



EUROPE AND AFGHAN HEROIN

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As the war in Afghanistan reaches the decade mark, the effort to stem opium poppy cultivation has taken a turn for the worse. International efforts to defeat the Taliban have tapered into a regressed response to the problem that drugs play in this conflict. Anti-drug campaigns are floundering as opium prices rise, which acts as an incitement to continued and renewed farming. This could potentially further destabilize the previous efforts in a war in which there is a desperate need to show progress. Perhaps Europe can recognize a problem of which they are a part and find an alternative way to effectively address the issue at hand.

Too great a focus on traditional security issues can make us lose track of how intertwined they are with the drug problem. The importance of poppy cultivation to the finances of the Taliban and other belligerent entities in the Afghan arena is well known. Opiates that stem from poppy cultivation cause severe drug problems in the world, particularly in Europe and Asia. The flow of drugs from Afghanistan is less well known. The opium and heroin from poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has a market that is generated from a demand. The greatest demand for Afghan drugs originates mainly in Europe and Russia, estimated to account for about half of the global heroin market. This traffic creates great problems in transit areas where insufficient capacity at the local level worsens the drug problem. This development is especially dangerous for countries adjacent to Afghanistan through which much trafficking goes. The Afghan drug trade is becoming a source of corruption and funding for extremist groups along the routes, especially in Central Asian countries.

Heroin is one of the most widely used illegal drugs. It is derived from opium, which in itself can have an illicit use. But heroin creates the most problems internationally. Western Europe is the single biggest market, with Afghanistan supplying the lion's share. Roughly 37% of the heroin from Afghanistan takes the "Balkan route" through Iran, Turkey and Southeast Europe. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) set a goal to "eliminate or significantly reduce" illicit drug supply and demand by 2019. This mainly emanated from pressure by civil society on perceived weaknesses of the current international drug control system. This was met with a strong commitment by governments to produce better results in combating drug trafficking and drug use. Since 2002, captured illegal heroin has increased, but most of these captures took place in Iran

and Turkey. Only about 2% of trafficked Afghan heroin gets seized at the source, compared with around 20% of trafficked cocaine. Europe only managed to seize a fifth of the amount seized by Iran and Turkey. Very low quantities of captured heroin come into Europe from the European countries along the Balkan heroin route. Only 639kg were intercepted by Balkan countries, with Hungary and Austria adding another 132kg from a total of 7.6mt seized in Europe in 2008, from a route that is estimated to traffic around 140mt of heroin to the European market. There is a need to reduce the demand that fuels the supply.

While the official number of casualties of coalition forces in Afghanistan to date is around 2,300, deaths related to drug use have increased in Europe to 7,371, inflicting more deadly harm than the war. In order to stem the flow of heroin and gain greater control of the drugs, a balance between development, security, justice and health needs to be adopted. In this way, development is a crucial part of drug control and vice versa, making them inextricably linked with each other.

Fighting opiate production in Afghanistan has taken a backseat to traditional security issues lately. In 1998–2009, global opium production increased by 80%, whereas it rose by 150% in Afghanistan. Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan remained the same as 2009 in terms of the area cultivated and the number of farmers. This was a break with the previous annual increases in production since 2007. The world production of opiates actually declined 2007–2009. A decline by half in production occurred due to a plant disease in 2009. This meant that half the value of the 2010 poppy exports was lost, leading prices to more than double in 2009. In the meantime, the price of wheat dropped, making poppy six times more profitable. This created an incentive that could boost Afghan poppy cultivation, since the biggest reason for Afghan farm-



ers to cultivate poppies is the high sale price. The most common alternative to poppy sales is off-farm employment, which is far less lucrative.

Europe Needs to Do More

The drug problem in Afghanistan has been affected by the political changes in Western governments. In the beginning of the war, little attention was paid to poppy cultivation. It had been banned by the Taliban and saw a huge upswing with the removal of their regime. At that time it was not seen as important enough to garner much focus or resources from the coalition forces. As a result, poppy cultivation boomed. Later, efforts were made in order to reverse this trend that helped to limit the problem geographically to areas in which allied forces had little control. Europe needs to do more.

The cultivation is an important source of revenue for the Taliban and drug mafia. Progress in combating poppy cultivation has been made. About 20 provinces are free from poppies today. The efforts of eradicating poppy cultivation in certain provinces have increased the concentration of poppy cultivation in other areas, especially in Kandahar province. Ninety eight percent of poppy cultivation is located in nine provinces in the Southern and Western parts of Afghanistan, which are the most insecure provinces in the country. The less security and governmental influence in an area, the greater is the poppy cultivation. Legal alternatives to poppy cultivation need to be encouraged.

Drugs from Afghanistan constitute a problem that European countries have to tackle. In relation to the need to seize more smuggled heroin in Europe, there is a similar need in Afghanistan to control the import of the precursor chemicals to heroin productions, such as acetic anhydride. This substance is not produced in Afghanistan and therefore is only imported, mostly illicitly. It is estimated that around 1000mt is needed in order to produce the amount of heroin that is exported. Only 14,233 liters were seized in 2008. Legal trade in this substance would place its value at US\$1-2 per liter, but prices in Afghanistan have gone from US\$24 to US\$350/liter. Curbing the flow of this substance would contribute to fighting Afghan heroin production.

In the aftermath of the invasion and the refugee flows created by the war, many refugees have returned to Afghanistan. With them, a change in usage habits from opium to heroin has brought new problems, such as hepatitis and HIV. One million heroin addicts live on the streets. To combat this, UNODC has given recommendations for improved drug control. First, drug use should be treated as an illness and universal access to drug

treatment should be provided. This also contributes to shrinking demand by reducing the drug market. Second, urban conditions should be improved to make it more difficult to peddle drugs where public order has broken down. Third, international agreements against organized crime should be enforced. Instruments like the UN Convention against Organized Crime are not being used properly. There is a need to create better conditions for combating money laundering and cyber-crimes. Fourth, law enforcement should change focus and efficiency should be improved. Greater emphasis should be placed on violent, high profile, and high volume criminals instead of users. This is a challenging task to accomplish in Afghanistan in the short term, and more feasible in Europe.

History tells us that local efforts do not result in global success. Countries with limited means face great challenges in coping on their own. Successful efforts to fight heroin demand in Europe are possible and would remedy a large part of the world's heroin problem. Measures to reduce demand are needed. It is necessary to focus on the economic forces behind. Most efficient would be international collaborative efforts against illicit heroin use.

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