalize cultivation traditions from nearby regions, creating a diffusion of narcotics production toward conflict zones. Although narcotics production still overwhelmingly takes place in inaccessible areas and predominantly in minority-populated frontier regions, it has also tended to spread to previously non-affected parts of the major production countries.

Narcotics and Conflict: Patterns of Incidence

Evidence from the nine countries studied indicate no link between conflict initiation and narcotics production, confirming the results of earlier research. In fact, the trend of the interaction is the same in all four major drug-producing countries during the period (Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia, and Peru). In all cases, traditional production of opium or coca had existed in a limited fashion long before the conflicts, and no evidence suggests that onset of conflict was related to narcotics production. Nevertheless, narcotics production in all cases grew considerably in the period succeeding the onset of conflict.⁴⁶ Moreover, it was transformed in many instances: heroin and cocaine processing over time tended to migrate into production areas, and diversification also occurred, such as the introduction of opiates in Colombia and of synthetic drugs in Burma.

As regards conflict duration, the production of narcotics *per se* does not appear to be linked to duration of conflict. However, the magnitude of narcotics production seems to be directly related to the magnitude and duration of conflict. Minor producers also experienced only minor conflict if any; but the four largest narcotics producers were also the countries involved in the longest and most protracted conflicts.⁴⁷ Only Bolivia couples significant production over time with absence of armed conflict, although peasant unrest mainly geared toward the government's coca eradication exists in the country.⁴⁸

In all four major producers, the large-scale or industrial production of drugs (and particularly the processing of cocaine or heroin) developed after the initiation of conflict.

Colombia's civil war has lasted for over three decades, but the country until 1996 produced less than 25 percent of world coca, becoming the largest producer only in 1997. This increase was to a significant extent related to reductions in Peru's production. In Peru, the outbreak of civil war after 1981 was followed by a significant increase in coca cultivation, doubling from 1981–1982 to 1984–1985. In Burma, opium production has been present since the late nineteenth century, flourishing in the independent-minded Shan state since 1946.⁴⁹ The country has been marred by various armed conflicts since the end of World War II, but Burma became a major heroin exporter only in the 1970s. Likewise, Afghanistan was plunged into war with the Soviet invasion in 1979, at which time less than 200 tons of opium were cultivated. Opium production reached 1000 metric tons in 1988; and further increased in the civil war of 1990–1994, reaching 3416 tons in 1994. It remained high during the Taliban period, peaking at 4565 tons in 1999, before collapsing to 185 tons as a result of Taliban eradication in 2001. It then immediately resumed at 3400 tons in 2002 following Operation Enduring Freedom, and continued to expand in 2003 and 2004.⁵⁰ Minor producers exhibit no similarly clear pattern. Bolivia and Thailand experienced no armed conflict; Mexico and Pakistan experienced minor conflicts unrelated geographically to the drug industry; and Laos suffered a low-intensity conflict involving an opium-producing ethnic minority.

Hence the magnitude of drug cultivation appears linked to prolonged armed conflict. Armed conflict, in other words, presently appears to be a prerequisite for the large-scale cultivation of opiates and coca, which makes sense as these crops are being increasingly tightly controlled by the international narcotics control regime. However, observations of temporal succession and on the concurrence of protracted conflict and large-scale cultivation of narcotics do not permit far-reaching conclusions. The determining factor for both could simply be state weakness: conceivably, states could manage to monitor and combat narcotics production in low-intensity conflicts, whereas their ability to do so in protracted and intense armed conflict would be harder. Causal links can tell us only so much; it is therefore necessary to specifically study possible causal mechanisms. This requires the investigation of insurgent involvement.

Insurgent Involvement

There is strong empirical evidence for a link between insurgent groups and drug production. The link is most obvious for large-scale producers, and less clear in the case of minor producers.⁵¹ Mexico's Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), which fought a short conflict with the government in 1994, is the only insurgent movement in the sample to have steered clear of involvement in the narcotics trade. It could easily have boosted its financial capability by involvement in the drug trade, given the rampant drug trafficking problem in Mexico, but chose not to do so.⁵²

In the case of Pakistan, the armed conflict included in the UCDP is the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM), which was active in the Southern port city of Karachi in the 1980s and 1990s. It is politically and geographically distinct from the Pashtun-populated opiate-producing and processing areas in the Northwest.⁵³ MQM factions are known to have been involved in various forms of organized crime including drug smuggling in the export hub of Karachi, yet the organization never involved in the cultivation of drugs. In Laos, the Hmong minority has waged a low-intensity conflict against the communist government since it took power in 1975.⁵⁴ Laos's opium is cultivated in the highlands inhabited by minorities, especially the Hmong.⁵⁵ Opium production in Laos peaked in 1989–1990, when an estimated 380 and 275 metric tons of opium were produced, respectively, coinciding

with the peak of the insurgency. These were the only years that the conflict was actually registered in the UCDP.⁵⁶ An organic link between the insurgency and opium cultivation has not been proven nor has the issue been studied extensively. Nevertheless, connections between insurgents and traffickers have been noted and are thought to help fund and sustain the insurgency.⁵⁷

If the picture is mixed and unclear as concerns minor producers, there is strong evidence of systematic and most often direct involvement of insurgent actors in the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics in all cases of major drug producers surveyed.

Afghanistan

The Afghanistan conflict stands out by the impressive array of forces and factions involved, the total breakdown of societal and economic infrastructure, and the changing nature of the conflict: from 1979–1989, resistance to Soviet occupation; 1989–1994, civil war among various armed factions; 1995–2001, bipolar confrontation between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance;⁵⁸ and since the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, between the coalition-supported Interim Government and a “coalition” of opposition forces including (but not limited to) the Taliban, the Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Ample evidence supports the involvement of major armed factions in the drug industry in a direct capacity. The Hezb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was the perhaps strongest and most well-organized force among the Mujahideen resistance to the Soviet Union, benefiting from the lion share of American and Pakistani funds for the resistance.⁵⁹ Hezb-e-Islami gradually became deeply involved in opium production as well as heroin processing.⁶⁰ Hezb-e-Islami’s involvement in the heroin industry was first denied by U.S. authorities but later gradually acknowledged.⁶¹ The American disengagement from Afghanistan led to an abrupt cut in funding for the Mujahideen factions, pushing Hekmatyar, and others, to rely ever more on the drug trade for financing their struggle for power.⁶² Having spent the Taliban years in exile in Iran, Hekmatyar is now a leading figure fighting the United States and the interim government; and again deeply involved in the opium trade, estimated to control ca. 15 percent of opium production in Afghanistan in 2004.⁶³

Most other Afghan factions were implicated in the drug industry in one or another way. These include the Shura-i-Nazar, a Mujahideen faction turned main opposition to the Taliban, and the Taliban movement. Both have been in opposition as well as in government during the Afghan civil war. During the Taliban period, the Shura-i-Nazar continuously controlled the Panjsher valley and the Northeastern areas. When the Taliban government banned and eradicated opium in 2000–2001, production in Taliban-controlled areas practically disappeared. However, in the Shura-controlled Badakhshan province, it surged by 158 percent from 2000 to 2001.⁶⁴ The Shura benefited directly from the drug industry through a form of taxation and the supervision of farmers.⁶⁵ In 2002, the U.S. State Department noted that the Northern Alliance had “taken no action against cultivation and trafficking in the area it controls.”⁶⁶ While presently in Government, the Shura leadership is heavily compromised by the drug trade. As for the Taliban movement, it had an ambiguous relationship to opium. At first, it could not afford to do without taxing the drug trade, but it eventually conducted the most aggressive eradication effort since Mao’s China in an effort that appeared sincere, in spite of much skepticism.⁶⁷ In sum, in the case of Afghanistan, the major factions involved in the civil war have been involved in the drug trade, including foreign organizations with operations in the country, such as Al Qaeda and the IMU.⁶⁸ This

remains the case today, with an increasingly large part of the funding for the resistance against the Afghan Interim Government believed to come from the heroin industry.

Burma

Opium production in Burma (since 1996 officially the Union of Myanmar) has traditionally been concentrated in the Eastern Shan state bordering China, Laos, and Thailand.⁶⁹ Commercial opium industry increased in the Shan state mainly after remnants of the Kuomintang army of Yunnan origin fled Mao's China after 1949, finding affinity with the hill tribes of eastern Burma. Before that, colonial monopolies sold mainly Indian opium in the region, and Southeast Asia became a net producer of opium only after World War II. The British nevertheless never attempted to curtail local opium production in the Shan state.⁷⁰ The Shan state was simultaneously an area of independence struggles on the part of the tribal peoples.⁷¹ These struggles were increasingly financed through heroin, which gradually came to be processed in the Shan state itself.⁷² The profits from the heroin industry enabled the otherwise impoverished tribal areas to finance armed struggles against the Burmese state.⁷³ The Burmese heroin industry grew heavily in the 1970s, and was dominated by two figures: Luo Xinghan, leader of the Kokang Self-Defense Forces, who was nevertheless apprehended by the Burmese government; as well as Chang Qifu or Khun Sa, who after 1973 took up Luo's position in controlling a large part of the heroin industry of the Golden Triangle.⁷⁴ As was to happen in Colombia, the government after 1963 created self-defense militias known as Kha Kwei Yei due to its inability to counter the insurgent groups—and looked the other way as they were involved in various commercial and criminal enterprises including the heroin industry.⁷⁵ The drug trade was the basis of Khun Sa's power until he was forced to give himself up in 1996. The 1989 splintering of the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) exacerbated the drug trade, making it uncontrollable, as the government again allowed its splinter groups to involve in the drug trade, particularly the United Wa State Army (UWSA), presently the largest drug producer in Southeast Asia.⁷⁶ Likewise, the arrest of Khun Sa led to the splintering of his Mai Tai army into several distinct Shan nationalist forces, most of which are implicated in the heroin, and increasingly, methamphetamine trade.⁷⁷

Colombia

Colombia's civil war involves the Government and at least three parties: two left-wing guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Army of National Liberation (ELN); as well as right-wing paramilitary forces (the AUC). Civil conflict has plagued Colombia's modern history, being traced back at the very least to the widespread political violence that began in 1948, with the ELN being created in 1964 and the FARC in 1966.⁷⁸ The paramilitaries emerged under government patronage in the 1960s as a response to the Marxist guerrillas and due to the state's inability to control its territory and protect landholders. They were subsequently outlawed due to their increasing criminalization, although their links to the military remain. In the 1970s, Colombia emerged as a transit and processing area for Bolivian and Peruvian coca toward the United States.⁷⁹ By the early 1980s, coca cultivation had spread to Colombia, and mainly to FARC-controlled areas, where 80 percent of Colombia's coca was grown.⁸⁰ In fact, its involvement has been proven both qualitatively and quantitatively. Analyzing the overlap of FARC presence in the 175 coca-growing municipalities in Colombia, a recent study found that 47 percent of

coca-growing communities had FARC activity, whereas a control group only had 28 percent. Moreover, measuring the number of incidents involving FARC, municipalities with coca cultivation experienced an average 4.2 incidents, and the control group only 1.3.⁸¹ Research has shown that the FARC improved its relationship with Colombian drug cartels during the 1980s and taxed and protected the drug trade. When the United States successfully coerced Peru and Bolivia to eradicate the bulk of their coca production, production moved into Colombia itself. After the collapse of the Cali and Medellín cartels in the early 1990s, the FARC became increasingly involved in a direct capacity in the cocaine industry.⁸²

By contrast to FARC, the ELN long refrained from large-scale involvement in the drug industry. If 32 of 61 FARC fronts were linked with the drug trade in 2000, 7 of 41 ELN fronts were. However, this restrained policy is reported to have changed with a succession of leadership in the organization.⁸³ As for the AUC, their involvement with the drug trade is equally heavy, and their armed struggle against the Marxist guerrillas often appears to be over control of drug production. AUC leader Castaño in 2000 admitted that 70 percent of AUC funding was drug-related.⁸⁴ Colombia provides a clear example of the way in which non-state violent actors have gradually exploited the narcotics industry through protection, taxation, and direct involvement in order to increase their capabilities and extend the territories under their control.

Peru

The onset of conflict in Peru has remained a debated topic in the literature, especially as the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) Maoist guerrilla launched its insurgency immediately following a process of democratization.⁸⁵ If the fear of electoral marginalization led Sendero to launch a revolution, as Ron suggests, it was its decision to espouse the drug trade that provided the financial ground for the growth of Sendero's military capabilities, which enabled it to pose a formidable challenge to the state for a decade. In particular, political liberalization had brought a power vacuum to the Upper Huallaga valley in the Central Andes as well as an agricultural crisis, allowing drug traffickers to emerge in strength and force farmers to produce and deliver coca at low prices.⁸⁶ Beaten back by a military offensive against it, Sendero moved into the area by 1984. Sendero quickly acquired popularity with the coca growers by raising prices, and established itself as middleman, including the charging of landing fees for aircraft transporting drugs to Colombia for processing and trafficking northward.⁸⁷ Importantly, the normally highly dogmatic Sendero adopted a more flexible and moderate course in its relations with the local population in the Upper Huallaga Valley.⁸⁸ Sendero hence clearly benefited from, and adapted its ideological agenda to, the protection of coca cultivation in the Upper Huallaga Valley. In the late 1990s, U.S.-supported anti-narcotics measures coincided with a negative price spiral for coca, reducing coca production in Peru significantly. With the capture of Sendero leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992, both Sendero activity and coca production gradually declined. By 1999, the Sendero insurgency had ebbed out, whereas coca production stood at under 40,000 ha, compared to sustained figures over 100,000 ha from 1992–1995.

Motivational Changes: An Unclear Picture

With the exception of Mexico's EZLN, evidence suggests that all insurgent forces studied have moved either one or two steps along the crime–rebellion continuum into cooperation with organized crime, and in most cases also engaged in self-involvement for instrumental

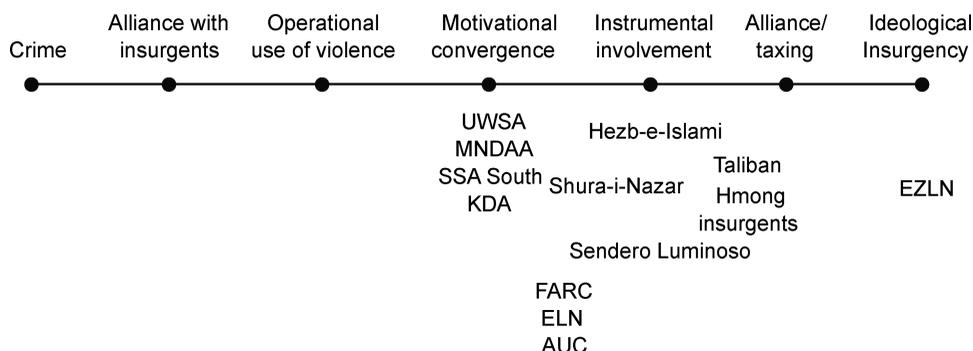


Figure 2. Insurgent groups along the crime–rebellion continuum.

purposes. This is certainly and most prominently the case for the four major armed conflicts in the study. But as concerns observable changes in motivation, the groups seem to split into two, as illustrated in Figure 2. Clearly, determining the motivation behind a rebel group's actions presents considerable difficulty and requires information that may be impossible to obtain. To that, government sources tend to overstate the criminal nature of insurgent groups, whereas groups themselves tend to understate or flatly deny their involvement in crime. Available evidence nevertheless indicates that the motivation structures of insurgent groups in Burma and Colombia have been affected to a considerable extent, whereas the picture in Afghanistan is less conclusive and Peru seems to be less affected.

Burma is perhaps the clearest case of ideological movements losing much of their original purpose. The main purpose of the UWSA's actions, for example, often seems to be the heroin industry and not nationalism. The UWSA and other Burmese groups hence appear to have entered into the "convergence" position on the crime–terror continuum. This was likely facilitated by a permissive government attitude, as seen later.

The FARC and ELN in Colombia are also close to the convergence position, having entered into alliances with drug cartels; protected and taxed coca cultivation; and over time increasingly involved in the trade themselves. With time, the motivating factors have increasingly seemed to be profit, as illustrated by the FARC's patterns of activity in drug-producing areas and its practice of abducting people for ransom.⁸⁹ That said, parts of both the FARC and ELN seem to remain motivated by ideology.

Afghanistan's Hezb-e-Islami, Taliban, and Shura-i-Nazar have all taxed opium production. The Hezb and the Shura have also been involved directly in supervising opium cultivation and heroin processing. The changing alliances and allegiances among factions, moreover indicate that their motivations have been increasingly focused on the pursuit of power rather than ideology. Involvement in the drug industry has been crucial for leaders to attain and keep political power, and struggle between factions can occasionally be interpreted as struggle over the control of the drug trade. But evidence does not readily permit the classification of any faction as mainly greed-seeking.

Peru's Sendero Luminoso displaced traffickers and controlled landing strips used for drug export, but did not appear to be mainly motivated by greed. The strict and dogmatic character of the organization was somewhat eased in coca-producing regions for pragmatic purposes, securing continued access to the crucial funding that the coca industry provided the organization. However, there is no indication that the motivations of the organization were affected.

Government Corruption

Compounding ample evidence of insurgent involvement in the drug industry, equally substantial evidence shows that governments and especially their proxy militias have become systematically implicated in the drug trade. This is an important element in understanding the drug–conflict linkage. Corruption of government authorities, including political as well as military bodies, first of all decreases their efficiency. Hence if the drug industry tends to strengthen insurgents, it has the opposite effect on governments—thereby strengthening what is in most cases the weaker side and weakening the stronger one. Moreover, government officials' involvement in the drug trade is likely to be easier and accountability lower in times of armed conflict. This, and the fact that conditions of armed conflict themselves enable the production of drugs, likely entails that individuals in government acquire a personal interest in the continuation of a conflict situation—if not necessarily war, then at least the absence of peace.⁹⁰

Afghanistan stands out as a country with a collapsed state, which enabled successive insurgent formations to control state authority. In this sense, talking about an Afghan state from 1989 to 2004 is relatively meaningless. That said, successive militia groups with ties to the drug industry have succeeded each other in nominal or actual control of the state, leading to entrenching criminal involvement of government officials. This is a major impediment to the building of the Afghan state.

In all drug-producing countries, there is a comprehensive body of evidence implicating governments, at the highest levels—including occasionally heads of state—in corruption by, or collusion with, the narcotics industry. In Colombia, aside from 35 percent of members of the country's Congress being implicated with the drug trade in the early 1990s, former President Ernesto Samper was found to have financed his election campaign with funds provided by cocaine cartels.⁹¹ In Peru, military authorities have been widely implicated in facilitating drug trafficking.⁹² All producer states, including those without armed conflict, as well as numerous transit countries, have been implicated by what David Jordan calls "Narcostatization."⁹³

Burma stands out as a country whose government has been especially lax toward drug production and trafficking.⁹⁴ Several leading members of the ruling military council have been connected to the drug trade, but beyond this, the state explicitly made tolerance of the drug business a bargaining chip in negotiations with rebel groups. In Burma, hence, the involvement of both sides in the drug trade interestingly helped reduce the intensity of armed conflict.

Conclusions

This article has sought to shed light on the interactions between narcotics production and armed conflict. In so doing, it has shown that conditions of armed conflict boost, exacerbate, transform, and occasionally shift preexisting patterns of narcotics production. Where narcotics are present, armed conflict is likely to fundamentally alter the dynamics of their production—and to be fundamentally altered by it. Narcotics production almost invariably comes to involve and bolster insurgent groups in protracted conflicts, helping to extend their capabilities and compounding the challenge they pose to states. States themselves see their authority weakened.

Moreover, the link between narcotics and conflict also has the potential to affect the motivational structures of insurgent groups, creating an economic function of war for actors on both sides of the conflict. The specific implications of this for conflict resolution

nevertheless remain to be studied. As the Burmese case indicates, interests on the part both of the government and insurgents in the drug trade could be a factor leading to reduction of warfare. This may not necessarily be inspiring, if it means that conflicts involving large-scale narcotics production can be ended through the creation of weak narco-states.

Much clearly remains to be done in this field of research. Whereas this article has been limited to cultivation countries, the same logic could be inferred in states transited by the drug trade or seriously affected by other organized crime. Case evidence such as the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), some Chechen groupings, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) indicate a similar mechanism at work even without drug cultivation. Moreover, the effect of the drug industry on the functioning and capabilities of the state in situations of armed conflict is a crucial and understudied component of the equation. Finally, further studies are needed to better understand the mechanisms whereby motivational structures of insurgent movements are affected. Indeed, there is no obvious explanation why some insurgent groups such as the FARC and various Burmese groups were strongly affected by criminal motivations, although others either steered clear of any involvement (the EZLN) or did get deeply involved in the drug industry without changes in motivation (Sendero Luminoso). Potentially, the study of the organizational structures, recruitment patterns, and ideological rigidity could provide partial answers, although posing significant methodological problems.

The findings of this study indicate that the interaction between narcotics production and armed conflict is considerably more complex than visible at first glance. The effect of the drug trade on capabilities and motivational structure of parties to armed conflict has important implications for efforts to resolve these conflicts. For example, the Colombian government's decision to grant the FARC control over an area the size of Switzerland in 1998 would have been a very doubtful proposition if the criminal nature of the FARC had been fully understood; indeed, the move did nothing to solve the conflict, while the ceded territory quickly developed into a safe haven for various criminal activities. This example suggests the importance a correct analysis of insurgent group characteristics has for mediation and negotiation strategies.

In sum, the type and level of involvement of an insurgent group in criminal activity is an increasingly important element in understanding the dynamics of armed conflict and in devising strategies to address, manage, and resolve these conflicts.

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