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DETERMINANTS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPIATE ECONOMY IN AFGHANISTAN

Drug production and trafficking, and the related development of criminal groups, are among the most serious problems of the modern world. Issues related to the drug business appear when the institutions and the economic and social systems of the state disintegrate. An example of this is Afghanistan, which has recently become the world's largest producer of opiates. The growing production of opiates has had negative consequences for Afghan society, causing various social problems, and for the international community, strengthening organized criminal groups involved in drug trafficking around the world. The aim of this study is to look for the most important factors causing the rapid increase in opiate cultivation in Afghanistan, and to assess how the Taliban's return to power will affect the drug business. The study was carried out through an analysis of available scientific literature, including statistical studies, as well as various compilation documents.

Keywords: Afghanistan, drug business, opium, heroin, crime, drug addiction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Drug production and trafficking and the associated development of criminal groups are one of the most severe problems of the modern world. According to the World Drugs Report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime about 284 million people representing 5.6% of the world's population used drugs in 2021. Out of those, about 61 million used the so-called hard drugs. Approximately 86% of opiate production on the world market came from Afghanistan. (UNODC WDR, 2022)

Afghanistan, since the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (August 15, 2021), is internationally recognized as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Since the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, Afghanistan has become the center of public attention.

Problems related to the drug business and, as a result, to organized crime, arms trafficking, or human trafficking appear where the institutions and the economic and social system of the state are disintegrating. An example of that is Afghanistan, where there has been a permanent internal and international conflict since the 1970s, contributing to drug cultivation and production growth, feeding various types of rebel groups, and causing

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social degradation. The aim of this study is to look for the most important factors causing the rapid increase in opiate cultivation in Afghanistan and how will the Taliban's return to power affect the drug business. The study was carried out through an analysis of available scientific literature, including statistical studies as well as various compilation documents.

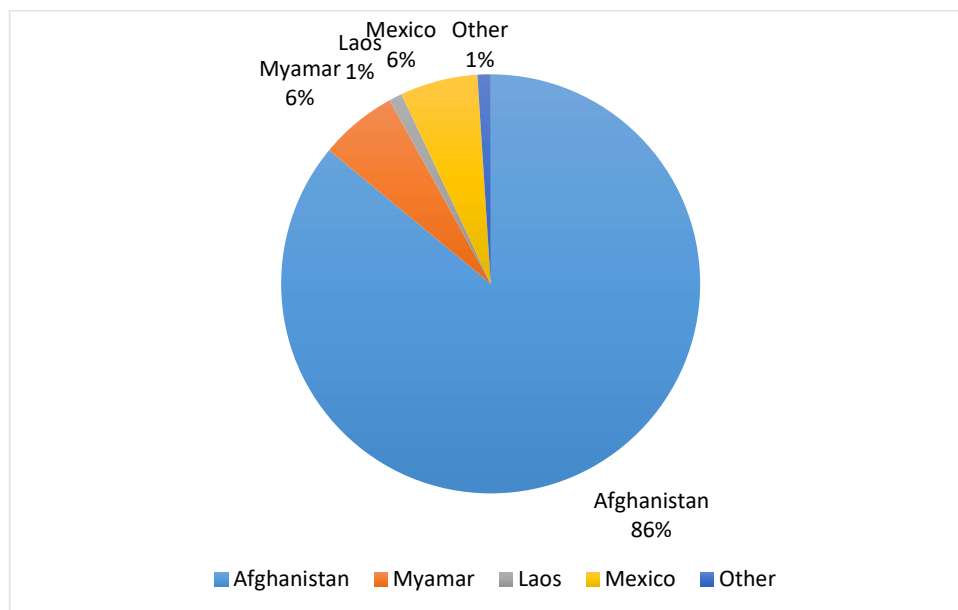


Chart 1. Global opium production

Source: Data from UNODC World Drug Report 2022.

2. THE GENESIS OF THE NARCO-BUSINESS IN AFGHANISTAN

The homeland of poppy cultivation is the Euphrates and Tigris basins. The Sumerians knew how to obtain and use the opium from poppy seeds even around 3000 BC. Opium poppy, the “plant of joy”, was grown in Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia, and ancient Greece (Booth, 1996). The association between drugs and soldiers/warriors has been known since the dawn of time. Narcotics were primarily known as a factor stimulating aggressive behavior in combat, on the one hand reducing pain, on the other increasing the susceptibility to carry out the orders of commanders (Jędrzejko, 2005).

The use of opium poppy for opium production came to Afghanistan with the conquest of this part of the world by Alexander the Great around 329 BC, when the great army, on its way to India, reached the borders of today's Afghanistan and conquered a country where afterwards, the Greek colonists lived next to the natives. They had long known how to obtain opium and its narcotic effects (Gaur Singh, 2006). The introduction of opium, and consequently addiction, by Alexander the Great to this part of the world almost two thousand years later, became a serious problem for Europe and the West. The properties of opium were known to the European colonizers, especially the British, who colonized the Indian subcontinent. Realizing the potential of the opium trade, they took control of most of Bengal's poppy-growing areas, introducing opium to trade with China in the nineteenth

century. Consequently, this led to the Opium Wars between the British Crown, France, and China² (Gaur Singh, 2006).

Historically, Afghanistan was not a classic producer of opiates (opium and processed morphine and heroin) on a large scale. In the eighteenth century, local consumption in the mountainous region of Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan drove farmers to cultivate and produce poppy seeds and opium. At the beginning of the twentieth century, small quantities of opium were made in Herat in western Afghanistan and Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan (Mass, 2020). Afghanistan became the world's largest exporter of opiates, providing cash for the mujahideen in the Afghan-Soviet War in the 1980s. Money from the opioid trade contributed to the mujahideen's budget, much needed for the purchase of modern equipment and training.

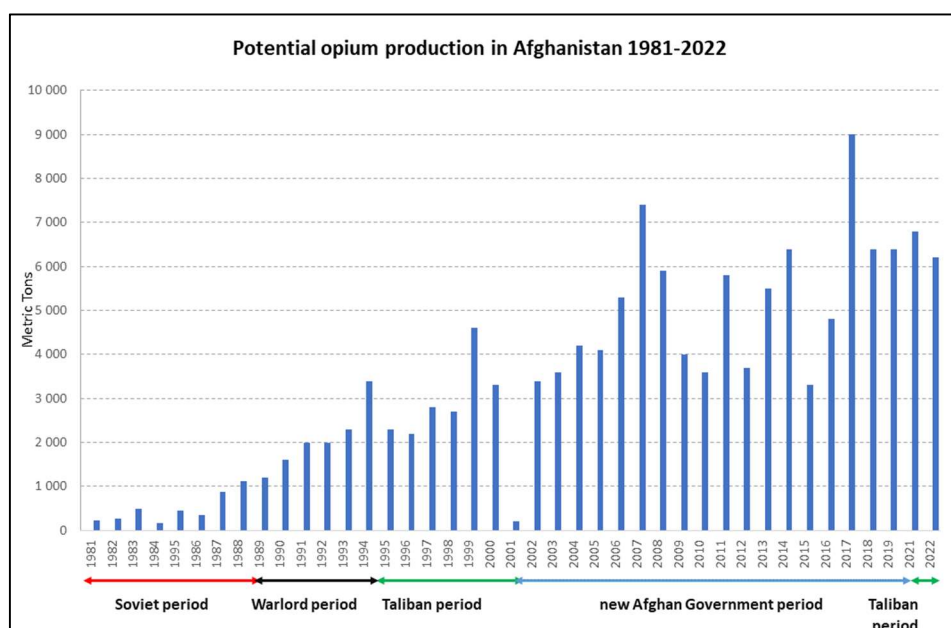


Chart 2. Potential opium production in Afghanistan 1981–2022

Source: Compiled from data in the documents UNODC.

Afghanistan produced approximately 100 tons of opium in 1971, this amount suddenly increased after the start of the anti-Soviet jihad in late 1979. Between 1991 and 1998, Afghanistan produced 2,000–2,800 tons of opium per year. In 1999, production reached 4,600 tons. In 2001, due to the Taliban's ban on opium poppy cultivation, opium production fell to 185 tons. With the fall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, farmers started growing poppies again³ (UNODC, 2003). Afghanistan became the world's number one

² Bengal is a historical region in South Asia, in the eastern part of the Hindustani Plain, on the Bay of Bengal. Currently, the western part of Bengal lies in India, and the eastern part is Bangladesh.

³ Probably the aim of the ban was, on the one hand, to reduce international criticism of the Afghan authorities for exacerbating the drug problem in the world, and on the other, to seek to control all opium production and trade in the state, and thus to obtain higher incomes. Before the ban, the

opium producer in the following years, pushing Myanmar (Burma) to second place. No other country has ever managed to achieve such a monopoly. In 2007, Afghanistan produced 7,400 tons of opiates, representing 93% of the global drug market (Mass, 2020). Afghanistan was able to maintain a high market share for the following years. The efforts made by the authorities had failed to change the upward trend in drug production, peaking in 2017, when Afghanistan produced about 9,000 tons of opium. In 2021, they produced 6,800 tons of opium, accounting for 86% of the global production.

Currently, Afghanistan produces about 6,200 tons of opiates, which accounts for about 80% of the world market. The reduction in production compared to 2021 was caused by a drought in early 2022, causing a sharp decline in opium yields. As per the U.N. research, from this amount of raw opium obtained during harvest, drug producers can attain 350–380 tons of heroin (50–70% purity) for export (UNODC Research Brief, 2022).

3. REASONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPIATE CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN.

What external factors contributed to the rapid growth of opiate cultivation and production in Afghanistan?

Firstly, the countries of the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia (Burma, Laos, Thailand), which in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century constituted the world's largest opium production region, were affected by several factors, causing a reduction in the level of production. These included the droughts often hitting the area and the Thai government's consistent policy of destroying plantations and promoting alternative crops. In the 1970s, the persistence of the United States in attacking and prosecuting the region's most significant drug traffickers and above mentioned actions led to a geographical shift of the opium-growing area from the Golden Triangle to the Golden Crescent - Central Asia (Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan).

Secondly, in 1974, the Turkish government took control of opium production and began licensing opium cultivation for medical purposes, which restricted opium cultivation in Turkey and moved it to Afghanistan.

The third factor came from Iran, which directly impacted Afghanistan. Due to Iran suffering from high production levels and widespread drug addiction, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had tried to, in vain, limit production since 1955. After the overthrow of the Shah in February 1979, the leader of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, achieved an essential partial success in the fight against drug production. Ayatollah Khomeini reduced the total production volume, and the domestic market consumed the remaining stocks almost in full. Since there was no longer a surplus required for heroin exports to the United States and Europe, producers from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border soon filled the supply gap (UNODC, 2003). Ultimately, in the mid-eighties, the production concentrated on the territory of Afghanistan because, the United States forced the military dictator of Pakistan, Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, to limit cultivation in the Pakistani border region. As a result, opium was produced in Afghanistan but processed in Pakistani heroin laboratories before being shipped via transit routes to Europe and the United States. This cross-border cooperation has formed the structural foundation of Afghanistan's war economy (UNODC, 2003).

price of opium was about USD 30 per 1 kg, while after its introduction it reached about USD 700 per 1 kg.

Regarding the internal factors, the problematic mountainous situation of Afghanistan has become a decisive factor in the development of opiate production. A significant role was played here by the hard-to-reach, sun-scorched steep mountain valleys of the Hindu Kush Mountains, covering almost 80% of the country's area with their surface, with peaks reaching over 7000 m. For Afghan farmers living in isolated mountain settlements, the cultivation of opium poppy became a valuable source of income, bringing a tangible profit from the product.

Because of its underdeveloped industrial infrastructure, the limited use of natural resources, and the poor conditions for maintaining agricultural production, Afghanistan and its population cleverly adapted to the new economic needs by transforming their barely surviving farms and small-scale local trade into highly profitable opiate cultivation and marketing. The cultivation and trafficking of drugs created opportunities for local farmers and smugglers to raise their standard of living to levels not seen in the past.

Furthermore, the developed traditional tribal culture involved in the smuggling of many goods legitimized the illicit drug trade and led to the rapid growth of the necessary smuggling networks. The lack of centrally registered farms made it easier for smugglers to fully involve farmers in poppy cultivation, and to support them, in the interests of their tribe members, to switch from their traditional crops. The isolation of many Afghan tribes among various hard-to-reach areas of the Hindu Kush contributed to their position in the social, financial, and political system.

As a result of these factors, Afghanistan developed a comprehensive opiate economy, from poppy seeds, the production of opium and more complex opiates, to their export to neighboring countries in Asia (especially the former Soviet republics), Europe, and the United States. In return, large quantities of weapons flowed into Afghanistan from the former Soviet republics, China, Iran, and Pakistan.

Arms and drug smuggling created unlimited opportunities for corruption in Afghanistan's political institutions. The level of corruption affected all levels of state power, from ordinary office officials at the local level, police officers, and corrections officers to politicians, ministers, judges, and bankers. Corrupt links between the government and the drug business were considered widespread. Corruption was based on personal, religious, and tribal relationships. An example is the ambiguous activity of Hamid Karzai's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was the chairman of the Kandahar provincial council. Coming from an influential Pashtun clan, Popalzai was considered by some to be the most significant drug lord in the province. Despite widespread allegations of involvement in drug trafficking from the opposition and U.S. officials, Ahmed Wali Karzai was never held accountable until he was shot dead by a trusted head of his security on July 12, 2011 (Sachs, 2011). For these reasons, over the two decades of the presence of coalition troops, the fight against drug trafficking became a significant challenge for the Afghan government and the countries involved in the Afghan conflict.

The profits from poppy cultivation became the driving force behind the drug business and the fuel for insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Due to poppy cultivation being the beginning of a process which ends in the production of heroin, this marks Afghanistan's crucial role in the chain of global distribution of illicit opiates.

4. POPPY CULTIVATION – CONDITIONS

Afghanistan have cultivated poppy in most provinces of Afghanistan. The main regions being the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar in the south, Badakhshan in the north, and

Nangarhar in the east. These provinces have had the best farmland, the most experienced poppy growers, and a well-functioning socio-economic system geared in this direction.

By the end of the 2000s, the burden of poppy cultivation had shifted to the southern and southwestern provinces, primarily due to security considerations. This area had been mostly controlled by the Rebels. In 2008, 98% of opiate poppy was grown in the south and southwest provinces (UNODC, 2008). In 2010s, the same factors caused poppy cultivation to be dispersed to other provinces. Currently, 73% of opiate poppy is grown in the southwestern regions (UNODC Research Brief, 2022).

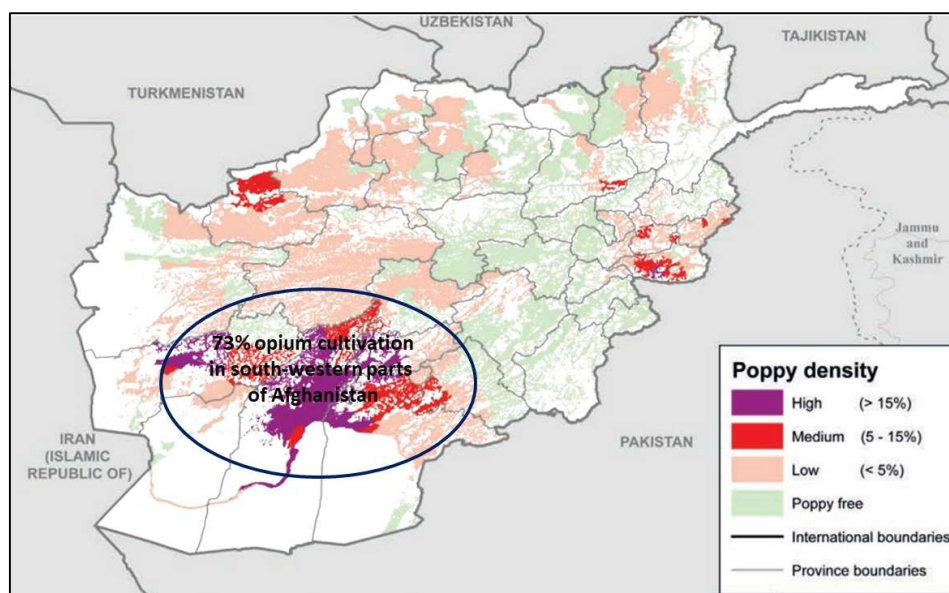


Chart 3. The density of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2022

Source: UNODC, Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan, November 2022.

September and October are the decisive months for the Afghan farmer. During this time, he must decide whether to grow poppies, sow wheat, or plant other plants. It is the most crucial point in the entire cultivation process, and the deciding factor for the annual yield due to the poppy being usually sown before winter and ripening in spring. Therefore, farmers must make their decisions in the fall (Byrd, 2008). The poppy cultivation cycle for most types of species takes about 120 days. Opium poppy – *Papaver somniferum* generally blooms after about 90 days of cultivation and keeps flowers for 2 to 3 weeks. Small spherical bags called poppies emerge from the flowers, and later increase in size, reaching the size of a chicken egg. Only this part of the plant, the poppy, produces opium alkaloids (Wikipedia, n.d.). When the poppy is ripe, the farmer has a limited time to harvest it until the plant begins to wither. Each poppy is cut by hand, requiring specially designed tools to achieve the best results. Fresh milk that flows from the poppy seed is later collected (McCoy, 2009). The limited harvest, lasting 8–12 days, puts the most pressure on the farmer's family and the whole agricultural society (UNODC AOS, 2019). Wage laborers are often hired for this work, which is the most challenging part of poppy cultivation.

Typical laborers are often contracted in advance, and their wages are twice as high as the work at the wheat harvest or on the construction sites. According to the UNDOC report, in 2009 it was possible to earn \$8.7/day from harvesting opium milk, \$4.3/day from the wheat harvest, and \$3.6/day from working on construction sites. Many wage laborers now migrate along the country for the greatest possible wages. In addition, workers are often recruited from neighboring countries or from local religious schools, madrassas, which are closed during the harvest to allow for their help.

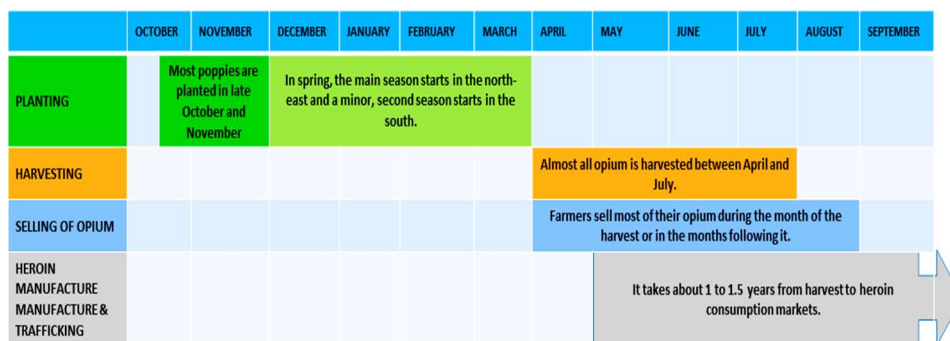


Chart 4. Afghanistan opium poppy calendar

Source: UNODC, Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan, November 2022.

5. OPIATE PRODUCTION

After the opium milk is collected during the harvest, the processing process begins. We distinguish three production phases: moist milk to dried opium, opium to morphine, and morphine to heroin. Opium is usually dried in places where poppy seeds are grown. It is the most straightforward process of extracting water from freshly harvested opium milk. It is generally dried in the sun, or a press is used for this.

Converting opium into morphine and then into heroin requires specific skills and knowledge that only few specialists, called chemists, possess. Drug producers often contract chemists to produce heroin.

The production of morphine and heroin often occurs in laboratories in hidden places of different regions of the country. These laboratories can work as small independent manufacturers, preparing material to order or as part of large, organized cartels with paid managers who direct this activity and the staff formed of specialists like chemists. The number of staff employed in such laboratories may vary. Morphine processing requires more and less skilled workers, while heroin, especially that of a high-quality, requires the most qualified. Several laboratories employ same chemists with the most skill, thus they end up earning the most.

6. DRUG TRAFFICKING IS A KEY INCOME FACTOR FOR THE AFGHAN COMMUNITY

The opioid trade occurs in a network of open bazaars and markets nationwide. The system of open bazaars is the main thread connecting growers, traders, opioid processors, and intermediaries who operate on both the internal and external markets. Traffickers or brokers who operate in bazaars maintain shops or stalls where they sell opium, morphine,

and heroin of various qualities. They usually work independently or may be linked to a larger drug dealer or a baron. In addition to freshly harvested opium and its products, other illegal goods are available in the bazaars, such as chemical precursors required in the processing process or weapons. In addition to selling and buying at bazaars, you can also get financial assistance from intermediaries. Intermediaries, especially in growing regions, have specialized in granting usurious loans, the so-called *salaam*, to farmers for guarantee of receiving the future harvest. When concluding such transactions, an independent *hawala*, a type of a money exchange network, often helps (Maimbo, 2006).

The Hindus invented *hawala* more than a thousand years ago. Later on, Arab merchants traveling with goods along the Silk Road adopted it. Arabs, from then on, no longer had to carry large sums of money with them and expose themselves to robbers. When the years-long conflict in Afghanistan and the imposition of international sanctions by the Taliban government led to the complete collapse of the domestic and international financial system, *hawala* filled this gap in the money system flow.

The total turnover of the global heroin market in 2008 was estimated at \$65 billion. The total income of Afghan opium farmers – \$0.7 billion in 2008 – was minimal by comparison. Between 2002 and 2008, Afghan farmers earned \$6.3 billion, and Afghan drug traffickers more than \$18 billion. Afghan farmers paid 10 percent of their total income, or \$600 million, to the Taliban, warlords, mullahs, and government officials as a tax, or *ushr*. Rebels working with the Taliban received weapons and money from drug traffickers in exchange for their safety⁴ (UNODC, 2009).

7. REBELS AS THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES OF THE NARCO-BUSINESS

The beneficiaries of drug trafficking revenues were united by a complex amalgam of fluid and changing alliances. This mix included various types of warlords, tribal leaders, religious leaders (mullahs), foreign jihadists, mercenaries, and various criminal organizations and rebels, who derive the most significant benefits from the drug business. Most rebels were associated with the Taliban, a fundamentalist movement of radicalized Pashtun peoples, or al-Qaeda (UNODC, 2009). Four rebel groups stood out, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda-linked militants, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami rebels, and the Haqqani network.

The Taliban were the largest and most influential group formed from the remnants of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) led by Mullah Muhammad Omar. This group included not only students at Koranic schools, called the Taliban, but also fighters and commanders mainly of Pashtun origin, in the past fighting against Russians who supported the Taliban movement and a new young generation supporting the fundamental ideology of Islam.

They originated from madrassas operating in Afghan refugee camps scattered across the border area of Pakistan and arrived in southern Afghanistan in 1994. In September 1996, they seized Kabul and proclaimed the creation of the First Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Rashid, 2001) After the overthrow of the Taliban by the international coalition and the Northern Alliance in 2001, many Taliban leaders found refuge among other Pashtuns in Pakistan's border territories. Since then, there has been an increased operational cooperation between the Pakistani Taliban and the fleeing Afghan Taliban. The

⁴ Ushr is a 10% tax sanctioned by Islamic law.

two groups have begun working together, planning, and carrying out attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan (UNODC, 2009).

Much of the funding for the Taliban came from the tax applied to the opioid trade. The Taliban believed that there was a consensus between poppy cultivation, which is religiously forbidden, and the taxation of crops and trade. Following the Taliban, war imperatives justified drug production and trade. Similar flexibility was evident in the criminal activities of other Islamic groups linked to al-Qaeda.

Taliban power collapsed in 2001 with the Allied intervention, but hidden structures were still operating in Afghanistan. Pakistan's border area and militias were reborn in 2021 with an even greater force than before, leading to the collapse of the internationally recognized Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the return to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021.

Al-Qaeda, like the Taliban, has evolved under international pressure by increasing the autonomy of individual terrorist cells that have often appropriated the “brand” of al-Qaeda. Al Qaeda was highly decentralized, as a loosely knit group of individuals based in at least 60 countries. Unlike the more localized Taliban, al-Qaeda was a transnational terrorist network with operational links to like-minded organizations worldwide. Al-Qaeda probably did not play a direct role in the Afghan opioid trade. Beyond ideological considerations, involvement in the drug trade would have increased the visibility of this highly clandestine group. However, extremist groups linked to or ideologically allied with al-Qaeda have been involved in a wide range of illegal activities, including drug trafficking, to fund their activities in areas as diverse as North and South Africa, Southern Europe, and Central Asia. In Afghanistan, al-Qaeda did not “control” territory and probably could not impose taxes on the cultivation or trafficking of drugs. However, its members were well prepared to participate in drug and arms smuggling on the Pakistani border. A joint investigation by the DEA⁵ and FBI in the U.S. in 2001 uncovered a transnational heroin network based in Peshawar and identified money launderers with alleged links to al-Qaeda. Maritime smuggling from Pakistan to Europe via the Gulf States was significant for financing al-Qaeda. In two weeks in December-January 2004, the U.S. Navy intercepted four ships carrying tons of hashish, heroin, and methamphetamine. Al-Qaeda members operated the first ship and had nearly two tons of hashish worth \$8–10 million on board (UNODC, 2009).

Hizb-i Islami (H.I.) had members and influence in many areas of Afghanistan and was an important insurgent group during the conflict in the nineties and was divided into two fractions, each led by a former anti-Soviet mujahideen. The first fraction was led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar⁶ (HiG), and the second by Anwar ul-Haq Mujahid⁷. (HiK). The HiK

⁵ DEA – Drug Enforcement Administration, a U.S. government agency that conducts drug enforcement activities.

⁶ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar – Pashtun, Afghan politician and former mujahideen leader. In 1975, he founded the Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) movement, modeled on the Muslim Brotherhood movement and the Islamist revolution in Iran. During the Afghan-Soviet war, HIG became one of the main beneficiaries of aid from Pakistan and America. As a result of the compromise in post-Soviet Afghanistan, Hekmatyar became Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1993 to 1994 and again briefly in 1996, before the Taliban takeover of Kabul forced him to flee to the Iranian capital, Tehran. He returned to Afghanistan in late 2001 or 2002, and launched attacks against coalition forces, especially in northeastern Afghanistan.

⁷ Anwar ul Haq Mujahid (born 1967 in Nangarhar province) is the eldest son of the late Afghan militant leader Mohammed Yunis Khalis, founder of Hezb-e Islami Khalis. On 22 August 2016,

fraction was assigned to the Taliban in 2003 (UNODC, 2009). However, the Hekmatyar fraction was closer to al-Qaeda than to the Taliban. The group operated in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in the provinces of Kunar, Nuristan, and Laghman, and it benefited from the support and shelter in the neighboring border areas of Pakistan. Hekmatyar also maintained a certain degree of activity in his native Kunduz and the western province of Takhar; he directly confronted the Taliban in some areas of Afghanistan. Competition continued in regions such as Wardak and Logar. This fraction was not as strong in most opium-growing areas of Afghanistan, apart from provinces such as Kunar and Laghman. Given its influence on these provinces, it was assumed that Hekmatyar controlled their opium cultivation. Most of the drug-related financial benefits consisted of informal taxes on crops in border areas and, to a lesser extent, involvement in the production process. According to some experts, Hekmatyar was the only mujahideen who systematically used the profits from opium. Money from drug selling was a basis for the existence of the party and the maintenance of his army. Most of its commanders were involved in selling raw opium, furthermore, Hekmatyar also invested in laboratories in cooperation with Pakistani heroin syndicates. Hekmatyar likely maintained several laboratories in Nangarhar and Badakhshan provinces from which he drew funds for the rebellion (UNODC, 2009). Hekmatyar and his party play a significant role and propose intra-Afghan talks to form an inclusive government to replace the current Taliban interim government.

The Haqqani Network (HQN) was headed by Jalaluddin Haqqani⁸, a mujahideen known for his activities during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The network operated in southeastern Afghanistan (mainly in Khost and Paktya provinces) and was based in neighboring North Waziristan (Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan). Haqqani's network maintained strong ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and established several training camps in North Waziristan. Haqqani's network provided shelter and protection to al-Qaeda and conducted joint operations with group elements. Information from UNAMA suggested that al-Qaeda favored Haqqani over the Taliban as a “subcontractor” for complex and spectacular attacks. In addition to receiving financial support from al-Qaeda, members of Haqqani's network derived funding from cross-border trade, primarily the protection of drug shipments. Haqqani's network had a more limited territory than the Taliban, and its drug tariffs were lower. However, control of an important trade route from Miram Shah (North Waziristan) via Khost, Paktya, on to Logar, and on to Kabul provided them with significant benefits from the flow of goods to and from Pakistan (UNODC, 2009).

one of the Taliban's spokesmen, Zabiullah Mujahid, announced that Anwar ul Haq had pledged allegiance to the Taliban's new emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada.

⁸ Jalaluddin Haqqani, (b.1939) Pashtun, a veteran of the Soviet Afghan war, who later became a minister in the Taliban government. After the fall of the Taliban, Haqqani fled to his base in Waziristan and decided to join the insurgency. Due to his older age, he commanded his forces together with his three sons. One of Sirajuddin Haqqani's sons is the current Afghan interior minister and one of the two deputy commanders of the Taliban's supreme commander, Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzad. Another of the sons, Khalil Haqqani, in August 2021, after the fall of Kabul, became responsible for Kabul's security during the transfer of power, and on September 7, 2021, he was appointed Minister of Refugee Affairs in the restored Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

8. COUNTER-NARCOTICS AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES

The fight against drug trafficking has become a significant challenge not only for the Afghan government but also for the coalition troops conducting a stabilization operation on the territory of Afghanistan for two decades. Over the years of fighting the drug business in Afghanistan, several strategies have been developed to address the drug problem in Afghanistan. These strategies evolved and reflected lessons learned from previous drug efforts. The failures in the fight against the drug business in the initial phase of allied operations in Afghanistan resulted from the small effort of the interim government. The reluctance of the United States to engage in the fight against poppy cultivation also contributed to this. They believed that the priority was to break up the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

For the first time, the Afghan government introduced the National Drug Control Strategy to eliminate the production, consumption, and trade of opium, as recommended by UNODC in 2003. After taking office in 2004, President Karzai declared a “jihad against poppy”, declaring poppy cultivation illegal in Islam. His position was underlined by adopting a “zero tolerance” decree in the fight against drugs in January 2005, which banned the cultivation, production, abuse, and trafficking of drugs (C-MFC, 2012).

In 2005, in response to the growing cultivation of opium in Afghanistan, in coordination with the U.K. and the Afghan government, the United States took a more significant role in Afghan counter-narcotics efforts. The United States has developed its first five-pillar strategy to combat drugs in Afghanistan⁹. The strategy introduced eradication, defined as the “elimination of opium poppy cultivation by destroying illicit opium plants before farmers are able to harvest them”, which had not been a major focus of previous drug policies.

In 2006, the Afghan government issued an updated five-year, eight-pillar strategy, which also incorporated eradication. The Afghan strategy stated that the goal is to “secure a sustainable decrease in cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs with a view to complete and sustainable elimination”. While in early 2002, the United Kingdom assumed “lead nation” responsibility for coordinating international counternarcotics activities, that responsibility shifted to the Afghan government as part of the 2006 Afghan Strategy. Eradication became the core of the drug policy in Afghanistan until 2009¹⁰ (C-MFC, 2012).

In April 2008, at the NATO summit in Bucharest, member states decided on a new approach and to give priority to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. The following four principles were adopted: solid and long-term commitment, strengthening the Afghan authorities and their accountability, a comprehensive approach by the international community taking into account the strengthening of civilian and military efforts, and the development of cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan's neighboring countries, in particular Pakistan (NATO, 2008).

In October 2008, at an informal meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Budapest, it was decided that NATO would increase its military contribution to the fight against drugs. It was agreed that, in agreement with the Afghan government, NATO could influence

⁹ The five pillars include: Alternative Livelihoods, Elimination/Eradiation, Interdiction, Law Enforcement/Justice Reform, Public Information.

¹⁰ The eight pillars include: Public Awareness, International & Regional Cooperation, Alternative Livelihoods, Demand Reduction, Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice, Eradication, and Institution Building.

facilities and adversaries supporting the insurgency in an anti-drug context but only within the framework of a United Nations resolution (BBC, 2008).

The new strategy placed primary focus on interdiction of the nexus between narco-trafficking and the insurgency, but also emphasised agricultural assistance to farmers and comprehensive rural development. The objective of interdiction operations have been to decrease narcotics trafficking and processing by disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking organisations. NATO forces have been given permission to operate directly from the ground and air on drug infrastructure, raids on drug warehouses and laboratories (C-MFC, 2012).

However, direct attacks on drug laboratories have sparked a dispute between NATO and ISAF Command. The dispute concerned the conditions for violence against targets for which there was often no direct evidence that they were actively engaged in armed resistance against the Afghan government or coalition troops. Seemly innocent people, ordinary workers, were often killed during such attacks (C-MFC, 2012).

In 2009, under the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, the U.S. strategy was refined and adapted to the situation at that time. The strategy interrupted the U.S.-led elimination of poppy cultivation, stating that the strategy was "ineffective and prompted farmers to side with the Taliban". Recognizing that eliminating Afghan farmers from poppy cultivation, for whom opium was the primary or often the only source of income, the U.S. military distanced itself from destroying poppy crops and financially supported provincial governors who initiated the eradication using Afghan forces. The elimination was still conducted by Afghan governors at the regional level and carried out by the Afghan National Police.

Alternative crops were an essential pillar of the drug strategy. As an example, the activities of Gulab Mangal, the governor of Helmand province, can be cited on his initiative to create the Food Zone Program (Ghilzai, Qazi, 2016). The primary assumption of this program was the free distribution of wheat seeds, fertilizers for cultivation, and training aimed at teaching farmers about this crop. This program was financed mainly by the Americans and the British.

The alternative wheat cultivation program has been implemented on many farms, reducing poppy cultivation in Helmand province to more than thirty percent in 2009. However, some critics claimed that it had caused an increase in crops in the neighboring provinces (C-MFC, 2012).

Despite the Afghan government's substantial financial outlays and long-term efforts supported by coalition partners, the effects of drug policy measures have been poor. In the perspective of subsequent years, opium cultivation increased, reaching the highest level of 123,000 ha in 2009 to 328,000 ha in 2017, bringing adverse social effects to Afghanistan (UNODC AOS, 2019).

9. DRUG ADDICTION AMONG THE AFGHAN COMMUNITY

Afghanistan is not only the number one producer of opium and heroin globally, but it has also become a significant consumer of the drugs it produces. The growing problem of addiction among Afghan citizens is the result of three decades of wars, growing quantities of drug cultivation, and consequently, their low price and universal and unlimited availability, and on the other hand, limited access to medical care. The vast scale of addiction in Afghanistan brings various problems: social and health, increased crime, the

development of prostitution, and the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases. Drug addiction affects the individual and his own family and profoundly impacts society.

According to a 2009 UNODC study, there were 920,000 drug users in Afghanistan, of whom 120,000 were women (UNODC Survey, 2009). By contrast, in 2015, estimates were already in the range of 1.9 million to 2.4 million adult drug users, equivalent to 12.6% of the adult population, more than double the global rate of drug use of 5.2% that year (Ahmad Alaie, 2017).

As highlighted in a 2014 UNODC study, drug addiction was the primary source of domestic violence. More than half of the family members interviewed said they had been punched or struck by a drug-using relative during a confrontation over drug use. In many cases, addicts exhibited violence caused by the effects of drugs on the nervous system, causing mental disorders.

Women have become the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the Afghan community because the dependence on their husbands and sons primarily affects them as wives and mothers. When a man in the family becomes an addict, the family loses its breadwinner and primary caregiver, while the family foundation would gradually weaken. The number of children addicted to drugs continues to increase, and the impact of narcotics on them is devastating, especially in their education. Over a third of the children interviewed said they had been forced to leave school due to a family member's drug use. According to the 2014 UNODC report, more than 30% of those surveyed mentioned that children dropped out of school because of their parent's addiction (UNODC, 2014). The future of many children is threatened and destroyed because of their parents' narcotics dependence.

Drug use has a negative impact on the health of individuals and health of the society as a whole. Poverty, unemployment, peer encouragement, and easy drug access are the main factors of addiction. Drug addiction in Afghanistan is growing dangerously, and urgently needs a proper solution to the problem (Ahmad Alaie, 2017).

10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Drug production and trafficking and the related development of international criminal groups are one of the most severe problems of the modern world. Problems related to the drug business, and as a result of organized crime, arms trafficking, or human trafficking, appear where the institutions and the economic and social system of the state are disintegrating. Afghanistan has recently become the largest producer of opiates in the world.

The functioning of the opioid economy in Afghanistan has resulted in the systematic destabilization of state security, allowing the use of funds from drug cultivation, production, and trafficking for insurgent and terrorist activities.

The growing production of opiates in Afghanistan has produced adverse effects on the Afghan society, which has become consumers of the drugs it makes. The output of opiates has caused various social and health problems, an increase in crime, the development of prostitution, the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases but also on the international community by strengthening organized criminal groups involved in drug trafficking around the world. Drug addiction has begun to affect the individual and their family and profoundly impacted society.

Analyzing the problems related to the Taliban's return to power, it is difficult to clearly state in which direction the drug business in Afghanistan will go. Given the difficult

situation caused by the suspension of foreign aid, the economy has collapsed, and many Afghans have gone into famine. Such a situation may consequently lead to a humanitarian catastrophe, a migration crisis, and the collapse of the state.

The Taliban can compensate for the lack of money and foreign aid with funds from illegal sources, including the expansion of opium production. In this case, there will be a political reduction in pressure on the control of crops, production, and trafficking of drugs, which will lead to a drastic or gradual increase in opium production. According to the UNDOC 2022 report, since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, opium cultivation has increased by 32%, or 56,000 hectares, compared to the previous year, making it the third-largest opium growing area in 2022 since the monitoring began. Increased levels of opium cultivation and production will increase the opioid trade and related criminal activities and an increasing number of users and overdose deaths.

As a result of the Taliban's ban on opium poppy cultivation in April 2022, opium prices have risen, resulting in farmers' income from opium sales tripling from \$425 million in 2021 to \$1.4 billion in 2022, equivalent to 29% of the value of the agricultural sector in 2021 (UNODC Research Brief, 2022). The 2022 ban on poppy cultivation could significantly reduce production, as it did in Afghanistan in 2000 under pressure from the world opinion. The reduced opium production has resulted in a drastic increase in opium prices in Afghanistan and heroin prices in Western Europe and the United States. Possible consequences of this move include a reduction in opium production for opium-supplied countries and heroin, resulting in a decline in use, a reduction in the number of new users and opioid deaths, and a reduction in opioid-related crime. It is also possible that users will replace heroin or opium with other similar substances.

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