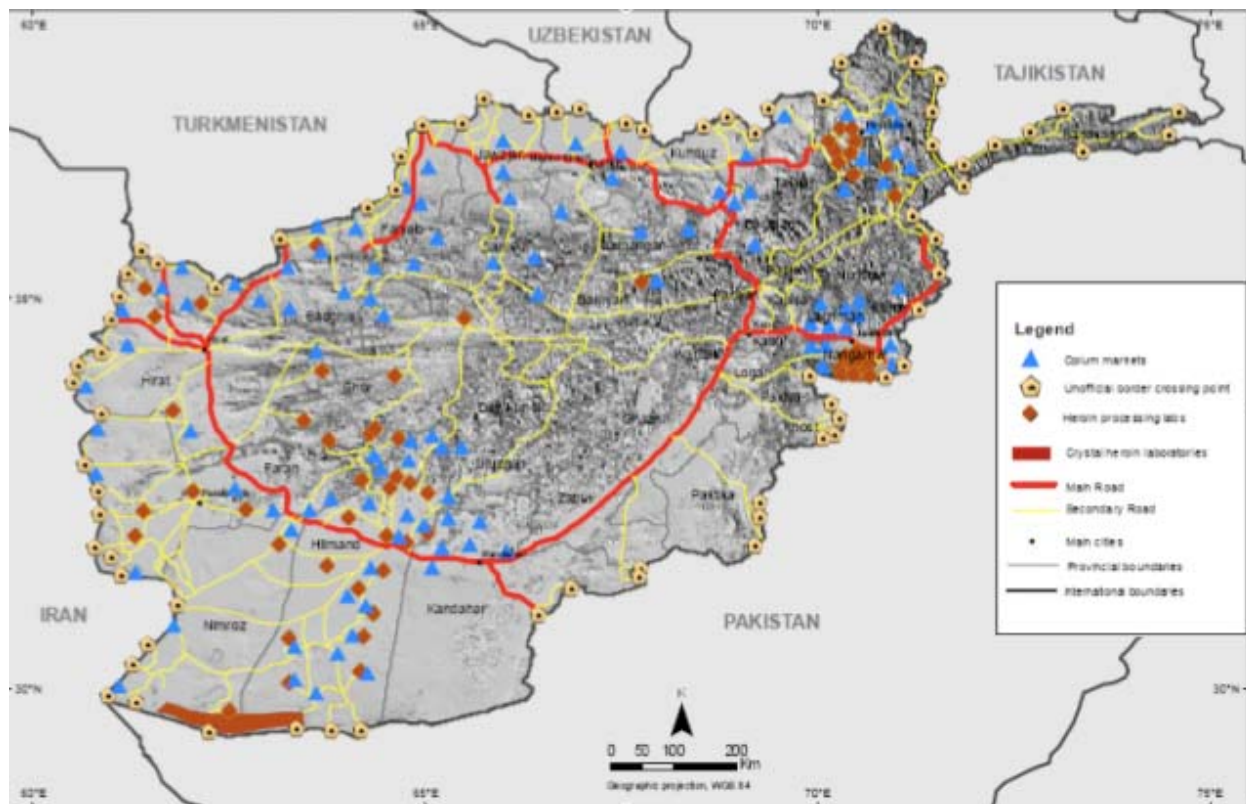


**Uniting the Golden Crescent and Central Asia:
The Potential for Greater Regional Cooperation to Curb Afghanistan's Opium Trade**



Drug Trafficking Trends in Afghanistan¹

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Policy Options for State-Building in Afghanistan
Johns Hopkins-SAIS
Spring 2009

¹ Image from UNODC, "Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan," September 2007, p.2.

Acronyms

ADAM – Automated Donor Assistance Database

ANF – Anti-Narcotics Force (Pakistan)

BLO – Border Liaison Office

CARICC – Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre

CARs – Central Asian Republics

DCH – Drug Control Headquarters (Iran)

FC – Frontier Corps (Pakistan)

MNC – Ministry for Narcotics Control (Pakistan)

MOBIT – Mobile Interdiction Team

SAID Initiative – Strengthening Afghan-Iran Drug Border Control and Cross-Border Cooperation

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Abstract

This paper explores the potential for greater regional cooperation between Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and the Central Asian Republics in combating the opium trade. Through examining the history of the regional dynamics of the opium trade, this paper concludes that elimination of the opium trade will require sustained regional cooperation that targets reduction of *both* supply and demand. There are significant challenges to enacting such a program, but there is also the potential to build on and expand initiatives with similar goals that are already underway. In the context of the Obama administration's broad review of U.S. foreign policy and strategy in the region, now is a fertile time to explore and pursue such efforts.

Introduction

The advent of a new American administration has brought a fresh and revamped commitment to Afghanistan. This has raised Afghanistan's international profile while drawing attention to the tremendous challenges associated with Afghanistan's illegal opium trade. According to recent reports, opium production in Afghanistan accounts for 93% of global opiates production, and the opium economy is equivalent to 20 to 30 percent of GDP.² Opium cultivation as a viable, albeit illegal, means for economic livelihood has been fueled by and corresponded with a Taliban resurgence, who are fostering the drug trade as a means for strengthening its grip on a widening swath of the Afghan countryside.³

As Afghanistan has taken on the notorious distinction as the world's largest producer of opium, it has also become the origin of major drug trafficking routes radiating out through Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries serve as important conduits for opium being smuggled to Western Europe, East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Russia, and to an extent, China.⁴ A UNODC report chronicling illicit drug trends in Afghanistan notes that domestic consumption of opium and opium derivatives accounts for only 2 percent of total opium production in Afghanistan, underscoring both the size of the drug trade occurring across Afghanistan's borders and the extent to which

² UNODC, Afghanistan 2007 Annual Opium Survey, August 2007, p. iv. http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/AFG07_ExSum_web.pdf; see also Mohammad Ishaque Sarwari, "Asian Development Outlook 2009: Afghanistan," Asian Development Bank, 2009. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2009/AFG.pdf>

³ In 2008, 98 percent of opium cultivation was confined to seven provinces, all of which have severe security problems. See "Current Situation with Respect to Regional and Subregional Cooperation," UNODC, Subcommittee on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, October 8, 2008, p.2. See also, UNODC, Afghanistan 2007 Annual Opium Survey, August 2007, p.16.

⁴ See "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan," UNODC and The Paris Pact Initiative, April 2008, p.23. See also, "Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control," UNODC, April 2008, p.5. See also, "Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan," UNODC, September 2007, p.3.

opium poppy cultivation is driven by demand outside of Afghanistan.⁵ A recent report detailing a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan noted active involvement on the part of the international community as a key objective.⁶ In the context of the Obama administration's broad review of U.S. foreign policy and strategy in the region, it is a fertile time to explore and pursue efforts that would enhance cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors to combat the opium trade.

Through looking at the history of the regional dynamics of the opium trade, this paper finds that regional cooperation is an essential component to curbing the opium trade. This paper examines current challenges associated with regional cooperation with regards to the opium trade, finding that there is potential for efforts already underway to be built on and expanded. If regional cooperation is to be successful, there needs to be a sustained commitment to building up Afghan institutions and to increasing its law enforcement capabilities so that Afghanistan is in a position to serve as a meaningful partner. It is also clear that greater regional emphasis on demand reduction will be required, and that this should occur in consort with a long-term strategy to reduce opium cultivation in Afghanistan.

Specifically, this paper finds that greater cooperation with Iran holds significant potential, particularly in demand reduction efforts, but that geopolitical considerations could limit further engagement. It also finds that the Central Asian Republics are willing partners, and the successes of their participation in regional cooperation initiatives to combat the opium trade are promising indicators that they could play a greater role, and that such cooperation will be

⁵ UNODC, *Illicit Drug Trends in Afghanistan*, June 2008, p.20.

⁶ "White Paper on the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," The White House, released March 27, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf

fruitful. Finally, there is the potential for Pakistan to play a more meaningful role, but its ability to do so will be challenged by the presence of a weak civilian government, complex border and tribal dynamics, and a weak counter-narcotics apparatus.

A Brief History of the Opium Trade in the Golden Crescent

The history of the regional dynamics of the opium trade underscores the importance of increasing regional cooperation. The Golden Crescent, which is composed of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, has a centuries long history of opium production and trade. When looking at the history of opium production in each of these three countries, particularly in the last several decades, it is near impossible to divorce developments in one country from those in the others. As such, the character of each country's role in opium production and trade has been intertwined with and at least partially driven by regional dynamics.

In recent history, this pattern began in earnest when Iran passed the "Law on Prohibition of Opium Poppy Cultivation and Taking Opium" in 1955.⁷ Up until that point, Iran had been a major cultivator of opium poppy. Opium was produced in Iran during the 18th and 19th Centuries mainly for domestic consumption, but was spurred on by the expansion of the Far Eastern market in the late 1800s, and ultimately became Iran's top export.⁸ The 1955 law had the dual effect of shifting opium production to Afghanistan while making smuggling of heroin and morphine from Afghanistan into Iran a profitable enterprise.⁹ In consort with these developments, addiction in Iran surged, inspiring the Shah to make drug smuggling a capital offense and to begin laying the groundwork for a nationwide system of health clinics and rehabilitation centers for addicts.

⁷ John Calabrese, "Iran's War on Drugs: Holding the Line?" *The Middle East Institute Policy Brief*, No.3, December 2007, p.1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Yet, the dynamics of opium production and trade in the region shifted once again following the tumult in the region that accompanied the 1979 Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion and counter-insurgency strategy had the effect of demolishing what little infrastructure and agricultural industry and self-sufficiency there was in Afghanistan. Prior to 1979, Afghanistan was a capable, self-sufficient food producer, and its agricultural outputs accounted for 30 percent of its annual GDP, amounting to US\$100 million in foreign exchange,¹⁰ but during the Soviet occupation, farmland and pastures were mined, ancient irrigation channels that were crucial to agricultural sustainability were bombed, livestock were killed, and key transport roads were destroyed.¹¹ On a macroeconomic level, the immediate result was that Afghanistan became a net food importer, requiring a supply of foreign exchange that simply did not exist in the licit economy. As Barnett Rubin points out, opium production was one such way that Afghans could maintain an adequate supply of foreign exchange to pay for food imports.¹²

On a micro level, opium production in Afghanistan emerged as a viable way for thousands of Afghans to secure income in the absence of other meaningful possibilities for maintaining their economic livelihood.¹³ There are several practical explanations for this. To begin with, opium poppy offers higher returns than any other crop, and is highly weather-resistant. In contrast to other licit crops such as wheat, opium can be easily stored with a low risk of perishing, making it an ideal “savings deposit” for farmers. Finally, the short amount of

¹⁰ Barnett Rubin, “Road to Ruin: Afghanistan’s Booming Opium Industry,” *Center on International Cooperation and Center for American Progress*, October 7, 2004, p.2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, p.3.

¹³ “National Drug Control Strategy: An Updated Five-Year Strategy for Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem,” *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Counter-Narcotics*, Kabul, January 2006, p.32.

time between planting and harvesting means that farmers can oftentimes plant a second crop in the same season.¹⁴

Yet, part of what made opium production both lucrative and sustainable during this period was that there was a significant demand for opium beyond Afghanistan's borders. This was certainly the case with Iran and Pakistan. Political turmoil engulfed Iran beginning first with the 1979 Iranian Revolution and then the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. Despite the revolutionary government's imposition of harsh criminal penalties on all forms of substance abuse, political instability in consort with an increased availability of Afghan opium caused consumption and demand for opiates in Iran to surge.¹⁵

Pakistan also played a significant role during this period in fueling demand. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, American CIA and Pakistani ISI delivered massive support to the Soviet opposition. Commanders and traders oftentimes re-invested these profits in illicit activities such as drug smuggling, paving the way for a two-way pipeline in which drugs coming out of Afghanistan funded arms moving in.¹⁶ The drug trade proved to be so lucrative that Pakistan began cultivating opium on a large-scale, with its production ultimately reaching parity with Afghanistan's by 1989.¹⁷

The booming narcotics industry in Pakistan became increasingly entrenched in the Pakistani state, with the United States Drug Enforcement Agency identifying several top Pakistani government officers as heads of major heroin syndicates.¹⁸ Alarmed by the extent to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Calabrese, p.2.

¹⁶ Jonathan Goodhand, "Frontiers and Wars: the Opium Economy in Afghanistan," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol.5 No.2, April 2005, 191-216, p.198.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

which industry and trade in Pakistan were being financed by drug money, the United States invested US\$100 million in aid to combat drugs in Pakistan and opium cultivation was largely eradicated during the 1990s, and in 2000-2001 Pakistan was classified as poppy free.¹⁹

Reductions in opium production in Pakistan in the 1990s coincided with similar efforts in Turkey and Iran, effectively driving up the price of opium and pushing traffickers further into the Afghan market as they sought out new sources for raw supplies of opium.²⁰ Between 1996 and 2001, opium production in Afghanistan continued to expand under the Taliban who were able to monopolize on Afghanistan's weak structures of governance, asserting control over administration and revenue collection, which included taxes levied on opium.²¹ For reasons that no one is entirely sure of, the Taliban banned all opium cultivation between 2000 and 2001, leading to a 94 percent drop in production in the same period.²²

The long-term impact of the Taliban-imposed ban cannot be overstated. While the Taliban may have banned cultivation, they did not ban the processing or trafficking of existing stocks of opium. The net result of this was that a significant rise in the price of raw opium and its derivatives, creating a huge windfall for the Taliban, but also sent many peasants and low-level farmers spiraling into debt.²³ Many peasants and farmers had contracts with the Taliban in which they agreed to provide the Taliban a set amount of opium gum in exchange for half the value of the future crop, enabling many families to provide for themselves over the winter. Yet, when the Taliban imposed a ban on cultivation, many peasants who had agreed to such contracts

¹⁹ "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan," p.8.

²⁰Rubin, p.3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p.4.

²³ Ibid, p.4.

were unable to service their debts. Rather than forgiving the debt, the Taliban monetized it at the new higher market price.²⁴

Ironically enough, the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan exacerbated the opium problem. An influx of U.S. dollars to finance the war efforts led to a dramatic appreciation of the Afghan currency in the four months between September 2001 and January 2002.²⁵ All of the sudden, moneylenders were flush with cash and wanting to make loans, resulting in a flurry of new contracts with peasants who were desperate and determined to discharge their debt, and who also saw opium cultivation as the only way of doing so.²⁶ Moreover, the fall of the Taliban coincided with the planting season and the absence of government authority between October 2001 and the establishment of the Transitional Authority in 2002 allowed farmers to be uninhibited in their planting of poppy.²⁷ These factors, combined with the high profit margins opium cultivation offered compared to other crops,²⁸ caused large-scale opium production to resume following the fall of the Taliban in the fall of 2001.²⁹

In the years since, the amount of land under opium cultivation has steadily increased from an all-time low of 8,000 ha in 2001 to an all-time high of 193,000 ha in 2007 [See **Figure 1**].³⁰ Recent reports indicate a 19 percent reduction in opium cultivation for 2008, and UNODC

²⁴ Before the ban the market price of 10kg of opium was \$60, but skyrocketed to \$675/kg after the ban. See Rubin, p.4.

²⁵ In September 2001, the exchange rate was 70,980 af to the dollar; in January 2002 it was 28,990 af to the dollar. See International Monetary Fund, "Islamic State of Afghanistan: Rebuilding a Macroeconomic Framework for Reconstruction and Growth," IMF Country Report No. 03/299, September 2003, p.114. See also Rubin, p.5.

²⁶ Rubin, p.5.

²⁷ "National Drug Control Strategy," p.33.

²⁸ During this period there was an increased availability of wheat, which has largely been cited as a potential substitute for opium cultivation. Yet, its increased availability led depressed prices, making opium cultivation all the more attractive.

²⁹ "National Drug Control Strategy," p.34.

³⁰ See UNODC and Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Directorate, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003," October 2003, p.5. See also UNODC, "Afghanistan Opium Winter Assessment," January 2009, p.42.

anticipates another reduction in 2009, largely due to harsh weather conditions, a rise in the price of wheat, and a concurrent fall in the price of opium.³¹

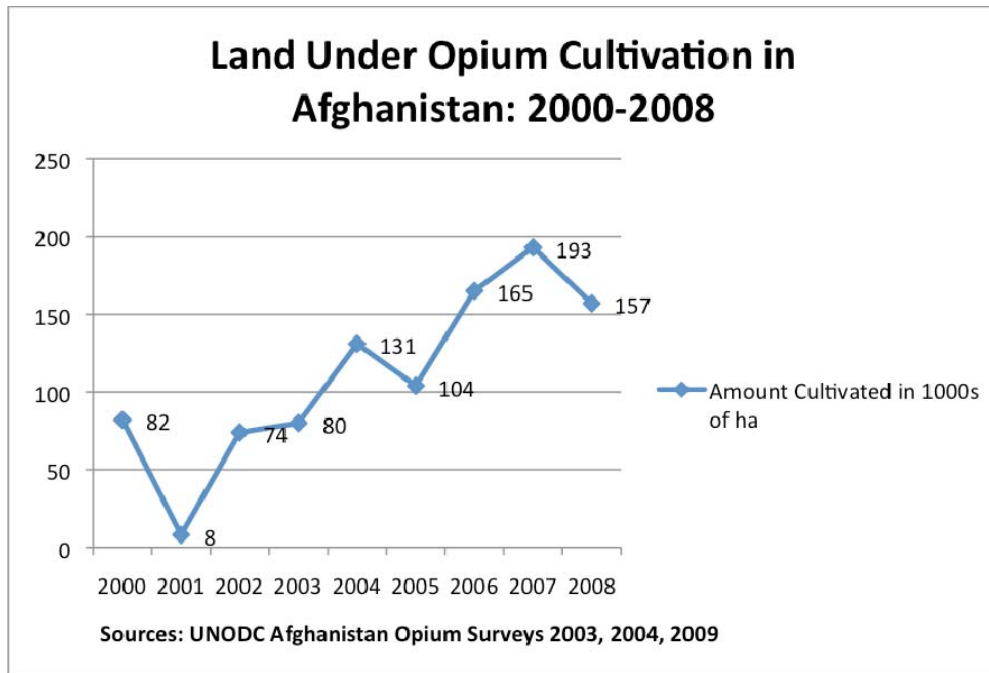
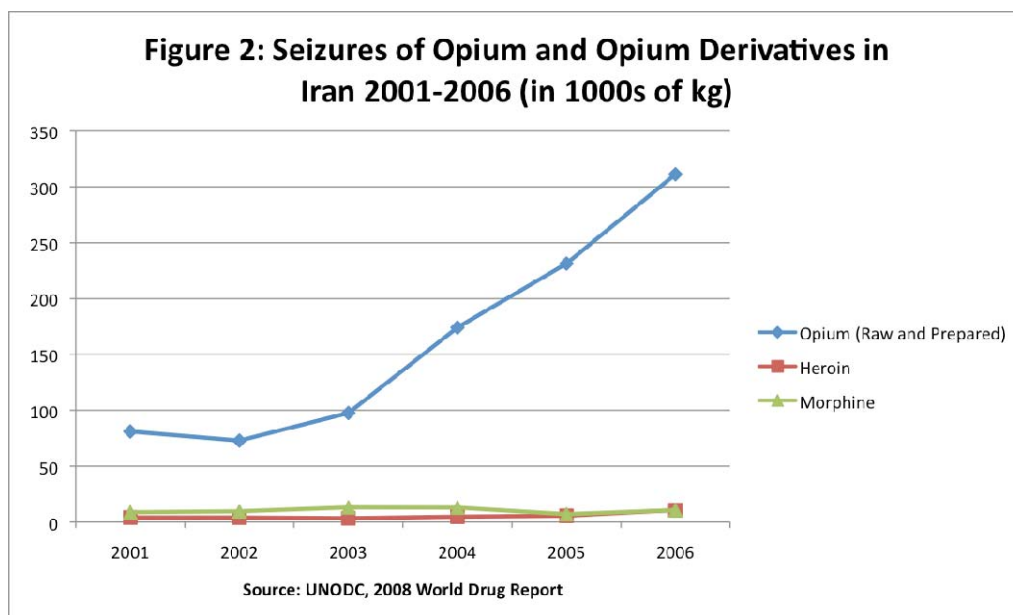


FIGURE 1

Current Trafficking Patterns and Regional Dynamics

As Afghanistan has become the world's largest producer of opium, the regional dynamics of opium production and trade have continued to evolve, underscoring the need for greater regional cooperation. Indeed, since 2001, seizures of opium and opium derivatives in Iran and Pakistan have soared, indicating the extent to which cross-border trafficking is taking place [See **Figures 2 and 3**].

³¹ The fall in the price of opium can be attributed to the presence of large stockpiles of opium that resulted from surplus production in the several years prior. See "Afghanistan Opium Winter Assessment 2009," p.1.



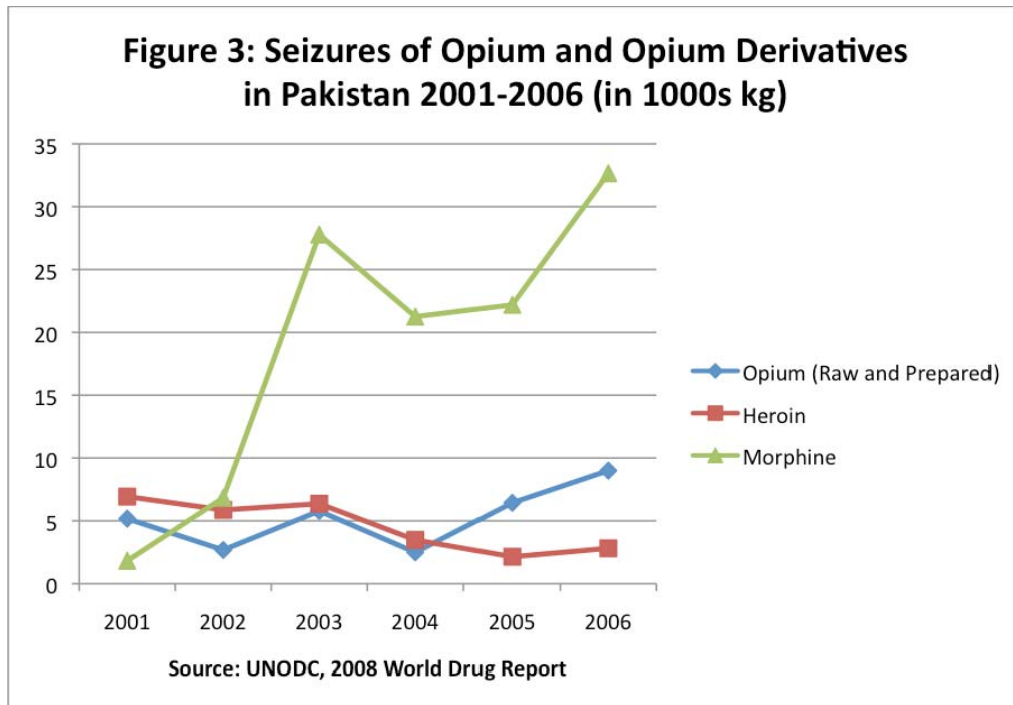
Currently, Iran, which shares an 869 kilometer border with Afghanistan, is the preferred trafficking route largely because smugglers only need to make it past two border crossings before reaching Europe, the target market for most of the opium smuggled through Iran.³² It is estimated that 53³³ percent of the opium that leaves Afghanistan transits through Iran, and its popularity as a transit route has only increased since the advent of the war in Iraq.³⁴ Turkey has been the traditional exit point for drugs transiting through Iran, but the weakening of border

³² Calabrese, p.2.

³³ **A NOTE** about these estimates: throughout this paper, the author has tried to lend consistency to her data by gathering it almost exclusively from UNODC. This, however, was not possible for data on opiates leaving Afghanistan. UNODC, for example, does not publish estimates on the percentage of opiates smuggled through Pakistan, and the figure provided in this section is according to “working estimates” of Pakistan’s ANF. The fact that this data originates from different sources with different data collection methods likely accounts for some of the discrepancy in the figures I have reported. What does seem clear is that Iran, Pakistan, and the CARs are key transit routes, with Iran likely serving as the largest conduit for opium smuggling.

³⁴ See “Illicit Drug Trends in Central Asia, UNODC, April 2008, p. 14. See Calabrese, p.2.

controls and the breakdown of security along Iran’s border with Iraq since 2003 have made Iraq an attractive alternative.³⁵



Pakistan’s 2430 kilometer border with Afghanistan runs over rugged mountain terrain, making it difficult to police and therefore presents significant opportunities for the illegal cross-border drug trade. Pakistan’s Anti-Narcotics Force operates under the assumption that one-third of illicit opiates coming out of Afghanistan transit through Pakistan on their way to Western Europe, Asia, and East Africa.³⁶ According to UNODC’s Afghanistan Opium Survey in 2007, approximately 70 percent of Afghanistan’s opium poppy was grown in five provinces along the border with Pakistan. The two most popular trafficking routes into Pakistan are through the

³⁵ Rupert Hamer, “Iraq is New Drug Route,” *Sunday Mirror*, April 2, 2006. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4161/is_20060402/ai_n16206356/?tag=content:coll.

³⁶ “Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control,” UNODC, April 2008, p.5.

loosely-policed borders between Afghanistan-Balochistan and Afghanistan's border with Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP).³⁷

In addition to Iran and Pakistan, Central Asia, or the "Northern Route," has also become a key transit route for opiates being smuggled out of Afghanistan. It is estimated that 21 percent of all heroin smuggled from Afghanistan transits the "Northern Route" to the Russian Federation, Europe, and China.³⁸ There are several reasons for the Northern Route's emergence as a popular trafficking route. First, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan are well-positioned geographically to serve as convenient transit countries for opiates traveling from Afghanistan to Russia and Western Europe. Second, since the fall of the Soviet Union, this region has been politically unstable and as a result, has suffered from a lack of good governance, resulting in a little law enforcement presence. Exacerbating these two factors is the fact that high levels of poverty and limited employment opportunities in this region create an environment in which many individuals are inclined to engage in criminal activities, including drug trafficking.³⁹

As Afghanistan has become the origin for major trafficking routes, it has also become a major center for processing labs that convert opium into morphine and heroin. In the 1990s, the conversion process took place mainly in secondary transit countries along drug trafficking routes, but *not* in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ In the last several years, however, there has been growing evidence that heroin manufacturing is taking place inside Afghanistan's borders. Since this process requires precursor chemicals such as acetic anhydride that have been previously

³⁷ Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan," p.23.

³⁸ "Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan,"p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴⁰ UNODC, "Targeting Precursors Used in Heroin Manufacture," May 2007.

unavailable in Afghanistan and that Afghanistan is not capable of manufacturing, this development suggests that the requisite chemicals are being smuggled into Afghanistan. UNODC, for example, estimates that two-thirds of Afghan opium produced is converted into heroin within the country.⁴¹ Given this, experts estimate that the process would require the availability of 1,150 tons of acetic anhydride as well as 12,500 tons of other precursor chemicals.⁴² This implies that precursor chemicals that are essential in the processing of opium are being transported across the border from Pakistan, Iran, and the CARs into Afghanistan. To date, border police in Afghanistan and in neighboring countries are not adequately trained to recognize precursor chemicals, making this a ripe area for cooperation.⁴³

Efforts and Challenges Associated with Curbing Cross-Border Trade Within Afghanistan

A significant challenge to curbing the cross-border opium trade is that Afghanistan lacks the capacity to effectively police its border. There are a number of reasons for this, beginning with widespread corruption and weak governance. Major actors in the Afghan opium trade often target government institutions and law enforcement officers, purchasing immunity from them, and as a result, are enabled to continue their operations.⁴⁴ There has been an increasing presence of powerful drug traffickers who operate in the open with the tacit knowledge and approval of local officials and police.⁴⁵ In an interview with a reporter from *Jane's Intelligence Review*, one tribal elder in Kandahar noted that even though government officials knew which people were major smugglers, it would be very difficult for them to crack down on the opium trade since

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Joanna Wright, "The Changing Structure of the Afghan Opium Trade," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 2006, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.7.

they, along with the Taliban and the farmers benefitted from it.⁴⁶ This system of political protection is becoming an increasingly troubling issue, largely because the opium economy is the largest sector in Afghanistan's economy and state actors at every level seek access to the funds it generates.⁴⁷

Afghanistan's capacity to curb cross-border opium trade has also been hindered by the weakness of its police force. Training the Afghan police was a low priority until 2005, and according to a report released by the National Defense Research Institute, the police force is "corrupt, incompetent, under-resourced and often loyal to local commanders rather than to the central government."⁴⁸ Many newly hired police officers are poorly educated, barely literate, and lack sufficient training in judicial procedures to prosecute traffickers. In addition, there is evidence of police officers getting sent to border posts and exploiting their positions to facilitate illicit trafficking.⁴⁹

A lack of effective enforcement and the presence of corruption can partly be explained by increasing evidence of prevalent drug use amongst Afghan police officers. Data acquired by the BBC from the British Foreign Office indicate that of 5320 Afghan police and recruits country-wide who were tested by U.S.-led training programs, 19 percent tested positive for drugs, the majority of which had been using cannabis or opium.⁵⁰ Analysts have noted that this number is higher in southern provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar, with 38% of police officers and

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ed Johnson, "Afghanistan's Future Threatened by Poor Police, Balkenende Says," *Bloomberg*, June 9, 2008. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=a2ASs6.BS7Mc&refer=home>

⁴⁹ "The Changing Structure of the Afghan Opium Trade," p.8.

⁵⁰ Martin Patience, "Drug Abuse Hampers Afghan Police," *BBC News*, February 18, 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7895612.stm

recruits testing positive.⁵¹ Gulab Mangal, the provincial governor of Helmand, said that drug use amongst police officers was a “huge problem,” and British officials affiliated with the Foreign Office have stated that this problem was “undermining the security sector reform and state-building efforts as well as contributing to corruption.”⁵²

Recognizing the weakness of the police force, the Afghan government has recently pledged to increase its 82,000 member police force by 15,000 officers who will work with international trainers and mentors for six to nine months after completing their initial training.⁵³ In addition, several new initiatives geared towards beefing of Afghanistan’s border police, particularly along the Pakistani border, have been enacted in recent months. The U.S. has become involved in training border police, much of it at State Department regional centers. By some accounts, this training has been effective and American officials involved in the training have noted that graduates from the programs look and act polished, are more confident and motivated to help their country.⁵⁴

Initiatives in Khost and Paktika provinces, which border Pakistan, illustrate the difficulties of recruiting and maintaining a sufficient number of border police. While several towns in this region are loyal to the government in Kabul, many are not and have links to militants who are trying to drive out western forces.⁵⁵ This makes police recruitment and training tough – even with a charismatic local leader in charge of the border police such as this

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Afghanistan to Boost Police by 15,000: Minister,” *AFP*, April 19, 2009 (accessed April 20, 2009). http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jloHZx5cLmBm_b0JD2ipzaAz1dg

⁵⁴ Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, “Afghan Border Police Make Progress, Slowly,” *Morning Edition*, NPR, March 5, 2009.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

region has found in Nabi Jan Molakheil.⁵⁶ Molakheil has launched a relatively successful recruitment campaign through cajoling and browbeating village elders and local strongmen to support the government in Kabul, but even so, he still only has half the border guards he needs.⁵⁷ Last year he threw out a third of his commanders after they were accused of corruption.⁵⁸ As training initiatives move forward, it will be important to take into account how power is eventually transferred over to local leaders, and how to support a security structure that is expensive and financially untenable without international support.

Yet, the problems that have beset Khost and Paktika provinces are not unique to those provinces bordering Pakistan as initiatives along the Iranian border have been beset with similar challenges. The problems faced by a UNODC-initiated project, “Strengthening Afghan-Iran Drug Border Control and Cross-Border Cooperation,” (SAID Initiative) are one such example. The SAID Initiative, which “aims to establish and equip border posts along the border between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, train personnel and introduce a basic criminal intelligence system,” has been confronted with a number of considerable obstacles.⁵⁹ The abysmal conditions in which the border police must operate contribute to high turnover, and low morale. Unequal pay between the police and army, poor working and living conditions, poor quality of food, and low levels of basic skills to help local staff carry out their programs have not only created low morale, but have also made them ineffective. High levels of staff turnover mean that valuable funds are wasted on training.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Thematic Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided to Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,” UNODC, Vol. 3, May 2008.

⁶⁰ UNODC noted that the average border officer remains in his post for only six months. See “Thematic Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided to Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.”

Adding to these problems, recruits inevitably have family connections or personal ties to drug traffickers and have no incentive to act against them.⁶¹ Such is the case in the border areas encompassed by Baluchistan, which straddles the Afghan, Pakistani, and Iranian borders and is primarily composed of ethnic-Baluchis. This region has long been a staging point for opium trafficking, and is notorious for being undeveloped, desolate, and lawless.⁶² Here, drug traffickers are notorious for monopolizing on tribal links to gain local support and protection from law enforcement agencies.⁶³

Nonetheless, UNODC has persisted in its efforts to curb the flow of opium into Iran. One recent project, which received funding approval just last year, aims to re-establish the rule of law in Afghanistan's Nimroz province. It is estimated that up to 40 percent of the illicit opium that leaves the country on an annual basis does so through Nimroz province.⁶⁴ In this region, area border police have pulled out because of a lack of support, manpower, equipment, training and facilities. The new UNODC program is working to provide infrastructure, such as a regional border security garrison to facilitate Afghan Border Police and other narcotics agencies in regional border enforcement activities.⁶⁵ The program calls for putting adequate numbers of

⁶¹ See "Thematic Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided to Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime." A slightly more promising approach might be one adopted by the "Integrated Border Control Project," which, among other things calls for the equipping of border control posts along the international border between Afghanistan and Iran. The governments of Iran and Afghanistan adopted a bilateral agreement for Iran to build 25 border posts within Afghan territory, and as of March 2007, 24 posts had been completed and were due to be handed over to the government of Afghanistan (outlined in "Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control," UNODC, April 2008). However, it is unclear what Iranian involvement is following construction.

⁶² See Calabrese, p.3.

⁶³ Tomas Muzik, *Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics: Iran 2004*, Silk Road Studies Program: SAIS-Johns Hopkins and Uppsala University (Accessed April 2, 2009).
http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/research/narcotics_crime/FctSheet/2004/Iran.pdf .

⁶⁴ "Thematic Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided to Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime."

⁶⁵ "Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control," UNODC, April 2008, p.5.

properly trained and equipped police officers in positions where they can interdict large numbers of international smugglers who are currently allowed to move freely throughout this area.⁶⁶

While promising, it is likely that this project will face similar obstacles to those confronted by the SAID Initiative.

Engaging Iran: Lessons, Challenges, and the Potential for Further Cooperation

Despite the myriad challenges that policing the Iran-Afghanistan border present, Iran is in a unique position to play a larger cooperative role in both curbing the cross-border opium trade and in working with its Golden Crescent neighbors to reduce demand. Having long-suffered the consequences of the negative externalities of serving as a transit country, the Iranian government has built up a significant amount of resolve to both curb opium addiction and to reduce the flow of drugs into Iran from Afghanistan. This build-up has come in the form of developing a relatively sophisticated counter-narcotics apparatus that is capable of devoting significant resources towards these dual missions.

In recent years, opium addiction and violence associated with it have presented a serious threat to Iran's public health and public security. An increase in opium availability has accompanied a spike in intravenous drug use, leading to an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate amongst intravenous drug users of 23 percent.⁶⁷ In addition, Iran's drug problem has been linked with an increase in criminal activities, and has strained its criminal justice system. Narcotics-related arrests have averaged almost 400,000 per year for the last several years⁶⁸ and UNODC reports

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Calabrese, p.6.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.7.

that Iran has the highest opiate consumption prevalence rate in the world with approximately 2.8 percent of the population aged 15-64 using opiates.⁶⁹

The Iranian government has developed a holistic approach to the country's drug problem, attempting to strike a balance between prevention, treatment, and law enforcement activities.⁷⁰ A number of prevention programs targeted at youth and high-risk groups have sprung up in consort with numerous and increasingly sophisticated drug treatment facilities.⁷¹ Referring to the Iranian government's shift away from its emphasis on supply reduction, one of Iran's senior government advisers on drug addiction noted, "the old way of considering drug abuse as a crime was not working. Drug users could never seek help so they could never be rehabilitated. The problem was just getting worse."⁷²

Iran has also invested significant resources into law enforcement activities that are focused on the supply-side, committing 12,000 anti-narcotics police and border guards to its 1845 km border with Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁷³ According to the Iranian government, more than 3,500 Iranian law enforcement officers have died in clashes with heavily armed drug traffickers over the last two decades, and several hundred die each year in an effort to curb the cross-border narcotics trade from Afghanistan.⁷⁴

As Iranian commitment to fight the opium trade has grown it has developed a fairly sophisticated counter-narcotics apparatus that might offer a useful model to Afghanistan and

⁶⁹ UNODC, "Nationwide Drug Prevention Measures in the Islamic Republic of Iran," March 29, 2009.

⁷⁰ Calabrese, p.10.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.11.

⁷² "Iran Blasts West for not Helping Iran in Drug Campaign," *FNA*, December 9, 2008. Accessed March 2 from <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8709190762> .

⁷³ "Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control," UNODC, April 2008, p.5.

⁷⁴ "West Links Drug War Aid to Iranian Nuclear Impasse," *Associated Press*, June 24, 2008. See also Lionel Beehner, "Afghanistan's Role in Iran's Drug Problem," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 14, 2006. Accessed March 2, 2009 at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11457> .

Pakistan. On the national level, Iran's Drug Control Headquarters (DCH) acts as the main policy-making body responsible for planning and monitoring counternarcotics campaigns. In addition, it coordinates drug-related activities of the police, customs, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), along with the Ministries of Intelligence, Security, Islamic Guidance and Education, and Health.⁷⁵ DCH's reach extends to the local level through several tactical headquarters established by the IRGC in the eastern part of the country and through the establishment of *Basij* units which, conduct counter-narcotics operations on the local level.⁷⁶

Another interesting and influential component in Iran's counter-narcotics apparatus is civil society. Civil society organizations in Iran have played an integral role in demand reduction and treatment initiatives. NGOs, for example, worked closely with the Ministry of Health and other government stakeholders to inform policy, which ultimately resulted in the creation of government-supported therapeutic centers; the founding of Narcotics Anonymous; and outpatient clinics.⁷⁷ Another example of NGO-influence is evidenced by the 2005 judicial branch decree, which supported needle exchange programs.⁷⁸ This unlikely development came about after NGOs targeted key religious figures and government officials to petition them to support such programs.⁷⁹

Despite sustained government resolve and numerous resources devoted to counter-narcotics, Iran still faces a significant problem both with domestic opium consumption and in curbing cross-border trade with Afghanistan. John Calabrese offers three possible explanations for this. First, he postulates that the enormity of the sheer volume of opium originating in

⁷⁵ *Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics: Iran 2004.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Calabrese, p.11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.13.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Afghanistan makes curbing the trade incredibly difficult, even if Iran has devoted resources to doing so. Second, he suggests that traffickers have increasingly been shifting towards small-scale shipments, enabling them to quickly adapt to Iranian counter-narcotics enforcement trends and to utilize alternative routes that are not heavily regulated. Third, Iran is an important conduit for opium traveling primarily to Europe, and increasingly to Africa and the Middle East. Calabrese argues that this creates a burgeoning heroin market that “traffickers are eager serve” and able to do so by taking advantages of weak links in the system.⁸⁰

The Iranian government is aware of the severity of its opium problem and the limitations that it has in combating it, and as a result is open and willing to engage in cooperative measures both regionally and internationally.⁸¹ This is evidenced by its active engagement with regional and international counter-narcotics programs. It is, for example, heavily engaged with UNODC in the region, and is an active participant in UNODC’s Triangular initiative, which aims to foster greater cooperation between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Under UNODC’s auspices it has engaged in projects such as the SAID Initiative and has hosted study tours focusing on drug control and HIV prevention for delegations from Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁸² In addition, Iran is a signatory to the Berlin Declaration on Counter-Narcotics, which provides for increased cooperation between Afghanistan and its six neighbors. Iran has also signed several narcotics control memoranda under the auspices of the Regional Gulf Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Organization.⁸³ Internationally, Iran is party to the Paris Pact, a mechanism

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.16.

⁸¹ Julian Borger, “Failed Afghan Drug Policy Harming Us, Says Iran,” *The Guardian*, September 11, 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/11/Iran.afghanistan/print> .

⁸² *Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics: Iran 2004*. See also, “Current Situation with Respect to Regional and Subregional Cooperation,” UNODC, Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, October 8, 2008, p.3-6.

⁸³ *Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics: Iran 2004*.

initiated by the French to engage 55 countries seriously affected by the traffic of opium and heroin produced in Afghanistan to “combine their wills and their countries’ efforts to step up national capabilities, develop regional partnerships and hence tackle all the aspects of this problem.”⁸⁴

Iran’s openness to international and regional cooperation, combined with its sophisticated counter-narcotics apparatus, places it in a unique position to be effective in not only curbing cross-border drug trade with Afghanistan, but also in developing a strategic vision for implementing demand reduction programs regionally and internationally. Yet, to date, greater support for engaging Iran has been limited due to the political and diplomatic sensitivity surrounding Iran’s development of nuclear weapons and stance towards Israel. As a result, it has received little financial support from the international community.⁸⁵ The US, for example, does not give cash to the UN to support Iran’s counter-narcotics efforts due to unilateral American sanctions.⁸⁶ This has led to some frustration within the Iranian government. Last December, the head of Iran’s Drug Control Headquarters, Brigadier General Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam noted that “Iran expects the EU and the world to do more than just thank Iran” for its work in intercepting the drug flow from Afghanistan.⁸⁷

While Iran certainly has a lot to offer in terms of regional cooperation, the potential for the United States to monopolize on this is uncertain. After nearly four decades of chilly relations, the United States took a positive step towards engaging Iran in March of 2009 in The Hague. Engaging Iran on the drug trade might serve as a testing ground for cooperation as the

⁸⁴ Paris Statement, Conference on Drug Routes from Central Asia to Europe, Paris, May 21-22, 2003.

⁸⁵ Michael Theodoulou, “Iran Warns of ‘Drug Tsunami’ if UN Cash for Patrols is Cut,” *The Scotsman*, June 28, 2008. <http://news.scotsman.com/world/Iran-warns-of-39drug-tsunami39.4218442.jp> .

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

United States weighs engaging Iran on issues such as seeking cooperation from Iran to serve as a transit route for U.S. supplies into Afghanistan. These further engagement and cooperation with Iran could be set back if Iran continues to pursue its nuclear program or to support Hamas.

In the presence of geopolitical obstacles, civil society organizations might be the best hope for facilitating further regional cooperation on the opium trade. In such an instance, UNODC might consider sponsoring programs that would pair up NGOs in Iran that are focused on demand reduction with similar-minded NGOs in Iran and Pakistan.

Challenges and Openings for Greater Cooperation with Pakistan

Pakistan has not shown the same kind of commitment as Iran to combating the opium trade, but it nonetheless remains an important actor. While Pakistan has agreed to cooperate regionally and internationally largely through programs initiated by UNODC, it has not provided much substantive support. It has, for example participated in several high-level meetings set in place by the Triangular Initiative, but the situation on the ground has not improved. Ambassador Said Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States, recently noted that while leaders at the top of the Pakistani and Afghan governments "see each other a lot," this "degree of engagement needs to be matched by delivery of services" from Pakistan, particularly from the military.⁸⁸

One explanation for a lack of substantive cooperation is an increasingly tense relationship between the Afghan government and the Pakistani military. Afghans have been angered by what they perceive to be Pakistan's support of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The contents of classified intelligence reports were leaked at the end of March 2009 in which Taliban strikes in

⁸⁸ Ambassador Said Jawad, Speech Given to Johns Hopkins-SAIS, "Afghanistan: Regional Cooperation is Key to Winning the War on Terror," April 24, 2009.

Afghanistan were explicitly linked to Pakistani support.⁸⁹ While this comes as little surprise to officials and experts familiar with the region, this clear linkage only creates a disincentive for further cross-border cooperation and fuels mistrust and suspicion.

This is only exacerbated by the complex dynamics along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. To begin with, the Afghan government does not recognize the British-drawn Durand line that separates the two countries. Moreover, the Durand line cuts through the Pashtun belt, resulting in area in which tribes are not bound by the border, and therefore maintain close linkages on both sides of it.⁹⁰

The construction and subsequent failure of the construction of a “Biometric Border Control” system at the Chaman border crossing illustrates the challenges presented by the presence of complex border politics. Funded through a bilateral agreement between Canada and Pakistan, the “Biometric Border Control” system involved a computer card reader that was proposed by Pakistan to monitor people moving in and out of Pakistan.⁹¹ The system was established in early 2008, but caused such discontent amongst those living along the border in Afghanistan, who found that the system no longer enabled them to walk freely between their tribal family members in the contested border area.⁹² Afghan nationals also refused to recognize the system, and the UNODC report on the matter states that Afghan dissatisfaction with the system was so great “that Pakistani nationals who used this system were threatened and

⁸⁹ Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, “Afghan Strikes by Taliban Get Pakistan Help, U.S. Aides Say,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/asia/26tribal.html?_r=2&ref=todayspaper

⁹⁰ Walter Andersen, “Afghanistan: Interaction of External Actors and Domestic Politics,” (Class Lecture for Comparative Political and Economic Development in South Asia, SAIS – Johns Hopkins, April 1, 2009).

⁹¹ UNODC, “Mid-Term Evaluation Report on Pakistan Border Management Project PAK/J61,” UNODC, February 13, 2009, p.17.

⁹² “Chaman Border Crossing Closed,” *Dawn*, January 11, 2007. <http://www.dawn.com/2007/01/12/top2.htm>

punished.”⁹³ As a result, the use of the physical structure and system has been discontinued even though it holds the potential to be more rigorous in monitoring cross-border activity.⁹⁴

While there are clear political, historical, and demographic explanations for the dissatisfaction with a system of this nature, the Pakistani government showed a great deal of weakness by backing down from its support of this measure.

Regional and cross-border cooperation on the opium trade has also been hindered by the fact that Pakistan’s counter-narcotics apparatus is clunky and inefficient. In Pakistan, there are no fewer than six agencies and components responsible for counter-narcotics efforts. These components span three different ministries and all have competing mandates, and a convoluted chain of command. For example, the Frontier Corps (FC), is directly under the Ministry of Interior and is responsible for enforcing laws associated with counter-terrorism, narcotics, weapons, and human trafficking. Yet, the FC is given its powers of enforcement by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) directly under the Ministry of Narcotics Control (MNC) and in its own right is responsible for dismantling drug trafficking.⁹⁵ This is just one instance in which the chain of command and reporting channels are unclear and confusing. Under these circumstances, intelligence sharing amongst the various counter narcotics units is incredibly difficult, and also seriously cripples Pakistan’s ability to mount a coordinated inter-agency response to the opium trade originating in Afghanistan. It seems clear that a more streamlined counter-narcotics structure will be necessary if Pakistan is going to play a more meaningful role as a regional cooperator in this regard.

⁹³ “Mid-Term Evaluation Report on Pakistan Border Management Project PAK/J61,” p.17.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

On a more basic level, Pakistan, unlike Iran, has not developed the same kind of government resolve to combat the opium trade. This can partially be explained by the fact that Pakistan has not been hit nearly as hard by the negative externalities of serving as a transit country for the opium trade. Yet, there is evidence that domestic drug abuse is an increasing problem in Pakistan. While Pakistan's domestic drug problem is not of the same scale as Iran's, it is still troublesome. A 2006 National Assessment Report on Problem Drug Use in Pakistan estimates there are approximately 628,000 opiate drug users in Pakistan or 0.7 percent of the population. Moreover, the composition of drug abuse has shifted, with the number of intravenous drug users doubling to 125,000 since 2000.⁹⁶ This portends a public health threat as intravenous drug use increases the risk for HIV/AIDS transmission. If this trend persists, HIV/AIDS could become a more widespread problem.⁹⁷

While troubling, this trend provides a potential opening for both cooperation and a reassessment of Pakistan's counter-narcotics strategy and capabilities. Civil Society organizations should become actively engaged in lobbying local and central government leaders to educate them and pressure them address the country's growing drug problem. UNODC, through its office in Pakistan, could play a potentially useful role in this effort, identifying NGOs that might be able to carry out this message, and working with them to effectively target the right kinds of leaders.

Civil society organizations in combination with international actors such as the United States should strongly encourage Pakistan to conduct a comprehensive review of its counter-narcotics apparatus with the goal of empowering a central coordinating body, much like DCH in Iran. It should also work on improving reporting structures, and eliminate redundancies in

⁹⁶ "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan," p.15.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

operations and the chain of command. This way, Pakistan could play a more fruitful role in cooperating and information sharing with border police across the border in Afghanistan *and* Iran.

It is likely that mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan will persist, but initiating small-scale programs to enhance cooperation in curbing the cross-border opium trade has the potential to initiate positive developments in the relations between the two countries. Iran has already offered to train Afghanistan's border police, but such an offer might be extended to include Pakistan as well.⁹⁸ If Iran were to train Afghan and Pakistani border police simultaneously this could potentially boost both Pakistani and Afghan capacity to police the border while building mutual trust. A similar model might be employed with civil society organizations in which Iranian NGOs that are devoted to drug treatment and demand reduction might offer training programs to similar-minded NGOs from Afghanistan and Pakistan on how to lobby religious leaders and policymakers. Opportunities such as this should be sought out and facilitated by the international community.

Cooperation with Central Asia: A Model for Regional Cooperation

In stark contrast to Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics perhaps offer the greatest potential to play a sustained and cooperative role in curbing the Afghan opium trade, and have been relatively innovative in the projects initiated thus far. Weak law enforcement and lack of intelligence sharing are and have been major obstacles in initiating effective policing of the area along the Afghan border with Central Asia, but several high-level initiatives have been working to change that.⁹⁹ UNODC, for example, is working to establish a series of Border Liaison

⁹⁸ Ben Farmer, "Iran Offers to Train Afghan Police," *Telegraph*, April 13, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/5149148/Iran-offers-to-train-Afghan-police.html>

⁹⁹ "Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan," p.4.

Offices (BLOs) along the Afghan border as well as along Central Asian borders with Iran and China.¹⁰⁰ These BLOs are geared toward increasing the capabilities of border guards and other law enforcement officers posted in these areas through cross-border communication, coordination, and improved information-sharing systems.¹⁰¹ An offshoot of this program is the establishment of mobile interdiction teams (MOBITs), which are set up to reinforce the activities of the BLOs by providing additional capacity to secure Central Asia's borders.¹⁰²

In addition, UNODC has initiated the establishment of the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) which is geared towards increasing information exchange across borders by creating a central intelligence database which will allow BLOs and MOBITs, for example, to process crime analysis and intelligence.¹⁰³ It is the hope that CARICC will eventually become "the regional focal point for communication, analysis and exchange of operational information in 'real time' on cross-border crime, as well as a centre for the organization and coordination of joint operations."¹⁰⁴ CARICC, while not fully operational, has already served as a key coordinating body for law enforcement activities and projects in Central Asia, including Operation TARCET, which is aimed at intercepting precursor chemicals being smuggled into Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵

These initiatives are a clear step in the right direction, but there will need to be sustained financial support and technical assistance from UNODC and the international community to

¹⁰⁰ "Current Situation with Respect to Regional and Subregional Cooperation," UNODC, Subcommittee on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, October 8, 2008, p.8. For more information on the organizational structure of BLOs see "Securing Central Asia's Border with Afghanistan," UNODC, September 2007, pp.7-8.

¹⁰¹ "Current Situation with Respect to Regional and Subregional Cooperation," p.8.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Securing Central Asia's Border with Afghanistan," p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ "Current Situation with Respect to Regional and Subregional Cooperation," p.9.

ensure long-term success. Currently, projects to strengthen Central Asia's border are funded by multiple donors, undoubtedly leading to improvements in border management.¹⁰⁶ The support received so far is a testament to what is achievable when multiple countries and multi-lateral institutions unite around a common mission. It is this sort of unity, commitment, and innovation that will be required in further engagement and cooperative measures between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Conclusion and Policy Prescriptions

There is no doubt that combating the opium trade is a daunting task. It seems clear that just as Afghanistan's neighbors have played a role in facilitating the opium trade, they are also in a unique and important position to curb it. Moreover, the history of opium trade in the region has followed a pattern that should not be discredited: opium cultivation has never been entirely eliminated; only shifted to the country and regional where governance is the weakest. What has also become clear is that even when cultivation shifts to a neighboring country, as happened when large-scale cultivation shifted to Afghanistan from Iran in the mid-1950s, the problems affiliated with the drug trade have never been entirely eliminated. Given this trend, elimination of the opium trade will require sustained regional cooperation that targets reduction of *both* supply and demand.

First and foremost on the supply side, a significant investment will need to be made to reduce opium cultivation in Afghanistan. With opium making up a significant portion of the Afghan economy and with thousands of farmers relying on opium cultivation for income in the absence of meaningful alternatives, this will be no easy task. This will likely involve a heavy

¹⁰⁶ Donors include the European Commission, OSCE, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, United Kingdom, and the United States. See "Securing Central Asia's Border with Afghanistan," UNODC, September 2007, p.6.

and long-term commitment from the international community to implement development projects that will enable alternative means for economic survival to emerge. Such development projects will likely take years and will also require a heavy security presence as projects of this nature are likely to encounter significant resistance at first.

In consort with initiatives to reduce opium cultivation, there will need to be sustained commitment to strengthening Afghanistan's borders. The CARICC model should be emulated or expanded to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. In addition, greater effort should be made to streamline the counter-narcotics apparatuses in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as this will facilitate greater cooperation and will increase the likelihood of effective coordination through a CARICC-like initiative.

The international community and civil society organizations throughout Central Asia and the Golden Crescent should mobilize around reducing demand for opiates. To facilitate this, the Paris Pact Initiative and the UNODC should use existing structures to develop programs to assist countries in implementing demand reduction initiatives. This is a daunting task, but UNODC could start off by targeting countries where opiate use is most prevalent, and it could at least use its knowledge and resources to make concrete recommendations to the governments of those countries on potential ways to reduce demand.

At the same time, the international community, through the help of UNODC, should look for ways to empower civil society organizations throughout the Golden Crescent. Iran's experience with civil society groups demonstrates that they can play an integral role in influencing religious clerics and government officials to adopt progressive policies that target demand reduction. This model could be copied, and it could even serve as the basis for greater regional cooperation in which civil society groups from Iran might be paired up with civil

society groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate this process. The other benefit of this model is that it has the potential to facilitate cooperation while avoiding some of the roadblocks that are presented by tensions that exist in government-to-government cooperation, especially between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

While it is the hope that regional cooperation will eventually be able to occur without the aid of the international community, it is likely that sustained funding from international actors will be necessary for some time. Given this reality, it will be important to continue to develop ways to streamline so that efforts are coordinated and priorities are agreed upon. The Paris Pact Initiative has made some good headway in advancing this through its launching of the Automated Donor Assistance Database (ADAM), which is “designed to automatically provide partners with essential information in order to avoid the duplication of activities and projects, as well as coordinating donor assistance.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, greater attention needs to be given to coordination with U.S. military efforts, and other international bodies that have indicated a willingness to offer support.

¹⁰⁷ Paris Pact Initiative Web Site. <https://www.paris-pact.net/>.

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