

Afghanistan Drug War

By – Praagya Singh



Harvesting raw opium at a poppy field in the Zhari district of Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

Picture Credits: Allauddin Khan/Associated Press

Afghanistan is the global leader in opium production, with a thriving poppy cultivation which helps produce opium, the main ingredient for heroin. Afghanistan supplies 90 per cent of the world's heroin; regarded to be the cause of tens of thousands of deaths every year. This is damaging Afghan social fabric as well as growing number of Afghans are getting addicted to narcotics.

The issue of narcotics production and consumption is worsening in Afghanistan which threatens security and hinders the development of the country. A nationwide survey has revealed that there are as many as 2.9 million drug users in the country. Heroin trafficking is also blamed for fueling the country's insurgency.

The high rates of unemployment in the country contributes to growing numbers of drug addicts in the country. Farmers poor condition has forced them to cultivate opium as they are able to earn five times the profit through opium trade. The Afghan government has adopted no serious measures to eradicate narcotics trade, especially in rural areas. Helmand province continues to be Afghanistan's largest poppy cultivating province, owing to a combination of Taliban advances and rampant corruption, with both sides, the Government and Taliban battling over the drug trade. The Taliban largely controls the areas, which produce huge amounts of opium and heroin. The drug cartels and the Taliban today are seen as being very closely intertwined.



It is spring that determines how a year turns out, according to an Afghan proverb. And if the Helmand poppy fields this spring are any indication, the Taliban will have a very good year.

The Taliban earns huge profits from the narcotics trade. They trade drugs in return to weapons. Taliban men guard poppy fields from police raids; in return they take 10 per cent profits from farmers.

The United Nations, which has described the Taliban behavior as “more like godfathers than a government in waiting.” It’s been credibly reported that the insurgency extracts a large share of its expense from the narcotics trade, which is estimated to the tune of roughly US \$3 billion a year within Afghanistan. Above all, the harvest season becomes a Taliban recruitment drive, with thousands of men coming in from all over the country driven by a lack of job opportunities.

The war in Afghanistan is not suffering a war of ideology, it is going through a war of financial benefits. The poppies support the Taliban financially. The commanders of the Taliban stuff their pockets with cash. Once they receive the cash that makes their stomachs oily, they prepare themselves for fighting.

Furthermore corruption in the government is adding fuel to fire. The police take bribes from farmers, few hundred dollars per hectare to not destroy their poppy crops. General Dawlatzai stated: *“It’s not going to change until we do something about the political corruption, which is being carried out from Kabul, and involves everyone: elders, parliament members, politicians, all of them.”* Drawing attention to the police as an institution he lamented *“The police, especially, are not a national police. They are not fighting for the benefit of their country, but for their patrons.”* Mullah Majid Akhonzada, the Deputy Provincial Chairman, said that all that Helmand got from Kabul was empty promises, as the Taliban gain more and more territory. *“The fact is, nothing has been done except filling their own pockets,”* he said. *“That’s all they do.”* Afghan government listed 22 national priorities but still they haven’t taken seriousness of the narcotics drug trade. In a documentary entitled *‘101 East’*, on Afghanistan’s drug trade, Gul Mohammad Shukhran, Director, Drug Control, Kandahar opines that with little funding, from Afghan government he spends much of his days sitting idle in his office. He says he feels frustrated and let down by the national and international community.

Despite US \$8.6bn (£6.5bn) spent by the US alone since 2001 to fight Afghan opium, the drug's business continues to grow.

The value of Afghan-produced opiates doubled in 2016, from US \$1.56 billion in 2015 to US \$3.02 billion, according to the UN. The hub of the trade is Helmand. Foreign-funded eradication programs have now been all but disbanded.

The US \$14.6m “food zone” project funded by the US and UK to distribute fertiliser and seeds to farmers ended years ago. Nearly all attempts to introduce alternative crops have failed. Drug seizures are equally inefficient. *“Generally, the pattern is that areas under Taliban see more cultivation,”* said Devashish Dhar, international project coordinator with the UN’s drug and crime agency, UNODC. New agricultural technology such as solar panels has accelerated cultivation by reducing costs of pumps and generators for irrigation. Taliban fuels the narcotics drugs trade, *“If there is No Taliban, there will be no poppy.”*

The world's biggest opium producer has an estimated 2.9 million adult drug users but only 123 treatment centers. Afghanistan has converted the former US military camp, NATO military base in Kabul into the largest rehabilitation Centre in the country, serving mostly homeless addicts. There are usually around 600 patients in the Centre.

The Afghan ministries of counter-narcotics, public health and economy have joined together in the initiative to provide treatment for drug addicts at the camp.

Activists say the government's campaign is a good way to help limit the production and smuggling of drugs across the country. It may also save some lives.

Bibliography and References:

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/world/asia/taliban-afghan-poppy-harvest-opium.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FDrug%20Trafficking%20in%20Afghanistan>
2. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2015/05/afghanistans-war-drugs-150508104158816.html>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/16/afghanistan-heroin-trade-trail-of-addiction-treatment-opium-helmand>
4. Afghanistan Drug war 101 EAST by ALJAZERA.