

Opium and Afghanistan: New Solution to an Old Problem

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Introduction

According to Antonio Maria Costa, director of the United Nations (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime, the Afghan opium economy is "now a clear and present danger."¹ The opium economy is a threat to international security as it enhances the chances of failed states emerging, of stable regions destabilizing, and of human poverty, addiction, and disease proliferating. The root cause of the Afghan opium economy is the great number of domestic farmers who cultivate the crop. Thus, the factors that compel rural farmers to cultivate opium cause the manifestation of the opium economy in Afghanistan, and the subsequent insecurity that afflicts the international community.

Probable Causes

During its war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Soviet Union (SU) encountered stiff resistance from *mujahidin* guerillas. Rural Afghans backed these *mujahidin*, and provided them with support in the form food, water, shelter, and medical aid.² In hopes of harming the rural population and thereby weakening the *mujahidin*'s support network, the SU attacked the agricultural sector;³ aerial sorties destroyed vital infrastructure such

¹ United Nations Information Service, *Increased Supply of Afghan Heroin Promises Overdoses and Death* (Vienna, Austria: 2004), 1.

² The reason the Soviet Union Targeted the agricultural sector results from the fact that agriculture was the main source of livelihood for rural Afghans. Assessment Team assembled by the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), "Seed and Crop Improvement Situation Assessment in Afghanistan," ICARDA, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, http://www.icarda.org/Afghanistan/NA/Full/General_F.htm, Recent Agro-Economic Conditions.

³ Lester W. Grau, "The Soviet-Afghan War: A Superpower Mired in the Mountains," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17 (March 2004): 145.

as roads and irrigation systems,⁴ and scorched earth campaigns turned "entire regions that once were fertile (into) areas of barren waste."⁵ From a Soviet standpoint, these tactics were successful, as the cultivation of licit crops traditionally grown by Afghani farmers declined during the war.⁶ Corresponding with this decline was a rise in opium cultivation, as farmers increasingly switched to the illicit crop during the conflict.⁷ This switch occurred because traditional crops need fertile land, irrigation, and quick road access to markets,⁸ whereas opium can grow on most types of soil, it requires minimal irrigation, and its lightweight and non-perishable nature allow for easy transport.⁹

Although the SU left Afghanistan, the conditions that compelled farmers to switch to opium cultivation remained. Governmental neglect is to blame for this, as rural reconstruction was never a priority for the Communist (1978-1992), Mujahidin (1992-1996), or Taliban regimes (1996-2001) that ruled Afghanistan.¹⁰ The collapse of the Taliban in 2001 ended this trend of neglect. In its place came a new era marked by increased reconstruction and development programs. However, this increase

⁴ Vital agricultural infrastructure destroyed by the Soviets includes irrigation systems, roads, and channels. Jonathan Goodland, "Frontiers and Wars: A Study of the Opium Economy in Afghanistan," *Crisis States Research Center, London School of Economics*, January 2003 <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/others/SeminarJG29012003.pdf>, 4.

⁵ Richard F. Nyrop & Donald M. Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Studies and Government Publications*, (Washington, DC: 1986), Crops and Developments After 1978.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey, 2004* (Vienna, Austria: 5), 9.

⁸ Vanda Felbab Brown, "Afghanistan: When Counternarcotics Undermines Counterterrorism," *Washington Quarterly*, Fall (2005): 58.

⁹ Frank Kenefick & Larry Morgan, *Report submitted U.S. Agency for International Development: ium in Afghanistan: People and Poppies, the Good Evil* (Kabul, Afghanistan: 2004), 19.

¹⁰ Omar Zakhilwal, "The Afghan Economy: Past, Present & Future," *Institute for Afghan Studies*, May 12, 2002, http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/ECONOMY/afghan_economy_past_present.htm, The Communist Era-The Taliban Take Over

occurred, and continues to occur, in an uneven pattern.¹¹

Uneven patterns occur due to security issues, as reconstruction programs may only take place in regions deemed sufficiently secure.¹² Due to this condition, the insecure agriculturally oriented countryside has not been a focal point of reconstruction and development efforts. Consequently, much of the infrastructure damaged in the past has remained unusable.¹³ These dynamics are similar Cold War dynamics, as infrastructural constraints continue to hinder the cultivation of licit crops. Given that these infrastructural limitations do not apply to opium cultivation, it is understandable why farmers currently choose to grow this crop.

Additional incentive for cultivating opium results from the nature of Afghanistan's informal banking system. Most farmers take out loans on a yearly basis in order to satisfy basic needs such as purchasing food, clothing, medical services, and agricultural inputs.¹⁴ The most widely used method of obtaining loans involves opium as a source of credit; farmers receive a loan by agreeing to cultivate a predetermined amount of opium that is to be transferred to the creditor at a later date.¹⁵ This particular method is in wide use because opium provides the greatest access to loans, and the most favorable interest rates, when compared to other forms of credit.¹⁶ With so many needs to satisfy, and so few means for satisfying these needs, it is only natural that

¹¹ Farish A Noor, "Warlords, Drugs, and Landmines," *The Daily Times*, November 30, 2003, Op-Ed.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ David Mansfield, "The Role of Opium as a Source of Informal Credit in Rural Afghanistan," World Bank, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Resources/AFRFW_4_Role_of_Opium_as_Source_of_Credit.htm, The Incidence and Size of Seasonal Loans and Key messages.

¹⁵ Felbab Brown, *When Counternarcotics Undermine Counterterrorism*, 58.

¹⁶ Mansfield, *Role of Opium*, Key Messages.

farmers would choose the opium option.

Unfortunately, satisfying these needs became increasingly difficult for opium farmers in recent years, as widespread crop failure, governmental bans, and eradication efforts caused yields to be lower than expected.¹⁷ Lower yields led some farmers to initially default on their loans, as they were unable to grow the predetermined amount of opium. While some were eventually able to repay their loans, others were less fortunate; as of 2005, over one-third of farmers had an outstanding loan to pay.¹⁸

Farmers with outstanding loans have several means with which they can manage their debt. They may opt to sell or mortgage their land, give their daughter to marriage, grow licit crops, or work wage labor to supplement their farm earning.¹⁹ Alternatively, they may choose to cultivate opium. This latter option is the one that is the most preferred and widely employed, as many consider it the best debt management strategy in contemporary Afghanistan.²⁰ At an age where debts have proliferated, this preference has contributed significantly to the rising levels of opium cultivation in the country.

Security Implications

Weakening of the Afghan state

Antonio Maria Costa is of the belief that “there is a palpable risk that

¹⁷ Ibid., Coping With Accumulated Debt.

¹⁸ Bob Weber, “Drug traders use debt to keep Afghan farmers in cycle of opium production,” *Canadian Press*, June 9, 2006.

¹⁹ Mansfield, *Role of Opium*, Strategies For Repayment.

²⁰ Ibid., Key Messages.

Afghanistan will again turn into a failed state."²¹ State failure is quite possible given the prominence of the opium economy, and the adverse influence that this economy has on Afghanistan's stability. Elucidating this influence is the Failed State Index as espoused by the Fund for Peace.²² The Failed State Index calculates Afghanistan's proximity to becoming a failed state based on twelve indicators that have historically been prominent in bringing about failure to a nation. Of the twelve indicators, numerous are closely related to, and exacerbated by, the Afghan opium economy.²³

Enhancing the scope of the *external intervention* in Afghanistan is the fact that foreign forces have been, and continue to be, involved in counter-narcotic operations. Operations of this sort have worked to antagonize certain Afghan parties. Some of these parties have responded by sending their opium-funded *security apparatuses who operate as a "state within a state"* to wage violent campaigns, in hopes of stifling the counter-narcotic efforts.²⁴ In turn, these campaigns of violence have caused the displacement of thousands of people,²⁵ which has intensified the *movement of internally displaced persons*. Campaigns of opium-funded violence have as well led to *uneven patterns of development*. Uneven patterns arise because areas that are free of opium funded-violence receive more development assistance than regions that are

²¹ Ian Traynor Zagreb, "Afghanistan at the Mercy of Narco-Terrorists," *The Guardian*, October 30, 03, Special Reports.

²² Fund for Peace, "Failed State Index," Fund for Peace, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/programs/fsi/fsindex.php>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ United Nations Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs, *Bittersweet Harvest: Afghanistan's New War* (New York, NY: 2005). See also Pamela Constable, "In Afghan Poppy Heartland, New Crops, Growing Danger," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2006, A11.

²⁵ IRINNews.org, "AFGHANISTAN: Thousands displaced by fighting in Kandahar," *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs*, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=55433&SelectRegion=Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN>.

plagued by the same type of violence.²⁶ The further exacerbation of these factors by the presence of the opium economy may cause Afghanistan to degenerate into a failed state. It would be very detrimental if such a scenario were to materialize, as "failed states serve as safe havens and staging grounds for terrorist activities, and create environments that spur wider regional conflict which carry significant security costs to neighboring countries."²⁷

Strengthening the Taliban

Recent reports suggest that resurgent Taliban forces have forged an alliance with opium traffickers; in return for protecting traffickers and farmers, the Taliban receives a share of the profits accrued from the opium trade.²⁸ Taliban forces in turn use this capital to finance weapons and equipment procurement,²⁹ to pay combatant wages,³⁰ and to entice recruits to join their cause.³¹ With more weapons, equipment, and operatives, the Taliban is better able to wage its insurgency campaign. This opium-funded campaign undermines human security at present time, and it has the capacity to continue doing so in the future.

Human security suffers presently due to the Taliban's use of tactics that aim to

²⁶ Noor, "Warlords, Drugs, and Landmines," Op-Ed.

²⁷ Susan E. Rice, "U.S. Foreign Assistance and Failed States," Global Economics, The Brookings Institute, <http://www.brook.edu/views/papaers/rice/20021125.htm>.

²⁸ Declan Walsh, "Better paid, better armed, better connected - Taliban rise again," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2006.

²⁹ Michael Yon, "Afghanistan's Other War," *CBS News Online, CBS Broadcasting Inc.*, September 12, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/12/opinion/main2000748.shtml>.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that the Taliban pays well which may explain its successes in recruiting. Taliban fighters receive twice as much pay as Afghan soldiers, and four times as much as Afghan police. Anna Badkhan, "Afghan government failure reopens door to the Taliban," *The San-Francisco Chronicle*, September 17, 2006.

³¹ Rachel Morarjee, "Taliban Goes for Cash Over Ideology," *The Financial Times*, July 26, 2006, World.

terrorize the population.³² In the future, human security will suffer if the Taliban's opium-funded campaign propels them back into power. This is the case, as the Taliban, during its previous stint in power, and throughout its recent campaign, have shown a flagrant and constant disregard for the human rights of women.³³ It is likely that this disregard would continue and become even more pervasive if the Taliban reassume control in Afghanistan.

Strengthening of Al Qaeda

Islamic charities sympathetic to al Qaeda's cause have historically been its main source of financing. The anti-terror campaigns that ensued following 9/11 targeted charities of this nature, and in the process diminished their ability to divert funds to al Qaeda.³⁴ To offset this loss of income, "al Qaeda," according to the American intelligence community, "has turned to the poppy fields of Afghanistan as barter to finance its operations."³⁵ More specifically, al Qaeda generates capital by levying a tax on each opium shipment that passes through its area of influence.³⁶ Capital accrued in this manner is subsequently used by al Qaeda to fund its operations in Afghanistan, and

³² Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Bombs and Threats shut down School," *Human Rights Watch*, July 11, 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/06/afghan13700.htm>.

³³ The rights that were violated during the Taliban's previous stint in power include the right to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, the right to work, the right to education, freedom of movement, and the right to health care. Examples of current Taliban attitudes vis-à-vis rights is evident through the letter they post around rural villages. For example, one letter said: "Respected Afghans: Leave the culture and traditions of the Christians and Jews. Do not send your girls to school." A. Widney Brown and Farhat Bokhari, "Humanity Denied - Systematic Violations of Women's Rights in Afghanistan," *Report Prepared for Human Rights Watch*, Section V. See Also Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Bombs and Threats."

³⁴ GlobalSecurity.org, "Funding in Afghanistan," *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/paralal-gaida-funding.htm>.

³⁵ Rowan Scarborough, "Drug Money sustains Al-Qaeda," *The Washington Times*, December 29, 2003, Nation/Politics.

³⁶ Ibid.

in areas of the former SU.³⁷ Regions where al Qaeda is active may in turn suffer through episodes of indiscriminate violence that have the potential to inflict death and injury to many.

Weakening of Security in the Region

A majority of Afghani opium ends up in Europe after being trafficked through Central Asia.³⁸ Corrupt government officials in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia help facilitate the flow of drugs through the region.³⁹ This poses a threat to international security because corrupt regimes tend to breed poverty and terrorism.⁴⁰ Traffickers who enjoy these kinds of 'political favors' include transnational criminal organizations such as the Chechen and Russian mafias.⁴¹ Groups of this type, who by virtue of the opium trade become financially stronger, affect people's sense of security by engaging in arms dealing, corruption, bank fraud, and money laundering.⁴² Greater financial strength has as well allowed some of these groups to divert finances to separatist groups in Chechnya.⁴³ This is of great concern vis-à-vis international security, as there is fear that the Chechen conflict might spillover

³⁷ Steven Metz & Raymond Millen, "Insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan: Change and Continuity," *Strategic Studies Institute, Central Intelligence Agency*, http://www.cia.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_2020_Support/2004_05_25_papers/insurgency.pdf, 20-21. See also Tamara Makarenko, "Crime, Terror and the Central Asian Drug Trade," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, (Spring 2002).

³⁸ Glenn E. Curtis, "Involvement of Russian Organized Crime Syndicates, Criminal elements in the Russian Military, and Regional Terrorist Groups in Narcotics Trafficking in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Chechnya," *Library of Congress*, www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/RussianOrgCrime.pdf, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 & 14.

⁴⁰ Francois Melese, "The Problem of Corruption," *The Free Market* 20, no. 6 (2002): 13. See also John McFarlane, "Corruption a Threat to National Stability," *Platypus Magazine*, June 2002, 31.

⁴¹ Curtis, *Criminal Elements in Russian Military*, 23.

⁴² Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Priorities* (Ottawa, ON: 2005), Transnational Criminal Activity.

⁴³ Christopher M. Blanchard, Report for Congress: Afghanistan: Narcotics and US. Policy (Washington, DC: 2004), 19.

the border and lead to regional instability.⁴⁴

Weakening the Security of Opiate Users and Their Communities

Afghani opiates and the various drugs derived from it are highly addictive. These addictive properties lead to over consumption and abuse, which in turn enhances the likelihood of drug users dying. With an increasing supply of Afghani opiates, deaths are becoming more common. One telling stat regarding the frequency of death is the fact that Afghani heroin alone is the cause of approximately 75,000 deaths every year.⁴⁵ As well as enhancing the likelihood of death, the use of Afghani heroin enhances the odds that an individual will contract a disease; HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C rates amongst users of Afghani heroin are disproportionately high, as many of these individuals inject the drug with contaminated needles.⁴⁶

Along with the enhanced likelihood of death and disease, users of opiates experience greater than average human insecurity. This occurs because consumers often devote whatever money they have to quelling drug cravings rather than to satisfying basic needs such as hunger and shelter. When opiate consumers run out of money for quelling their drug cravings, they frequently turn to crime. For

⁴⁴ Jean-Christoph Peuch, "Russia: Ingushetia Mourns its Dead Amid Renew Concerns for Regional Stability," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, RFE/RL Inc.*, June 23, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/6/e69d054a-7af3-459a-83ea-e3fdec4bca42.aspx?napage=2>.

⁴⁵ Keep in mind that deaths resulting other narcotics derived from Afghani opiates (i.e. morphine, codeine, opium resin) are not part of the 75,000. United Nations Information Service, *Increased Supply of Afghan Opium Promises Overdoses and Death* (Vienna, Austria: 2004), News Alert.

⁴⁶ John D. Negroponte, *Remarks to the United Nations Security Council* (New York, NY: June 17, 2003). See also Lance L. Smith, *Opening Statement on the Conference to Counter-Narcotics and Regional Stabilization in Central and South Asian States* (Freising, Germany: May 17, 2005).

example, in England, which imports 90% of its heroin from Afghanistan,⁴⁷ an estimated three quarters of heroin addicts partake in criminal activities to fund their habit.⁴⁸ Such drug induced criminal behavior raises the level of insecurity in the community.

Policy Options and Recommendations

Eradication

Eradication is both a proactive and reactive counter-narcotic program that is currently in use in Afghanistan. It works to proactively dissuade farmers from growing illicit crops. The rationale for this proactive approach is as follows: when faced with the prospects of their crops being destroyed, farmers will have greater incentive to abandon the cultivation of opium, and instead choose to grow legal crops. When farmers nonetheless cultivate opium, it seeks to reactively disrupt the drug trade by physically destroying the illicit crops.⁴⁹

Eradication programs are on the whole more successful and widespread in secure regions than they are in insecure regions. Due to the varying levels of security throughout the country, uneven patterns of eradication have emerged.⁵⁰ The effects of this imbalance are notable, as perceptions that the state is giving preferential treatment to certain ethnic and tribal groups have surfaced. Perceptions of this type are undesirable due to their ability to exacerbate pre-existing ethnic divisions that are prominent in the

⁴⁷ Blanchard, *Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, 19.

⁴⁸ BBC News, "Gauging the UK's Drug Use," *BBC News UK Edition*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4229470.stm>, Crime.

⁴⁹ Felbab Brown, *When Counternarcotics Undermines Counterterrorism*, 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

country.⁵¹ Feelings of ill will will also arise because eradication programs destroy livelihoods. Without an income, farmers have a more difficult time satisfying basic needs and paying back loans on schedule. Consequently, some farmers may experience greater impoverishment and debt due to the eradication of their crops.⁵²

Compensatory eradication schemes aim to ease the economic hardships that farmers may endure due to the eradication of their crop. This nuanced approach provides monetary reimbursements to poppy farmers who consent to having their crops eradicated.⁵³ Despite its good intentions, this scheme is undesirable as it inspires popular resentment vis-à-vis the government who runs the program. Resentment arises because compensatory sums of money promised to farmers at times remain undelivered. When compensation does reach the farmers, the financial sums are small one-time payments that require foregoing significant long-term payments.⁵⁴ Thus, compensatory and regular eradication programs are inappropriate, as they have the "potential to feed the insurgency and terrorism by losing the hearts and minds of the people."⁵⁵

Interdiction

Opium interdiction programs are common in present day Afghanistan. The goal of interdiction is to decrease narcotics trafficking by seizing opium, destroying

⁵¹ Ibid., 65.

⁵² Ibid., 64.

⁵³ Andrew North, "The Drugs Threat to Afghanistan," *BBC News UK Edition*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/southasia/3476377.stm>, No Quick Fix.

⁵⁴ Felbab Brown, *When Counternarcotics Undermines Counterterrorism*, 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 67.

processing labs, and arresting high volume traffickers.⁵⁶ If the program is successful, destruction will come upon the drug economy's infrastructure, and imprisonment will come upon its participants. The greater chances of infrastructural damage and jail time will raise the costs of participation in the economy, which will in turn work to dissuade individuals from joining due to fear of imprisonment and financial loss. Consequently, farmers will lose incentive to cultivate the crop, as there will be substantially fewer customers for its product. However, the fact that interdiction programs manage to alienate Afghani warlords provides a counterweight to its perceived virtues.⁵⁷

In order to secure and stabilize Afghanistan, there is a need for local human intelligence. Warlords, who supply this type of intelligence, are often involved in the drug trade. Herein lies the problem, as it is unlikely that warlords will be willing to provide intelligence assistance to the very same forces that are destroying their business.⁵⁸ Given how important it is to secure and stabilize Afghanistan, it is essential not to alienate warlords, and therefore, interdiction is not a viable short-term solution.

Drug Amnesty

Amnesty programs aim to minimize the impact warlords have on the opium economy, and to maximize the impact they have on security operations. Under the framework of such a program, warlords will receive legal pardons for past wrongdoings

⁵⁶ Powell, *Testimony before the United States*.

⁵⁷ Felbab Brown, *When Counternarcotics Undermines Counterterrorism*, 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

in exchange for their future abstention from the opium economy.⁵⁹ With the removal of warlords and their associates from the drug trade, Afghani opiates will have more difficulty reaching consumption markets. Concurrently, farmers will have less incentive to cultivate the crop, as a smaller number of traffickers would be in demand for their product.

The problem with this scheme is that the central government does not have the capacity to reprimand traffickers who are granted amnesty but nonetheless continue to partake in the drug trade. An inability to mete out punitive measures would undermine both the scheme and the government's already shaken credibility in terms of its ability to deal harshly with traffickers.⁶⁰ Political ruin will also result if amnesty programs take place at the same time as eradication programs; implementing the two programs concurrently will ensure that individuals who generate large profits receive judicial pardons, while farmers who earn a subsistence living from the crop will face potential prosecution and destruction of their income.⁶¹ Due to these various drawbacks, amnesty program are undesirable.

Alternative Development Programs

Alternative development (AD) programs aim to reduce drug production by offering economic alternatives to a rural population otherwise dependent on cultivating illegal narcotics.⁶² The scope of programs currently employed in Afghanistan is wide and varied. 'Crop diversification' programs urge farmers to cultivate legal crops such as

⁵⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁶¹ Ibid., 68.

⁶² Venda Felbab Brown, "Drugs and State Building in Afghanistan," *Precise* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 6-7.

wheat, potatoes, or fruits rather than opium.⁶³ ‘Cash for work’ programs offer locals the opportunity to partake in wage work on important and necessary projects.⁶⁴ ‘Microfinance’ programs offer loans to rural Afghans, which in turn allow them to escape the cycle of indebtedness associated with opium-as-credit loans, and as well allow them to start a new business or buy a new type of seed.⁶⁵ These programs are in theory quite efficacious and appropriate for a society trying to transition away from a drug economy. However, programs of this type have to date failed somewhat in their mission in Afghanistan.

Many regions in Afghanistan lack a secure environment, and this insecurity is influential, as it makes it more difficult for some AD programs to succeed. For example, Taliban threats ordering farmers to grow opium have undermined ‘crop substitution’ schemes, while insurgent attacks on road workers have undermined ‘cash for work’ programs.⁶⁶ Economic issues are also influential, as the aid received by AD programs to date is less than what donors initially pledged. When aid does indeed arrive, government and aid agencies that are in charge of the programs oftentimes mismanage it.⁶⁷ Political factors, similar to security and economic factors, negatively affect AD

⁶³ Nikola Krastev, “Afghanistan: UN Drug Agency Promotes ‘Alternative Development’ For Curbing Poppy Cultivation,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Online, RFE/RL Inc.*, March 1, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/301DEFC7-AFB2-46F1-8DDD-1A3103D837B1.html>.

⁶⁴ This work may for example include road repairs, river re-channelling, and irrigation systems repairs. Mark Ward, *Statement before U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs* (Washington, DC: September 11, 2006).

⁶⁵ Felbab Brown, *Drugs and State Building*, 6-7.

⁶⁶ Carlotta Gall, “Afghanistan’s Openly Flourishing Poppy Trade,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2006, 13. See also Agence France Presse, “19 workers killed in Taliban attack in Afghanistan,” *Agence France Presse*, September 22, 2006.

⁶⁷ Reuters, “Afghan turmoil at a Glance,” *Reuters Foundation Alertnet, Reuters Limited*, http://www.alertnet.org/printable.htm?URL=/db/crisisprofiles/AF_REC.htm, Reconstruction and Transparency. See also Jason Motlagh, “Analysis: Afghanistan fights for its Future,” *World Peace Herald*,

programs in Afghanistan. Most notably, the presence of politicians who siphon aid money into their personal coffers is negatively influencing the program.⁶⁸ Given the lack of security, economic means, and political determination in Afghanistan, there is a need to scale back the goals of AD programs in the short-term, as the present goals are too ambitious for the current environment.

State Building

In the absence of effective short-term policies for combating the opium problem in Afghanistan, there is a need to adopt a comprehensive long-term policy focusing on state building.⁶⁹ State building is a time consuming process, with multiple steps. Establishing and maintaining security, rule of law, and due process in the country is the top priority. Large-scale development programs and public awareness campaigns, which depend on security and rule of law, are the next step. The last step involves implementing eradication and interdiction programs. However, these counter-narcotic programs may only take place after the previous steps succeed in their missions. Closer examination of each of these steps will occur in the following sections.

Security, Rule of Law, and Due Process

In modern day Afghanistan, a very lawless culture has arisen, and this culture is one of criminal impunity. The presence of such a culture influences the illegal opium

News World Communications Inc., September 28, 2006, <http://wpherald.com/articles/1480/2/Analysis-Afghanistan-fights-for-its-future/Three-interrelated-challenges.html>.

⁶⁸ Reuters, "Afghan turmoil," Reconstruction and Transparency.

⁶⁹ Mansfield, *Role of Opium*, Conclusion.

economy. For example, individuals increasingly join the lucrative opium economy due to the knowledge that their actions are likely to go unpunished. Other individuals who happily operate outside the economy often end up within it, as coercive elements that are unafraid of legal repercussions force them to join. What is driving these types of actions, and more generally the culture of impunity, is the fact that the central government is unable to assert its sole and sovereign authority in all regions of Afghanistan.

Criminal impunity is rampant in some Afghani regions due to a lack of security. The presence of insecurity is partly the fault of international forces, who have been, and continue to be, somewhat unsuccessful in their mission to secure Afghanistan.⁷⁰ These failures make it tougher for the central government to establish its authority, as its personnel and infrastructure are constantly under threat of attack. Concomitantly, these failures have led to the emergence of ‘shadow governments’ who thrive off the absence of rule of law and due process, and therefore promote actions that undermine the central government’s authority.

Bureaucratic factors as well contribute to the rise of culture of criminal impunity. Afghanistan’s Security Sector Reform (SSR) agenda has not yet established strong, effective, and accountable institutions and law enforcement agencies that can create and maintain security, rule of law, and due process.⁷¹ Reasons for the SSR’s shortcomings include a lack of funding, a poor structural organization, and the presence of deep-rooted

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Afghanistan’s SSR agenda consists of five pillars, each supported by a different donor state: military reform (US); police reform (Germany); the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants (Japan); judicial reform (Italy); and counter-narcotics (UK). Mark Sedra, “Security first: Afghanistan’s security sector reform process,” *The Ploughshares Monitor* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2003): The Five Pillars of Security Sector Reform.

corruption.⁷² In order to rid the country of the culture of criminal impunity, there is a need to strengthen foreign and domestic apparatuses so they can better establish security, rule of law, and due process.

Additional foreign troops, as requested by commanders on the ground,⁷³ should deploy to Afghanistan to help suppress destabilizing forces. As for Afghanistan's security sector, it must become strong, effective, and accountable at a more accelerated pace. To accomplish this, a single party such as the UN, the United States, or Afghanistan should assume control of the SSR agenda in hopes of implementing a more coherent and balanced strategy than is currently in place.⁷⁴ Additional aid to augment the relatively low funding enjoyed by the SSR agenda is as well necessary for eliminating some of the ills plaguing the program.⁷⁵ Moreover, there is a need to abandon the counter-narcotic pillar due to its capacity to alienate vital segments of the population.

With these modifications in place, the security situation will improve, and apparatuses that can maintain security will develop at a more rapid pace. Greater security and stability will enable the state to uphold the rule of law and due process more effectively, and the dominance of the culture of impunity will decrease. As impunity decreases, participants in the opium economy will be more reluctant to participate as the

⁷² Ibid. The Five Pillars of Security Sector Reform.

⁷³ BBC News Online, "Afghan force needs more troops," *BBC News Online*, BBC, BBC, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5322698.stm, Reinforcements.

⁷⁴ Incoherent results arise because different pillars are led by different states, which are working at a different pace, and contribute different amounts of fund. This imbalanced approach works to hinder security in Afghanistan. For example, advances in police reform become undermined because the justice system lags behind and often times does not know how to deal with detainees, and as a result releases them back to the streets. Ali A. Jalali, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Parameters* (Spring 2006): Security Sector Reform.

⁷⁵ Per capita external assistance to Kosovo from 1999-2001 was \$288; to Bosnia from 1996-99, \$326; and to Rwanda in 1994, \$193. In contrast, per capita aid distributed in Afghanistan in 2002 was \$63, and this figure will decline to \$42 by 2006. Sedra, "Security First," Implementing SSR. Additional aid can moderate if not solve many of the problems currently facing the SSR agenda. Better funding means that recruits will receive better training and equipment. Greater funding will as well allow for higher wages, which may in turn entice more recruits to join and dissuade those already in the service not to take bribes.

risks of breaking the law and facing punishment will be greater. Those who do nonetheless choose to participate will encounter legal repercussions at a greater frequency than they do now. The end result will be fewer participants, and with fewer participants, the magnitude and severity of the opium problem in Afghanistan will decrease.

Alternative Development Programs

The perceived failure of AD programs in Afghanistan does not mean that they are inherently flawed. In fact, given the right conditions, programs of this nature have the capacity to succeed as part of a long-term process. Success however, depends on satisfying the right conditions. Firstly, it is of the utmost importance that local and international forces secure and stabilize Afghanistan. Second, donor nations need to deliver on their promises, and hand over all previously pledged aid that has yet to arrive in Afghanistan.⁷⁶ Lastly, it is necessary to strengthen the civil and governmental bodies currently overseeing the program, as these programs are inefficient and lack in determination. To achieve this, there is a need to modify existing bodies or create new bodies such as to rid the program of corruption and mismanagement. These bodies will supervise the programs, and as well muster support for the programs domestically and around the world. If, and when, these conditions are satisfied, alternative development programs can and should proceed on a large-scale.

⁷⁶ Max Boot, "Get Serious About Afghanistan," *The L.A. Times*, October 4, 2006, Opinion.

Licensing Opium

At present, according to the World Health Organization, there is a global shortage of opium-based medicines such as morphine and codeine. The incongruity between the global demand and the global supply is especially notable in the developing world.⁷⁷ Afghanistan has the capacity to bridge this gap between supply and demand, by developing a system of opium licensing to complement other AD programs in the country. Under this system, which has received support both from within Afghanistan and from around the world,⁷⁸ farmers will receive a license to grow opium for conversion into legal medicines.

From an international law viewpoint, this proposal is a viable one for Afghanistan, because the country is a signatory to the three UN treaties regulating drug policy. In accordance with the treaties, Afghanistan may produce opium for medicinal purposes. Afghanistan may also convert the opium into medicine and subsequently export these medicines. In order to cultivate, convert, and export opium and its derivative medicines, all that is required is the establishment of a national agency to oversee the licensing process.⁷⁹ From an agricultural viewpoint, this proposal is as well viable for Afghanistan, as evident by the fact that it projects to produce over 6,1000 tonnes of opium in 2006.⁸⁰ From a security standpoint, Afghanistan is somewhat lacking, as

⁷⁷ Proliferating rates of HIV/AIDS and cancer ensure that the need for pain killing medicines is likely to increase. The Senlis Council, "Memorandum From the Senlis Council," *United Kingdom Parliament*, March 1, 2006, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmdfence/558/558we06.htm>, Introduction.

⁷⁸ Drug War Chronicle, "As Fighting Flares in Southern Afghanistan, Support for Licensed Opium Production Grows," *Drug War Chronicle Newsletter*, [stophedrugwar.org](http://www.stophedrugwar.org), http://www.stophedrugwar.org/chronicle/447/afghan_opium_proposal_gaining_support.

⁷⁹ Senlis Council, *Feasibility Study on Opium Licensing in Afghanistan: For the Productions of Morphine and Other Essential Medicines, Initial Findings*, (Kabul: September 2005), 2-3

⁸⁰ Kim Barker, "Very Bad News on Opium War," *The Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 2006.

destabilizing forces may try to sabotage the program, and thus it is essential to secure regions where this program will take place. With security in place and the licensing system under way, the desirability of the program will become evident, as it will work to undermine the illicit opium economy.⁸¹

The supply of opium diverted to the illegal economy will decrease because farmers will likely join the legal opium economy. Incentive for doing so results from the fact that growing opium legally allows them to operate within the confines of the law while still earning a comparable livelihood.⁸² The supply of operatives in the opium economy may as well decrease, as some may join the workforce in factories that convert opium to medicines. Despite these benefits, the supply of operatives and illicit opium is unlikely to disappear completely.

However, the scale of the entire opium economy will be smaller than it is now, and this is preferable in a number of ways. Instead of 100% of Afghani opium reaching the illegal market, only some opium will end up there.⁸³ The smaller scale of the illegal opium economy will as well enable Afghani authorities to deal with the opium problem more effectively; a smaller illegal drug economy means there are fewer people to incarcerate, fields to eradicate, and processing labs to interdict. Afghani institutions and

⁸¹ For an alternative view on some of the problems associated with this proposal, and why some might deem this proposal as undesirable, please see Vanda Felbab Brown, "Afghanistan and Opium," *The Boston Globe*, December 18, 2005, Editorial/Op-Ed.

⁸² According to the Senlis Council, "the price structure of opium under a licensed agreement compared to that of the current illegal industry would not necessarily create an economic disincentive for farmers to cultivate opium legally." Senlis Council, *Feasibility Study*, 3.

⁸³ Senlis Council, *Feasibility Study on Opium Licensing in Afghanistan: For the Productions of Morphine and Other Essential Medicines, General Executive Summary*, (Kabul: September 2005), 24.

law enforcement agencies will also be more effective due to increased funding generated by taxing the legal opium economy.⁸⁴

Education and Public Awareness

Many Afghans view opium in a positive light due to its economic usefulness. In a bid to curb the opium economy, there is a need to appeal to the population's intellect, and educate them regarding the negative impact of opium. Enhanced knowledge of this sort may deter Afghans from cultivating, trafficking, and consuming the narcotic. One way of enhancing the population's knowledge is by conducting a public awareness campaign. The scope of information encompassed in the public awareness campaign will be broad and comprehensive. It will focus on how opium harms the country's security, its economic growth, and its international reputation. The fact that opium is illegal, injurious, and un-Islamic will as well be a focal point of the campaign.⁸⁵ Government organizations, civil groups, educational institutions, and the media will be responsible for disseminating the campaign's message.⁸⁶

A Public awareness campaign of this sort is not a novel idea, as one is currently in place in Afghanistan. However, there are some flaws with the current campaign. Primarily, there is a problem with hypocrisy: individuals and institutions that publicly educate the masses and condemn the narcotic are often complicit in the drug trade. When this occurs, the thrust of the message loses some of its strength. To avoid this, there is a need to ensure that all parties involved in heightening awareness practice what

⁸⁴ Rosemary righter, "Let Afghan Poppies Bloom," *Times Online, Times Newspapers Ltd.*, September 6, 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1072-1766388,00.html>

⁸⁵ Afghanistan Ministry of counter-Narcotics, *National Drug Control Strategy For Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem* (Kabul: January 2006), 22.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

they preach. One way for making this happen is by establishing rule of law and due process, which will minimize the number of people involved with the drug, including those who are in charge of delivering the message to the masses. Thus, the main difference between this public awareness campaign and the one currently taking place in Afghanistan will be the elimination of hypocrisy amongst those delivering the message.

Counter-narcotic Operations

There is a need to suspend all interdiction and eradication programs, as at present time they are inappropriate strategies for Afghanistan. However, programs of this type should start up again once an appropriate environment manifests. An environment deemed appropriate is one that is marked by security, rule of law, due process, and bountiful alternative livelihood options. The reasoning for why such an environment is integral for the resumption of interdiction and eradication programs is as follows.

As counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts reach successful completion, the importance of warlords as sources of intelligence will diminish. When this occurs, the issue of whether or not interdiction alienates them becomes irrelevant.⁸⁷ The presence of many alternative livelihood options will deprive farmers of their current rationale for growing opium, which focuses on how it is their sole means of earning a living. As a result, crop eradication will become less alienating, and opium fields not licensed by the government should and will face eradication.

⁸⁷ Felbab Brown, *When Counternarcotics Undermines Counterterrorism*, 71.

Conclusion

The illegal opium economy in Afghanistan is not a recent phenomenon. To date, there has been a reliance on traditional approaches to combat the drug problem in the country. This must stop. There are no quick and easy solutions. Instead, there are only long and multi-layered solutions, which need commitment, support, and open-mindedness. The world community must understand this, and act upon it. Otherwise, the opium economy will continue to dominate in Afghanistan, and insecurity will continue to plague much of the international community.