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Drug production in Afghanistan is a problem that for the moment traces directly to the European citizens’ demand for heroin. Opium cultivation and production have a huge role in the Afghan economy, but the magnitude of its trade goes beyond Afghanistan as more than 80% of the export value reaches the drug trafficking networks. Opium and opiates’ traffickers follow three major routes from Afghanistan to Western Europe, among which the route through Pakistan is really a favoured option. In such an economy, there are actors at the village level, traffickers at regional level, and transnational smuggling enterprises, all working in a pattern of corruption to evade regulatory mechanisms. There are security implications for the western countries’ interests that wish for a stable Afghanistan in a stabilized region. The drug trade across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is not only challenging state control but it is also reinforcing linkages between drug traffickers, criminal groups, and insurgents. Traffickers and insurgents do not necessarily share the same aims, but sometimes it is difficult to draw a clear line of division between them. The ways and means that such networks use to finance insurgency and terrorism in the region through the opiates’ trade require attention and precise strategies to fight them.

Eventually, the drug trafficking is a world financial problem. Reducing the drug demand from the markets and eradicating the opiates’ production, as well as disrupting the link between them, require equal attention, and none of them can be underestimated or postponed. President Obama’s counternarcotics policy emphasizes the importance of interdiction and alternative development, and eliminates any U.S. role in eradication efforts. It is the reduction of the belligerent groups’ strength that comes first. Nevertheless, the new strategy also assures the necessary basis for substantial reductions in the size and impacts of the illicit economy in Afghanistan.

However, without coordinated mechanisms to fight regional traffickers, the local interdiction efforts could result in unintended consequences of raising the retail price of illegal drugs. Efforts to limit the insurgents’ funds must include measures against money laundering that focus on the global. It is sensible to look forward to having the US and EU in a complementary role to fight the wide and fragmented drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Europe, in which transnational police operations can parallel and gradually take over the current military operations in Afghanistan.
1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007 Afghanistan had reached the peak of opiates production, becoming virtually the world's sole producer of opium. However, over the last two years that trend has changed. “The bottom is starting to fall out of the Afghan opium market. (…)” writes\(^1\) Antonio Maria Costa, the Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. And, he adds: “(…) Afghan drugs still have catastrophic consequences. (…)”. The number of people who used opiates at least once in 2007 was nearly 20 million at the global level, of whom more than half are thought to live in Asia. But on the whole, drug production in Afghanistan is a problem that for the moment traces directly to the European citizens’ demand for heroin. Actually, the European drug market is in broad terms interested in heroine (0.7%), cocaine (0.8%), cannabis (5.4%), and amphetamine-type stimulants (0.6%)\(^2\). If so, why is the opium derivatives market of such huge concern in Europe? Europe has the largest opiates’ market in economic terms. It gets 80-90% of its heroin from Afghanistan. The estimated number of Europeans who used opiates at least once in 2007 was nearly 4 million, and although heroine use appears to be stable in many Western European countries, it is in Eastern Europe where increases have been reported. Moreover, opiates remain the world’s main problem drug in terms of treatment\(^3\).

In 2004, President Bush’s Administration said\(^4\) that the strict relation, between opium production in Afghanistan and European citizens’ demand for heroin, placed on Europe the obligation to provide the kind of massive help to the Afghans that the U.S. had extended to Colombia. And again, a bit later Secretary Rumsfeld spoke of the Afghan drug issue as pertaining only to the Europeans\(^5\). It is evident, in fact, in every UNODC yearly report that almost none of Afghan opiates reach the US, but it is estimated that opiates’ abuse kills more than ten thousand people a year in NATO countries, which is more than five times the NATO troop losses from conflict in Afghanistan over the last eight years.

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\(^1\) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009, Vienna, December 2009.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
The European Union and its countries are, indeed, called to a deeper attention to Afghan opiates’ trafficking, to protect their citizens, and to contribute to stabilise Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

In fact, Afghanistan and its neighbours have increasingly got a rise in opium and opiates’ users. There, serious health consequences to drug abusers have been progressively reported. In effect, likewise to the western countries, the impact of addiction and HIV/AIDS on families and communities is devastating, but differently from the developed countries, because the amount of health care is limited due to the scarce availability of drug treatment centres. Moreover, enormous efforts are carried out by under-resourced law enforcement officers who lose their lives working in a context of long and unpatrolled borders, while facing corruption and organized crime\(^6\). Actually, that is the point: the organized crime, traffickers, and insurgents, all operating by and for the drug trade, are potentially capable of undermining the stability in the region and endangering people everywhere. As such, the Afghan drug trade poses a threat to global security.

The emotional but obvious question that comes to common people’s mind is: why not bomb all the poppy fields with napalm? Why not spray pesticide all over the poppy field?

Such eradication is not the solution, because it would not solve the problem by itself, and it has been proved that used in isolation it worsens the situation, driving people to embrace the insurgency.

Moreover, those who lead the growing opium industry are firmly against any approach that would mean having their lucrative businesses destroyed. Their point of view is that Afghans produce opium and heroin because there is an avid demand for it. This argument leads to the everlasting and often futile exchange of accusations on who is responsible for the status quo: the users or the producers?

It is a matter of fact that many of the counternarcotics policies abroad have been built on the idea that the eradication of poppy fields could work soon and effectively. However, in Afghanistan, eradication is showing itself as a counterproductive policy when used alone. People are having their livelihoods destroyed by governments and they also need protection from the traffickers. Unintentionally, such a policy helps the insurgency.

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\(^6\) UNODC, *op cit.*
Many belligerent groups have exploited illicit economies, such as the illicit drug trade. Therefore, governments have more and more relied on the suppression of the drug trade as a means to defeating terrorists and insurgents. But, traffickers and insurgents do not necessarily share the same aims, even in the case of the Afghan border areas, where it is difficult to draw a clear line of division between them.

The aim of this paper is to articulate deeply on drug trafficking and its link with both the producers and users. It is interesting to see what effect there would be on the drug markets if the interdiction policies were aimed primarily at the drug trafficking. Also, it is essential to understand whether the effects of such a policy would strike the Afghanistan economy and its stability irremediably, or rather would it be instrumental for its gradual diversion towards an entirely legal economy, without striking directly the farmers’ income as the first option.

In the first part, the paper will assess the cultivation and production status quo and underline the range of the illegal economy. Then in the second part, it will analyse the nexus between criminal groups, traffickers, and insurgents in Afghan drug trafficking. In the third part, it outlines the old and new strategies to face the security issues and the illegal economy coming from drug trafficking, and to conclude with some comments on the implementations of those strategies and the relative challenges involved.
2. THE OPIUM DILEMMA: CURRENT ACTORS IN THE NARCOTICS ECONOMY IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

a. Opium cultivation and production: the role of opium in the Afghan economy.

The geography and the history of this country are summarized in its natural propensity to disunity. Over the centuries, this division has resulted in ethnic and regional differences that contribute to the lack of the western concept of universal civil administration. Afghan borders are the most porous in the region: there is no geographical or cultural basis to the borders that group those disparate tribes together, and supposedly divide the country from Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan.

Afghanistan is also among the poorest countries on the globe. Its GDP in 2009 is estimated to be about 13 billion US$, with licit GDP of 10.7 billion US$. Most of its inhabitants manage to survive on less than two dollars a day. In 2008 the average annual per capita GDP was estimated to be about $429. Taking poverty and other social indicators together, in 2004 Afghanistan ranked 173rd out of 178 countries on the UN Human Development Index. In 2009, despite billions of dollars of aid over the past eight years, Afghanistan has slipped down the latest UN human development index which ranks it 181 out of 182 countries, with only Niger lower. In Afghanistan the channels of commerce still need to be restored, communications facilities remain rudimentary, and the rule of law is still critical, above all outside Kabul. These three aspects are essential to revive the Afghanistan economy. However, a significant obstacle for the development of the economy is its human capital deficit; in fact, 44.5% of Afghans are under eighteen years of age and the adults have very little opportunity for employment as they constitute a low-skilled national labour force.

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8 *Idem.*
9 UNODC, *op cit.*
11 Robert I. Rotberg, *idem.*
12 *Idem.*
14 Robert I. Rotberg, *idem.*
Inside Afghanistan, opium constitutes a significant factor in the country’s extensive levels of corruption. The drug-trade always corrodes a country’s moral fibre and distorts its economy. The illicit GDP in 2009 is estimated to be about 2.8 billion US$ that is equivalent to about a quarter of the licit Afghan GDP for the same year. The net export value of opiates amounted to US$ 2.3 billion that is equivalent to 21% of the Afghan GDP15.

Opium cultivation is going down, according to the most recent survey16. In 2009 the area under opium cultivation in Afghanistan was 123,000 hectares (ha), with a decrease of 22% compared to that in 2008 (157,000 ha). Most opium cultivation was concentrated in just seven provinces, four in the Southern region and three in the Western region, which are subjugated by insurgency and organized criminal networks. This, in terms of security, reflects the deep divide between the unruly South-West and relatively stable North of the country, and confirms the link between insecurity and opium cultivation.

Opium production is going down as well17, but despite the substantial decline in opium cultivation, production has dropped less considerably; it was 6,900 metric tons (mt) in 2009, going down only 10% from 2008, equivalent to 800 metric tons. Among the main reasons, the unusually high profit was due to both favourable weather conditions and the improvement of some infrastructures, without excluding the reality of a constantly increasing experience that lead the Afghan producers to extract more opium per bulb.

In the same seven provinces where the cultivation is dense, there is the strongest concentration of opium production. Here the income per hectare is relatively higher than in the rest of the country, confirming once again that there is a strict link between production of opium and lack of security.

However, in 2009 opium farmers saw their gross income per hectare reduced to $3,562/ha from $4,662/ha in 2008. General farm-entry prices in Afghanistan have fallen by a third in the past year, that is from $95/kg to $64/kg for the dry opium and from $70/kg to $48/kg for the fresh sort, reducing the opium values in Afghanistan to the levels of late 1990s, when the Taliban were in power and the opium crop was half the size of today. It is thought that over supply at the front

15 UNODC, *op cit.*
and lower market access, above all in Europe, are the main causes that are pushing opium prices down. Therefore, in 2009 the gross income for farmers who cultivated opium is estimated at US$ 438 million that is a decrease from 2008 when farm-entry income for opium was roughly US$ 730 million.

Another important indication that the drug industry is becoming less attractive is the decrease in the number of actors involved in opium cultivation, in terms of both numbers of household, that in 2009 was 245,200 against 366,500 the year before, and number of workers, that in 2009 was 1.6 million, 800,000 fewer than in 2008.

Do all these factors mean that market forces are causing increasing pressure and anxiety about opium cultivation and production? Are they to be related to the eradication policy?

b. The impact of Afghan drug trade on economy and society.

The opium flows out of Afghanistan in all directions; it is processed within the areas next to Afghanistan and follows different routes before arriving at the final markets, which are without any doubt, most profitable for the traffickers. Western Europe in particular, although it is reported as a stable market, remains the most lucrative target, where Afghan heroin and opium costs go on being economical in many cities. Enlarged consumption levels have been observed in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, which once had the role of transit countries in the trafficking of heroin, and now are becoming more and more efficient markets. In Russia the Afghan drug markets have also grown. Moreover, the Asian opiates markets are larger than those in Europe. India, for example, has got the highest rate of opiates use in the region.

The result is a huge illicit drugs industry, increasingly capable of making profit and adapting to the market demand whose wholesale and distribution networks are becoming stronger than ever as they are able to squeeze the growers in Afghanistan and manage their exports on a huge global scale.

However, the drug trade from Afghanistan has significant impacts above all on the region’s drug economy and stability. In fact, going upstream of the opiates flow,

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18 UNODC, op cit.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Robert I. Rotberg, op cit.
the transit countries closer to Afghanistan have been reported increasingly affected by the global demand in opiates. The latter, combined with external pressure and the obstacles the traffickers have to overcome, has also led to the diversification of the routes creating new local customers for the drugs they transport\textsuperscript{22}. The diversification gives the traffickers both protection against counter-trafficking measures and the opportunity to open new and greater markets. Consequently, these bordering Afghanistan areas\textsuperscript{23} are becoming at the same time more and more transit, processing, and customer countries of Afghan opiates. Drug abuse among people is much more concentrated along the principal trade routes close to Afghanistan. Here, finally, some millions of Afghans are either directly or indirectly related to the Afghan drug economy. They profit from the growth, gathering, processing, transporting, and selling of raw and processed opium\textsuperscript{24}. And, as Afghanistan has currently doubled the production of opium compared to what is consumed worldwide, experts fear that some of the oversupply is being consumed locally and regionally, with serious long-term health, economic, and social consequences\textsuperscript{25}.

But, what would be the grey markets for drugs with a more effective targeting of the issues that concern the users? It is difficult to say as they are specific for each country. Any anti drugs campaign primarily has to be focused on people, their nearest interests and the immediate consequences of their behaviours. It is equally critical to address the drug demand through prevention and treatment, as this requires huge investment and efforts. Legalization of drugs is not the solution because the consequences for individuals and for communities with widespread addictions are absolutely devastating.

Eventually, without directly challenging the drug traffickers, for each market that disappears many others would be opened both along the operating routes and the new ones\textsuperscript{26}.

\textsuperscript{22} Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, “Narco - Trafficking in Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Areas and Implications for Security”, \textit{The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), Special Report n.20}, USA, December 2009.
\textsuperscript{23} UNODC, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}
c. Drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan.

According to UNODC, opium and opiates traffickers follow three major routes from Afghanistan to Western Europe and other minor destinations. They comprise southern routes via Pakistan, western routes throughout Iran, and northern routes through Central Asia.

Following the western routes, the drug passes through Iran, Turkey, and then it follows the Balkan route to get into Europe. It is estimated that one third of Afghan opium passes through this route. Following the northern routes, from Turkmenistan it goes to Iran where either it can follow the Turkey-Balkan-Europe route or it crosses the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, on to Georgia, then across the Black Sea, where it can go to Europe or to Russia. To this regard, Chechnya, North Ossetia, and Ingushetia are also supposed to have turned up as trafficking countries. From Uzbekistan drug trafficking goes to Kazakhstan, and eventually to Russia. These routes have become increasingly important and are absorbing a relevant part of the Afghan drug trade.

However, the southern routes have currently the most important role in the Afghan drug trade. After the drugs cross the Afghan-Pakistan border many traffickers travel via Iran to Turkey and Western Europe. Actually, Pakistan is where traffickers can have a diversification of their routes either travelling by ship or by air to destinations in the Gulf States, in China, in Malaysia, and in India. Anyway, the trafficking of opium from Afghanistan has been devastating for many of the neighbouring countries. Its borders with Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China, are often blurry and porous to movements of goods and people; by and large, they are all crossed by opium and opiates traffickers. In fact, every Afghanistan bordering country has seized opiates, and each of them has to face increasingly the spread of both drug addiction among local people and drug-related diseases.

Finally, going upstream of the opiates flow, let us see the routes within Afghanistan. Here, according to UNODC, opiates trafficking routes to several regions were reported as being lucrative. Among the routes leading out of Afghanistan the most risky is that with the destination of Iran. On the contrary,

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27 UNODC, *op cit.*
28 Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, *op cit.*
29 UNODC, *op cit.*
routes to Pakistan were reported as lucrative more frequently than other routes. Trafficking to Central Asia is associated with higher risks but it is a profitable business. Internal routes with the destination of China come into view as risky and not very lucrative. Therefore, assuming that traffickers would prefer a lucrative route which carries low risk, trafficking to Pakistan would be the ideal choice.\(^30\)

d. Key actors, groups, and networks in the local and regional drug trade.

The current political economy of the opium trade is derived from the war economy during the Soviet occupation and later during the Taliban regime. The Western financial and military inflows to sustain the mujahedeen set the base for production, processing, and trafficking of opium by warlords who in turn sustained the insurgency. Later on, a political coalition between the Taliban and the merchant class emerged over the chaos of warlord rule, and the Taliban established their rule over Afghanistan, but they also strengthened the opium economy, by imposing taxes on its production, transportation, and trade.\(^31\) From the fall of the Taliban up to now, the coercion networks, built during the warlords’ period and sustained by the Taliban, have been kept in place letting the power holders benefit from drug profits and generate political influence.\(^32\)

Nowadays, there are actors at the village level, traffickers at regional level, and transnational smuggling enterprises.\(^33\)

At the village level, there are farmers, rural households, and small opium traders that profit from this illicit livelihood, who in turn involve the overall economy, from the trade of livestock to the increase in restaurants and the growth in construction. By escalating the chain of processing and selling, the drug trade involves a string of other actors, such as smallholders, village chiefs, and local “protectors”. Many farmers may grow opium to avoid poverty, but criminals, insurgents and corrupt officials surely engage in its trade in the general search for power and prosperity by any means. The environment where the opium economy grows is highly insecure and characterized by weak governmental control.

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30 UNODC, *op cit.*
31 Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, *op cit.*
Therefore, complex links develop among the endemic phenomenon of corruption, farmers, local power holders, state officials, and insurgents. There is evidence that in some districts farmers are coerced not to cultivate opium poppy or to eradicate the poppy crop, whilst somewhere else the local power holders use their influence to protect opium crops to gain much more authority and political weight.\(^\text{34}\)

It is estimated\(^\text{35}\) that in 2009 less than 20% of the enormous profits from opium trade went to farmers, as the farm gate value in 2009 was a mere US$ 0.4 billion. More importantly, its net export value was about US$ 2.3 billion and by far the largest proportion of the revenue was made at the trafficking level.

As such, the opium economy involves regional traffickers, as the essential part of the drug industry in Afghanistan, that combine the relatively little income of the actors, at local level, with the much higher one of important powerbrokers at regional level. Some of those strongmen have links with provincial and national government in a pattern of corruption to evade regulatory mechanisms.\(^\text{36}\)

However, the corruption at state level is not the only aspect of the political economy of the drug trade. There is also a vicious link between the opium economy and the insurgents. Criminal groups, drug traffickers, and insurgents operate in a lawless and insecure environment, where the dividing lines between them are often unclear, especially in the border areas. Due to the high porosity of the Afghan border areas, ethnic linkages between Pashtun, Baluch, Tajik, and Uzbek Afghans and their counterparts in Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia are the fundamental basis for organizing networks to deliver Afghan opiates to regional markets.\(^\text{37}\)

e. Opium economy impact on security.

Yet, who are these traffickers? What are their links with terrorist organizations and the insurgency? Are there drug cartels? To answer these questions it is necessary to see who leads the drug trafficking within Afghanistan, in the transit areas, and where the drugs are sold.

Actually, the international drug trafficking, from Afghanistan to the final destinations, seems to be very fragmented. It includes many actors and

\(^{34}\) Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, *op cit.*

\(^{35}\) UNODC, *op cit.*

\(^{36}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{37}\) Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, *op cit.*
organizations, such as Turkish and Kurdish drug organizations, the Russian mafia, the Chinese Triads, and Balkan smuggling groups; all of them have both a portion of trade in their territories and a significant role in the drug trade with organized crime groups in Western and Eastern Europe\textsuperscript{38}. The Afghans do not appear to be major traffickers, but just major traders, and by and large in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries there is no evidence of strong drug cartels in the way they exist in Colombia or in other parts of the world. Instead, here many organizations appear to rely on drug trafficking and most of them are bound together by family ties and ethnicity\textsuperscript{39}. More recently, however, growing evidence, from tougher counter-narcotics and improved intelligence, shows that some anti-government elements in Afghanistan are turning into drug-cartels. If so, it is not a surprise. Such development has happened elsewhere as a natural consequence of continuous adaptation to both the dynamics of the illicit trade and environmental changes\textsuperscript{40}. This development may have a huge impact on the stability of Afghanistan and clearly affects the whole region.

As said before, by and large all around the Afghan border areas the lines and the roles between insurgents, traffickers, and criminal groups, are nearly indistinguishable. That is particularly true in the South, where the irreconcilable Taliban and terrorist groups belonging to al Qaeda are allegedly tied to crime along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border\textsuperscript{41}. There, major drug traffickers pay millions of dollars directly to the Taliban leadership to earn influence, or they sustain medical expenses and provide food and means to help the fighters\textsuperscript{42}. The Taliban insurgents provide protection for opium farmers and tax their profits, above all in the southern provinces of Afghanistan. The payment from farmers and producers can happen also in the form of raw or partially refined opium. The increasing evidence of mobile laboratories in the border areas is a further indicator of their need to get stronger direct control and more lucrative bargaining from the production and trafficking of opium. There are also clear interests beyond

\textsuperscript{38} Wanda Felba-Brown, “The drug economy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and military conflict in the region”, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{39} Robert I. Rotberg, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{40} UNODC, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{41} Louise I. Shelley, and Nazia Hussain, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}
Afghanistan’s borders where many of its neighbours either process opium or benefit from the trafficking or both\textsuperscript{43}.

In short, the impact that the opium economy in this region has on stability and conflict is huge, as it has direct implications on security in Afghanistan, in the neighbouring countries, and in the world. Recent police investigations have discovered that Taliban attacks planned against government officials, police, and offices of intelligence agencies, had been backed through profits resulted from heroin trade led by transnational networks to China, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates\textsuperscript{44}.

\textsuperscript{43} Robert I. Rotberg, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}
3. DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM AFGHANISTAN: THE DYNAMICS AND THE ISSUES.

a. Drug trafficking and international financing.

To understand the global drug trade from Afghanistan, it is useful to picture it as a series of concentric circles. The epicentre is Afghanistan, where opium poppy cultivation takes place and most of drug trade is in opium. The innermost ring is related to opium processing and opium derivatives production: it includes primarily Pakistan and Iran, where production of opiates is mainly, but not exclusively, located. The second concentric ring considers the transit-route countries, such as Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Central Asia, through which most of opium, morphine, and heroine are smuggled. The third concentric ring includes the market areas for heroine and morphine, such as Europe and Russia. Moving the other way around along the opiates’ smuggling paths, tons of precursor chemicals, most importantly acetic anhydride, are increasingly brought into Afghanistan every year. As a result, Afghanistan is becoming a major centre for heroin and morphine production. The evidence is that in this country there is a considerable rise in number of laboratories to process opium into heroin, which traditionally took place in Afghanistan's border areas.

In such a scheme, the network of the Afghan drug trade has developed into a drug-terrorism nexus which consists of three main levels: within Afghanistan, it is characterized by the linkages among warlords, insurgents, and corrupt officials;

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46 UNODC, op cit.
- at the regional level, it considers the linkages among transnational terrorist groups and drug cartels coordinating activities;
- at the global level, it links drug cartels and money laundering\textsuperscript{47}.

In different ways, but aimed at the same result, which is to profit from the drug trade, insurgents and terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, transnational terrorist entities (such as the Taliban, al Qaeda, etc.), and transnational drug and crime syndicates also deal with supporting activities, such as protection, price control, and distribution\textsuperscript{48}. But, at any of these levels, the key-problem is the introduction of money, derived from criminal activities, into the financial system. Then, a cascade of related activities, from cash handling, to funds transfer and manipulation, and to investments in other assets, requires a deep knowledge of world banking, anonymity, and minimal documentation. Therefore, money laundering schemes become essential to rule the flow of illegal profits collected through the drug trade across countries and regions. In short, the money laundering is aimed at closing the circle of the illicit drug trade.

Due to increasing globalization, these linkages are very difficult to track and overcome\textsuperscript{49}, because of the prevalent use of world banking new techniques and of the ‘hawala system’ (an informal funds transfer system\textsuperscript{50}). The key-components of the latter are trust and the extensive use of connections, such as family relationships or regional affiliations. It is through the conversion of drug money into legal money that the Taliban insurgents and terrorists are trying to destabilize Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

b. Belligerent groups and illicit drugs.

Cases of known involvement of belligerent groups with illicit drugs in Afghanistan have been reported over the last three decades\textsuperscript{51}. The Mujahedeen in 1980s benefited from the opium and heroin trade, being involved in taxation of poppy cultivation, in trafficking of opium and in its processing into derivatives. The Warlords, the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, in 1990s were all involved

\textsuperscript{47} Patrick M. Jost, “The hawala alternative remittance system and its role in money laundering”, \textit{Interpol General Secretariat}, Lyon, January 2000.
\textsuperscript{48} Ehsan Ahrari, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Patrick M. Jost, \textit{op cit.}
in the above mentioned drug activities, and particularly the Taliban were alleged to have developed efficient international trafficking. After the fall of the Taliban’s regime, the Warlords on one side and Al Qaeda on the other have been constantly reported to fund themselves from taxation of opium crops, processing and domestic trafficking of heroin and opiates. This shows that participation in the drug trade has multifaceted potential benefits. However, such a trade is not the only illicit economy for the belligerent groups all over the world. But, there are circumstances in which the belligerents are not running drugs as their participation in such a trade would mean facing many constraints, such as:

- principles and religious beliefs;
- ideological factors, when it is to protect the “poor” farmers and labourers from the “brutal” traffickers;
- political factors, as the temptation to eliminate the traffickers and get a greater control over the drug trade could hurt the political support from the population;
- technical factors, as for example the opiates’ processing would call for a deep knowledge and a clear control of precursor agents whose trafficking is the opposite direction;
- government control of the territory, as the spread of a large-scale illicit drug economy would not be indifferent to police and military forces;
- and connections with criminal trafficking networks to set up a large illicit economy.

Actually, often for the belligerents group it is not easy to establish such a trade from nothing, nor does it appear that traffickers are interested in abandoning their traditional producers or protectors for new, inexperienced, and untested ones. It is also evident that the smaller is the illicit economy, the more difficult is the opportunity for new belligerent groups to get involved in it. Even in Afghanistan, which is a large-scale opium poppy cultivation area, the presence of competing belligerents remains an obstacle for the entrance of new ones in controlling and managing such an illicit trade. Yet, above all in the southern provinces of Afghanistan where the level of law enforcement as a whole is far from preventing some proximity with belligerents, the latter can sometimes have direct participation in the opium cultivation. Anyway, it is clear that any insurgent group would fear direct participation in opium cultivation above all when the
interdiction is primarily aimed at eradicating poppy crops. In this case, it is preferable for them to sustain production indirectly, by either threatening and taxing the farmers or protecting them from the state destruction of their only income\textsuperscript{52}. Actually, as there is no labour-intensive alternative for economic survival, the insurgent groups can profit from this situation keeping the farmers with undeveloped infrastructures, attracting those who feel themselves alienated and hopeless, protecting them from the eradication activities, taxing their profit, and continuing to threaten their tribal or social position\textsuperscript{53}.

c. Criminals and terrorists: are they different actors?
Do we have any information about the presence of people from European criminal organizations in Afghanistan? Are there links between European criminal organizations and the drug traffickers in Afghanistan? These are the most frequent questions that can help us to understand differences, similarities and potential synergies between criminal organizations and terrorists.

At the moment, there is not an enormous amount of information about Europeans being present at the starting point of this huge trade\textsuperscript{54}. However, a lot of the information suggests that there are some non-Afghans involved in the regional trafficking, while most of the drug operation inside Afghanistan involves Afghans. Then, it is clear that the link between European criminal organizations and the drug traffickers in Afghanistan certainly exists but that it is done outside the region.

Globalization has losers and winners. In particular, globalization has acted as a force multiplier for both criminal and terrorist organizations, providing them with new resources and new opportunities\textsuperscript{55}. It has motivated discontent, unemployment, changes in traditional cultures, massive economic dislocation, shift from legal to illegal economy, and resentment of the massive westernization

\textsuperscript{52} Wanda Felba-Brown, \textit{Shooting up: counterinsurgency and the war on drugs}, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), \textit{idem}.


\textsuperscript{54} UNODC, \textit{op cit}.

of poor and developing countries. It has also facilitated a whole set of illicit activities, from drug trafficking to the use of large-scale violence against innocent civilians. The interconnections among different parts of the world are denser; communication is cheap and easy; transportation and transmission of diseases, crime, and violence are impossible to stop. Transnational networks link members of terrorist networks and criminal organization.

Both criminal and terrorist organizations can be described in classic Clausewitzian terms, as they show rational behaviours. For instance, they are able to exploit new resources and opportunities effectively; they can erode state sovereignty; and they can influence state behaviours and policies. Both of them have designed clear strategies to achieve certain objectives, but the objectives themselves are very different and most times even the use of violence can greatly differ.

On the one side, terrorist organizations aim at political change, and for that their attacks have to be supported by long lasting complementary activities such as fund-raising, recruitment and training, development of special skills, target selection, attack preparation, and global media exploitation to make their terrorist attacks become a global theatre. Many terrorists are highly reliant on networks, above all when their safe haven is under attack or destroyed. Through the networks individuals come together in cells to carry out attacks. In effect, terrorist attacks are meant to have the maximum psychological impact. Violence is their first priority and corruption is just a way to get people’s consensus, and provide financial support or a territorial safe haven. Even the use of alliances and the search for cooperation are functional at sharing values and objectives, and then aimed at mutual support.

On the other side, criminal organizations’ objectives focus on profit. Their strategy is developed around and within the illicit economy, where normal business rules do not apply and risks are routine from both ruthless competitors and law enforcement agents. The awareness of such a risk makes a criminal organization become extremely flexible and adaptable to the environment where they work. They know that to survive and to lead an illicit business they have to keep a low profile, and to adopt strategies to both mitigate damage and maximize resilience. Therefore, the structure they prefer to assume is the networked one,

56 Phil Williams, op cit.
57 Idem.
which is by nature readily compartmentalised and makes possible its regeneration when part of the network is destroyed. As such, criminal organizations can choose to operate from countries where the government does not or cannot combat them effectively; nevertheless, where the state is strong and determined to tackle organized crime, criminality avoids as much as possible attacking it. The network can be held together by ties of family, affiliation, clan loyalties, common ethnicity, or, above all in the case of transnational trafficking organizations, by trust coming from knowledge of and experience with other participants. For the sake of illicit profit, organized crime preferably manages strategies that extend from the use of corruption to selective violent attacks, aimed at either neutralizing the criminal justice system, or dribbling through customs and immigration controls, or, at their best, preserving the territory as a safe haven. Very rarely criminal organizations move a terrorist campaign into a frontal assault against a state. They can use violence to kill those who oppose their own business, but only after a selective use of corruption as their dominant instrument. Finally, in the use of alliances, both tactical and strategic, drug trafficking organizations see the way to cooperate as a matter of expediency and mutual advantage. As they are just loyal to the profit, traffickers can at any moment truncate the scope of their activity to avoid direct confrontation with competing organizations, or they can convert themselves into giving assistance for money laundering.

The concern is when there are synergies between organized crime and terrorism, because they are driven by mutual convenience and opportunity, or when terrorists seize methods and structures from organized crime in order to finance their cause and extend the range of their terrorist attacks.

d. Counter-narcotics activities and drug trafficking.

Counter-narcotics programs supported by the Government of Afghanistan, the U.S. and the international community are engaged in activities to discourage poppy cultivation, interrupt the trade in illegal narcotics, and lay the foundations for a broad-based and sustainable licit economy to support Afghanistan's new democratic institutions.

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58 Phil Williams, op cit.
59 Idem.
60 Idem.
The link between drugs and the insurgency is now literally under attack. Afghan and NATO forces are focusing on this link between drugs and the insurgency, going in depth and with more effectiveness. The measures taken ranged from drug seizures, to destruction of clandestine laboratories, and to increased control of precursors \(^61\).

It is only a small part of the Afghan drug economy that has been hit, but enough to create a deterrent to the producers for the future and increase the risks of drug trafficking. As a consequence of the more effective fight against opium production, an increasing change in culture and behaviours is reported, which lead the farmers to be more and more nervous of reprisal and opium traders to become more and more prudent \(^62\).

Some licit questions come from the recurring reports. For instance, are there contacts between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, for a common counternarcotics policy or some form of cooperation to share intelligence and to know if they also control their own drug smugglers, both foreign smugglers and domestic smugglers?

Most of the efforts from the coalition in Afghanistan try to better establish a coordinated sharing of information in operations against the traffickers. The key is to provide a capability for the institutions that are being created in Afghanistan, such as the new national judicial system where a select group of investigators, prosecutors, and courts may sue major traffickers and trafficking related offenses. These institutions will be increasingly able to collect and manage information, share it not only within the Afghan institutions but also with other allied organizations, including those of both the coalition forces in the country and the neighbouring nations. The coalition forces have also been putting in place a conduit working on specific trafficking structures, getting a better picture of dynamics and movements. It includes a better knowledge and more effective control of chemicals that are used to process opium. Other efforts are aimed at working with neighbouring countries’ governments to be able to target the traffickers or support them where they are most vulnerable.

\(^{61}\) UNODC, *op cit.*

In short, all the counternarcotics’ efforts are aimed at a better understanding of the system to know where it starts, where the drugs become currencies, and then how it feeds the cycle for production.

The hard and crucial work is indeed to go after the money systems more aggressively. There is a little more work to do in that regard. It is hard because the world financial system is dynamic and complex. However, it is crucial to provide information on any suspicious money movements in order to chase the traffickers, criminals and terrorists alike. They, for their criminal objectives, can use as a shield, either nations that are fundamentally friendly and democratic, or places where there is no law enforcement presence, or countries where there may not be a stable government.
4. COUNTERNARCOTICS’ POLICIES: OLD AND NEW APPROACHES.

a. The U.S. Counternarcotics’ Strategy for Afghanistan.

The U.S. is supporting the Afghan government in its counternarcotics’ efforts through a comprehensive program based on five interrelated pillars that mirror Afghan initiatives and call for increased interagency and international cooperation.

The five pillars are Public Information, Alternative Livelihoods, Elimination/Eradication, Interdiction, and Law Enforcement/Justice Reform. Each of these elements weights differently within the strategies that have been issued by the U.S. Administration over the last eight years.

In particular, at the beginning of 2006, President Bush’s Administration had asked for a common and vigorous effort against narcotics to help Afghanistan on its road to becoming a fully functioning democracy and to building economic stability. In so doing, the Administration had detailed the U.S. initiatives among the five pillars, where the weight was clearly focused on the Elimination/Eradication and Interdiction elements by targeting the poor farmers and labourers as a “precondition” for following on alternative development in the country.

At the beginning of 2007, the Bush administration announced a “top-to-bottom” review of its strategy in Afghanistan with clear goals and implementing tasks according to which the U.S. and its Allies would help President Karzai:

- increase the size and capabilities of the Afghan Security Forces;
- improve provincial governance and develop Afghanistan’s rural economy;
- reverse the increase in poppy cultivation that is aiding the Taliban;
- fight corruption, particularly in Afghanistan’s Judicial System.

Moreover, it was recognized that the strategy for defeating the terrorists and stabilizing Afghanistan had to expand to a more regional view.

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65 Ibid.
It is also important to recognize that over this period there was a huge effort to start looking into both the future, to establish long-range goals, and the past, to examine what the predecessors had done. In particular, the focus was on creating and adapting the key structures aimed at carrying out the interdiction efforts on one side, and the law enforcement/justice reform efforts on the other. The interdiction efforts were focused on decreasing narcotics’ trafficking and processing in Afghanistan. Together with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the international allies, the Afghan government was able to make some encouraging moves to tackle the most significant drug trafficking organizations operating in the country through the arrest and prosecution of affiliated elements67.

The Law Enforcement/Justice Reform efforts in Afghanistan were aimed at encompassing both police and justice efforts to increase the overall rule of law. These initiatives were focused both specifically on counternarcotics and in more general terms on improving public confidence in law enforcement by creating an atmosphere in which corruption, narcotics’ trafficking and other illicit activities could be effectively countered68.

Moreover, the U.S. agenda also went on working with the Government of Afghanistan to implement police reform initiatives towards a professional democratic police organization. The program had also taken into account the necessity to focus salary and rank reform in order to get results in reducing corruption. Anti-corruption efforts, such as high-level corruption investigations, were considered key initiatives for the long-term success of the Afghan law enforcement sector and counternarcotics’ efforts.

Development of the Afghan police required also the establishment of an effective criminal justice sector. Justice Reform efforts in Afghanistan had two primary components: criminal justice reform and corrections support. A subcomponent of both was the support for narcotics’ prosecution69.

In short, President Bush’s Administration recognized that the seriousness of the narcotics problem in Afghanistan called for a long-term commitment on the part of the U.S. Government to combat narcotics’ production and trafficking. Above

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
all in a country that needs to be rebuilt in its fundamental structures there cannot be fast mending for illicit economy nor is it possible to hope in shortcuts for defeating insurgencies and other belligerents.\textsuperscript{70}

b. The EU Drugs Strategy.
The relationship between US and EU on the counternarcotics’ policy for Afghanistan cannot be simply described as a tale of misunderstanding and diverging strategies. There were different views in their efforts to contain the Afghan drug production in 2007 when, with the support of Great Britain and other EU countries, President Karzai blocked moves to spray poppy fields. Also the idea to legalize the poppy production in Afghanistan, largely debated among the European countries over the last two years of President Bush’s Administration, was far from being translated into action. As a matter of fact, both eradication and legalization of poppy cultivation have been neglected within President Obama’s strategy. Different points of view do not necessary mean lack of unity on supporting a follow-on regional counternarcotics’ plan, nor prevent U.S. and EU administrations from defining complementary roles in a joint comprehensive strategy. However, at this stage it is important to understand what the European views are.

Within Europe, terrorism remains a major threat to European livelihoods; organised crime continues to menace European societies, with trafficking in drugs, human beings, and weapons, alongside international fraud and money-laundering; great concern is given to the trade in Afghan drugs and its connection with terrorism and crime; the Afghan heroin has, in Europe, a very lucrative market and major consequences on users, but it is not the only drug market that concerns European citizens.\textsuperscript{71}

As seen before, it is clear that, while almost no Afghan drugs reach the U.S., Europe is a very lucrative market for drug trafficking from everywhere. For that reason, the EU countries have been much more focused on the EU internal dimension of the drugs trade rather than on its external one. But the U.S. and the EU countries, among other several affinities, share the same fear for the security

\textsuperscript{70} Wanda Felba-Brown, \textit{Shooting up: counterinsurgency and the war on drugs}, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), \textit{idem}.

of their troops in Afghanistan, and the potential dreadful nexus, between terrorism and organized crime, which profits from the opiates trafficking. In addition, both parts recognize that drug trafficking is also a world financial problem. Therefore, since 2003, with the European Security Strategy (ESS), EU has made progress in addressing both terrorism and organized crime. The ESS acknowledged that Europe has security interests beyond its immediate neighbourhood. In this respect, Afghanistan is a particular concern as Europe has a long-term commitment to bring stability there. EU Member States make a major contribution to the NATO mission, and EU is engaged in governance and development at all levels. The EU Police Mission is being expanded, but the European countries also recognize that these efforts will not succeed without full Afghan ownership, nor will they be effective without support from neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Central Asia, India, and Iran.

Following initiatives (such as the 2004 Hague Programme, and a new Strategy for the External Dimension of Justice and Home Affairs, adopted in 2005) it has been made easier to pursue investigations across borders, and co-ordinate prosecution, with respect for human rights and international law. So, since 2004, with the aim of building a system of enhanced collective security to prevent trafficking in drugs from Afghanistan, a series of police operations has been carried out by Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation, with the participation of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In terms of regional cooperation, the Paris Pact expert round table for the Black Sea area was held in Bucharest from 9 to 11 July 2008. Participants in the round table discussed ways and means of actively supporting and utilizing existing communication and information networks, such as INTERPOL (the World Customs Organization), EUROPOL (an EU body based in the Hague and staffed by police and customs officers), MAR-Info (the maritime traffic information system), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, and etc.

In October 2008, the U.S. Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates proposed a new front for NATO Allies targeting Afghanistan’s drug traffickers as part of a wider effort to confront a resurgent Taliban who were claimed to use heroin money to

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73 Ibid.
fund the insurgency. However, some European countries argued that any form of counternarcotics campaign went beyond ISAF mandate and actually it was the Afghans’ responsibility. The European countries cared about the unintended consequences following the interdiction efforts. They feared that drug interdiction could endanger their troops if it alienated segments of a population dependent on the cultivation of opium poppies. Such concern truly has merit, above all when the strategy relies too heavily on eradication and is not based primarily on people, on creating jobs, and on developing a licit economy.

Anyway, as the ESS already identified in 2003, EU should further strengthen:
- its counter-terrorism partnership with the United States, including the area of data sharing and protection;
- the capacity of its partners in South Asia, Africa, and its southern neighbours;
- the way of bringing together internal and external dimensions;
- a better co-ordination, transparency and flexibility across different agencies, at national and European level.

To this regard, EU recognizes that progress has been slow and incomplete. Therefore, the new European Union Drugs Action Plan, for 2009-2012, emphasizes, among the other priorities, the necessity to increase the international cooperation in order to counter illicit drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan. Such a cooperation is aimed at achieving maximum law enforcement coverage of the routes used for trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan, which includes the strengthening of the international precursor chemicals trade’s monitoring.

c. President Obama’s “Afghanistan-Pakistan” strategy and the U.S. Counternarcotics’ policy.

The election of President Obama and the establishment of his new administration provided the opportunity to assess and adjust efforts in Afghanistan and in the region. At the end of March 2009 a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (the so called “Af-Pak Strategy”) was issued. The bulk of the “new” strategy is a

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continuation of President Bush’s administration plans and policies\textsuperscript{75}, but it differs in two main ideas:
- the success in Afghanistan is strongly linked with the situation in Pakistan into a single broad strategy;
- President Obama’s administration refines the purpose of operations in Afghanistan into the defeat of al Qaeda and elimination of its safe havens.

Actually, the implementation of this strategy is the key. President Bush’s strategies were solid but their execution was considered poor, as insufficient resources were devoted to implementation of sensible policies and plans, and/or necessary adjustments were made late and thus ceded the initiative to the opposing forces\textsuperscript{76}.

In June 2009, President Obama’s Administration also introduced the outlines of a new counternarcotics’ policy in Afghanistan, by emphasizing the importance of interdiction and alternative development, but eliminating any U.S. role in eradication efforts\textsuperscript{77}. However, fighting the traffickers is more expensive and harder than counterproductive poppy field eradication\textsuperscript{78}. Additional “dual hat” military forces will assume a greater role in counternarcotics’ activities. The troops that have been made available will be deployed primarily in Kandahar and Helmand. The assumption is that they will be providing security there, for local farmers and labourers, from both the brutality of the traffickers who force them into debt, and the abuses of the Taliban who tax them in exchange for protection\textsuperscript{79}. They will also provide security for foreign agricultural workers that have to enter these areas to help the local agriculture build the kinds of infrastructure, and crop diversification, so far ignored. Finally, the new strategy seeks to revive a cross-border trade so that there can be a market in licit crops produced in both, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In overall terms, President Obama is introducing a truly joined up civilian-military strategy.

By not targeting the farmers through premature eradication on the one side, and by focusing on increased interdiction of drug traffickers and rural development on the other, this new counternarcotics’ strategy becomes consequently synchronized

\textsuperscript{75} Christopher M. Schnaubelt, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{77} Liana Sun Wyler, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{79} Wanda Felba-Brown, \textit{Shooting up: counterinsurgency and the war on drugs}, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), \textit{idem.}
with the counterinsurgency efforts, denying the Taliban a key source of support\textsuperscript{80}. However, the US counternarcotics activities abroad are mainly executed by military forces. On one hand, the military’s role in counternarcotics efforts has gradually become more focused on training and equipping foreign counternarcotics officials, as well as supporting foreign law enforcement personnel who are also conducting counternarcotics activities\textsuperscript{81}. On the other, despite the military’s ability in such support, the effectiveness of a major military role in interdiction of the drug trafficking within and from Afghanistan is arguable. The main reasons for that are the following\textsuperscript{82}:

- drug interdiction is a law enforcement mission rather than a military mission; moreover, it requires an extensive and accurate knowledge of financial tools;

- drug enforcement is an unconventional war for which the military is ill equipped to fight and that may expose the military to corruption;

- a drug enforcement role may divert military units from readiness for future combat operations;

- the use of the military may have serious political and diplomatic repercussions overseas;

- some people from the military environment have concern about an expanded role in the drug’s interdiction, seeing themselves as possible scapegoats in case of a policy failure;

- the use of US military forces in conducting counternarcotics interdiction is logical when the narcotics’ trafficking poses a national security threat to the United States, and this is not the case with the drug’s trafficking from Afghanistan.

It is also true that, above all where there is no security against insurgency and belligerents’ groups, it is almost impossible for civilian and police forces to operate. Military training and the right equipment become vital for highly specialized counternarcotics police officers that would have to carry out investigations within such an insurgency environment. Therefore, the idea to expand the military role to counternarcotics appears as the most sensible and sometimes the only practicable solution.

\textsuperscript{80} Wanda Felba-Brown, \textit{Shooting up: counterinsurgency and the war on drugs}, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), \textit{idem}.

\textsuperscript{81} Liana Sun Wyler, \textit{op cit}.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid}.
In conclusion, with respect to counternarcotics, counterinsurgency and state-building policies, the effectiveness of President Obama’s strategy will depend on the capability to make it work, knowing that it potentially faces a lot of difficulties.

d. Alternative approaches of narcotics’ interdiction policy.

As mentioned before, the focus of the new US counternarcotics policy is on interdiction of drug traffickers and on disrupting their networks. In particular, in addition to reducing the strength of insurgents, diminishing the power of criminal groups should be another essential element of this approach. Traffickers and terrorists/insurgents are different actors “per se” as they have diverging interests; therefore the new strategy should avoid treating them as a unified actor, fighting both of them with the same means, tactics, techniques and procedures. Some say that in a context like Afghanistan the US and allied counterinsurgency actors are challenged by the problem that some crucial informants are also known as drug traffickers or as individuals having ties to the drug trade. It is difficult then to balance counterinsurgency and counternarcotics objectives and the dilemma would be between getting crucial information to fight the insurgents and dismantling the illicit trade. Treating traffickers and belligerents as a unified actor would reinforce the tie between them and would help these criminals to enlarge their coercive and corruptive power. Targeting only traffickers linked to insurgents may undermine the rule of law in the long term. The US and allied efforts, and increasingly together with those of the Afghan government, should look at ways to set traffickers and belligerents in opposition to each other. Moreover, targeting the regional level traffickers first, then zooming in on small illicit traders at tribal level and their family-tie networks would be essential to avoid the formation of a small number of powerful criminal organizations. These traffickers and criminal networks, due to the fact that they may be vertically integrated, are potentially able to control the market and form a cartel. As such, the interdiction efforts should be equipped with greater intelligence resources that

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84 Liana Sun Wyler, op cit.
can include regular use of more and more specific means of investigations, such as infiltrating police officers into the networks and/or intercepting both communications and suspicious financial transactions. Ultimately, targeting drug traffickers and criminal organizations primarily involves policing, not conventional soldiering. Actually, the globalization of crime induces governments to look at how to globalize law and law enforcement. In this era of globalization, more and more crime crosses borders. Therefore, governments push for greater homogeneity in their criminal laws and join their efforts into bilateral and multilateral agreements and/or international institutions to better collaborate against the spread of transnational crime. Prosecutors, police, and other government agents have no choice but to respond by working together and more effectively. The target is to reduce criminal activities and ultimately the illicit economy. For example, freezing suspicious funds will constrict the operating environment for illicit actors and disrupt their activities. In so doing, it is also important to consider the possibility that the suppression of illegal drug activities in one area could produce a shift of trafficking to different illegal stuff and/or in other areas dominated by a major terrorist group. Criminal organizations rarely disappear even when the suppression of their illegal activities succeeds.

It is natural and essential that in an era of globalization the response to the growth of transnational crime can be an increasing cooperation among governments for the growth of international criminal law enforcement. Actually, within the sphere of global finance, financial de-regulation has to be mitigated through efforts to restrict money laundering and terrorist financing. In brief, to mitigate the fall of economic barriers, accurate police regulations have to be increased and extended out through regional and global law enforcement initiatives. To this regard, the United States is compelled by the magnitude of the problem to play a global leadership role.

88 Phil Williams, op cit.
89 Liana Sun Wyler, op cit.
5. CONCLUSION

Afghanistan has virtually become the sole world supplier of heroin, and Europe is its most profitable market. Although some improvements have been recorded over the last two years, the opium trade situation in Afghanistan is still critical. Opium production remains a crucial problem for the whole of the Afghan economy and society. The opium economy itself and its nexus with insecurity and poor governance represent a central development dilemma for the country.

And, as the opium flows out of Afghanistan in all directions, through routes which in turn change and multiply like a river delta, the trafficking of opium derivatives has resulted in more and more harmful effects for many of its neighbours before getting to Europe. That has many consequences related to the increasing level of addiction, the highest level of corruption, the deterioration of the criminal situation in the countries, and not less important the conflict with insurgents and terrorists.

As a consequence of eight years of fighting and counternarcotics policies, there are indicators that something is improving in the country. But, that is not due to the eradication policy, which actually, when used prematurely and in isolation, works to push poor people and farmers to embrace the insurgents’ cause. Neither is it possible to ignore the amount of opium production in Afghanistan, nor is it appropriate to underestimate the issue to further reduce the drug demand.

However, while eradication can appear as an immediate gratification, any counternarcotics policy aimed at fighting the drug trafficking takes a great amount of time and resources.

Opiates’ trafficking is first and foremost a world financial problem. As such, it must be challenged in all its segments, from the Afghan traders, to the regional traffickers, and to the transnational crime syndicates. In particular, the focus should be on the link between criminality and terrorism, which is a globalizing threat. In fact, beyond the differences in the objectives and strategies, in a globalized world, criminal and terrorist operations have ideal support from transnational networks, where the centre of gravity is difficult to attack; where the structure is hard to control by a single state apparatus; where the most significant vulnerability can only be the dense communication connections between the cells deployed in different areas and

90 Robert I. Rotberg, op cit.
91 UNODC, op cit.
countries; and where suspicious financial transactions can make such a structure even more vulnerable.

Such a link between criminality and terrorism is hard to detect without a specific law enforcement sensitivity that some kinds of criminal activities are likely to be related to terrorist organizations. A counter-terrorism strategy has to consider deeply such sensitivity as a key element of transnational law enforcement policy. In so doing, the US and EU can define complementary roles in a joint comprehensive strategy, where the former is better equipped to lead counternarcotics’ operations within the production and processing areas, while the latter could lead anti drug trafficking operations within the main routing and market areas.

There is also a broaden consensus that to combat money laundering and terrorist financing it is essential to monitor informal financing transaction (IFT) systems to avoid their misuse by illicit groups. It is believed that the potential anonymity afforded by these systems presents risks of money laundering and terrorist financing that need to be addressed. Yet, selecting the appropriate regulatory and supervisory response requires a realistic and practical assessment and an understanding of the specific country environment in which the IFT dealers operate.  

For this reason, fighting the long chain of traffickers that spans from Afghanistan to Europe requires a system capable of sharing information, increasing the cooperation between the existing agencies in the developed countries, using their links with the structures which work on security and development, and tasking effectively their police and security forces. That is a system capable of integrating single nation’s efforts in a better coordinated activity, taking care that the boundaries between nations do not become an obstacle to bringing the drug traffickers to justice.

Such a counternarcotics policy should be carried out more consistently and in parallel with both opium crops’ eradication and drug demand reduction. But indeed it is very difficult to implement, as there is always the risk of producing unintended effects. President Obama’s new strategy emphasizes the interdiction of drug traffickers and the disruption of their networks, within a more balanced approach, which rather than just relying too heavily on eradication, is primarily based on local people, on creating jobs in the agricultural sector, and ultimately on setting the economic development of

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92 Patrick M. Jost, op cit.
Afghanistan. And eventually, the efficacy of such a strategy will depend on the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency efforts.

Unfortunately, it does not exclude unintended consequences, but the decisive achievement relies on its implementation, as it requires patience, flexibility, adaptability, and constant connection with the reality on the ground, so that it is possible to make the right adjustments to the approach.

“Annual fluctuations of opium cultivation and production do not tell the whole story. Success will come when Afghanistan’s farmers have sustainable licit livelihoods, when drug traffickers no longer operate with impunity, and when people no longer have to pay bribes for basic services.” writes Antonio Maria Costa93.

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93 UNODC, op cit.


