FROM DISENGAGEMENT TO REGIONAL OPIUM WAR? TOWARDS A COUNTER-NARCOTICS SURGE IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

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Abstract:
The security transition process in Afghanistan (2011-2014) will in many ways be a game changer for the international community's role in the country. As foreign troops are pulled out, many security and counter-insurgency related resources and infrastructure will disappear. Having less foreign boots on the ground is likely to decrease the commitment and investment of the international community in the broader development process of Afghanistan, especially as countries are faced with budget cuts and other political priorities at home. This could spell disaster for international support to Afghanistan's counter-narcotics policy, which partly relies on military infrastructure. Without the military footprint of the international community, it is also likely that there will be less political clout as well as limited donor spending to increase the impact of Afghanistan's counter-narcotics policy. This will especially affect Pakistan, which has a history of poppy cultivation and currently accounts for about 40 percent of the volume of drugs, trafficked out of Afghanistan. Without a strong increase in civilian counter-narcotics efforts in the region – a much needed *counter-narcotics surge* to prevent international disengagement – a turf war for control over the illegal opium industry could break out in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan following a disruption of the illegal opium economy's power structure after 2014.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, tribal areas, Central Asia, Taliban, insurgency, terrorism, illicit, drugs, cultivation, trafficking, opium, heroin, NATO, ISAF, drug policy, security, military, transition.

Resumen:
El actual proceso de transición en Afganistán (2011-2014) va a ser en muchas formas un "game changer" para el rol de la comunidad internacional. Cuando las tropas extranjeras salgan del país buena parte de los recursos dedicados a la contrainsurgencia van a desaparecer. Con menos tropas sobre el terreno es probable que disminuya la inversión internacional en Afganistán, especialmente de aquellos países que haciendo frente a recortes y que están asumiendo otros compromisos internacionales. Con menor presencia militar de la comunidad internacional es probable que haya menos influencia política así como menos ayuda para la política de antinarcóticos en Afganistán. Esto, en particular, afectará también a Pakistán donde se produce el 40% del opio que luego transcurre por Afganistán. Sin un incremento importante del esfuerzo civil de lucha contra narcóticos puede llegar a declararse una lucha por el control del tráfico en las zonas fronterizas entre Pakistán y Afganistán.

Palabras clave: *Afganistán, Pakistán, Áreas Tribales, Asia Central, Talibán, insurgencia, terrorismo, ilícito, drogas, cultivo, tráfico, opio, heroína, OTAN, ISAF, política anti-droga, seguridad, ejército, transición.*

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1. Introduction

This article aims to raise questions and spark an in-depth debate about the current status of the illegal opium economy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the potential risks the security transition process holds for these two countries. In recent history, counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan has often been a neglected or under-prioritised issue area, especially because of bigger political concerns such as support for the Mujahedeen in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), the fight against terrorists and insurgents since 2001, or attempts to create stability through the support of specific local tribes, strongmen or warlords.

One could argue that in the past three decades, counter-narcotics policy has only been a priority between 1988 and 1991[3] (after the defeat of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan had become imminent and before the US disengagement from Afghanistan) and since 2005 when the nexus between the different Taliban insurgency groups and the illegal opium economy became more apparent.[4] However, the international community's renewed interest in solving the complex problem of Afghanistan's illegal opium economy is likely to decrease once foreign troops have been pulled out from Afghanistan and development cooperation spending is cut.

The role of foreign troops in Afghanistan's counter-narcotics policy has been indirect, consisting mainly of intelligence gathering, technical assistance and coordination of logistical operations, but the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has recently stepped up its efforts and expanded its role in this field. Nevertheless, the withdrawal of most foreign forces by the year 2014 will have an enormous impact on the international resources available for Afghanistan, and leaves a power vacuum in strategically important areas where poppy cultivation and opium production can further increase. Even though international counter-narcotics efforts have largely failed[5] in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of human and financial resources from Afghanistan in the near future, portends of even worse scenarios for the Afghans and neighbouring countries in particular, and the global population in general.

Therefore, before the transition end date of 2014 has been reached, a serious long-term commitment of the international community should be established that goes beyond the current regional fora and instruments that have been developed. Part of this renewed and reinforced commitment to counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan should be financed by countries that can rebalance some of their (financial) contribution following the end of their military engagement with Afghanistan. Rebalancing can also take place within counter-narcotics spending, to shift resources to more cost-efficient strategies such as long-term development and addressing the public health implications (and causes) of the Afghan opium problem.

The authors call for a solid post-transition boost in civilian efforts including a significant counter-narcotics and rural development pillar. This entails a shift from a military to a non-military approach when it comes to the international community's support role in

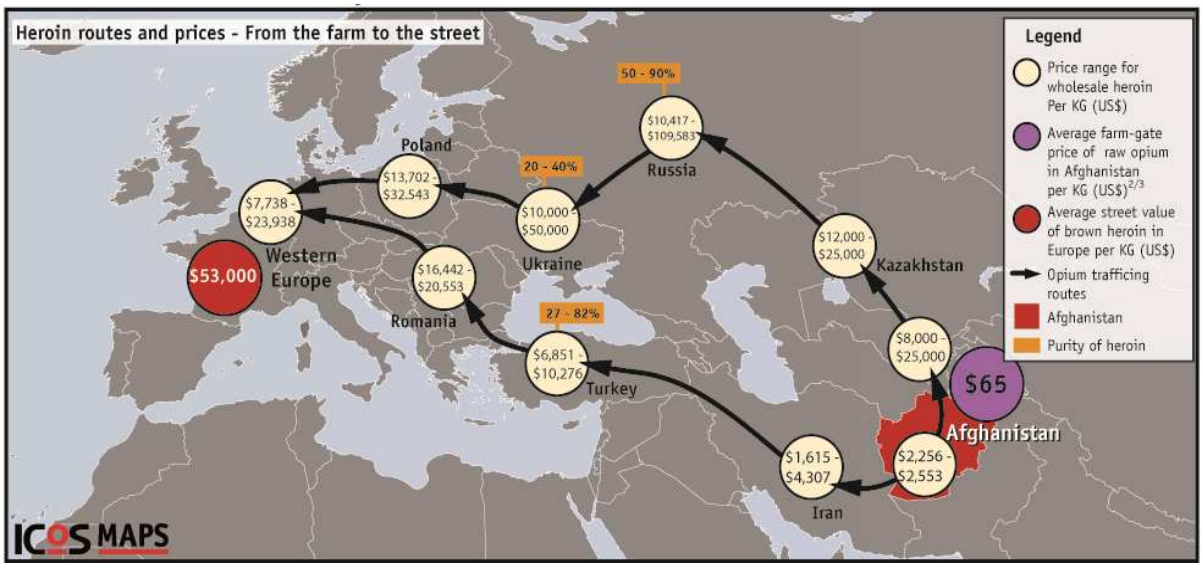
[3] In 1988 USAID launched its first counter-narcotics programme in Afghanistan.

[4] The Taliban insurgent groups not only grew in strength after 2005 but their presence and control increasingly became concentrated in the main poppy growing areas of Afghanistan.

[5] The failure of counter-narcotics efforts since 2003 is understood here as the inability to significantly and structurally decrease poppy cultivation and opium production in the years after. Appendix I provides evidence for this failure in the form of strongly fluctuating (and increasing) levels of poppy cultivation with no direct negative correlation between cultivation levels and the crop eradication policy.

counter-narcotics. At the moment, the support role of the international community depends on the presence of NATO-ISAF forces as a containing factor. Although difficult to substantiate, the assumption here is that the presence of foreign forces in the main poppy growing areas has not created the conditions to structurally decrease poppy cultivation and opium trade, but has at least helped to contain the industry and prevented a violent turf war to control it.

This role will automatically disappear[6] following the 2014 transition, and needs to be replaced by a reinforced civilian commitment in the poppy growing areas to better assist the Afghan government in its counter-narcotics efforts. The focus should especially be on alternative livelihoods and broader sustainable rural development within a regional context including investment in Pakistan, especially in Baluchistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP since 2010 renamed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), and other neighbouring countries where illegal poppy cultivation can take place.[7] Military disengagement can lead to further instability and insecurity, creating the perfect conditions for an increase in transnational crime, poppy cultivation and drug trafficking in these areas.



Map 1: Based on UNODC and EMCDDA figures from 2009, this map shows the huge mark-up value along the drug trafficking chain, excluding the route through Pakistan (source: International Council on Security and Development (ICOS)).

[6] The indirect impact the presence of NATO-ISAF forces has in terms of improving the security situation in which alternative livelihood programmes and other development projects operate will also end in 2014.

[7] The cross-border effects of the illegal opium economy on other neighbouring countries such as Iran and the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are equally important but fall outside of the scope of this article.

Map 2: The key border areas that could be further destabilised as a result of worsened law and order on the Afghan side of the border following the 2014 transition[8]

Part one of this article analyses the current situation in the run-up to the crucial year of 2014. Part two then focuses on the situation in Pakistan, while part three looks at the regional and cross-border dynamics that affect both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Part four, subsequently, discusses the role of NATO in counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan since 2003. Part five looks at broader regional and international initiatives that have been put in place to address the Afghan opium problem and its cross-border effects. Lastly, part six discusses a (worst-case) scenario in which the withdrawal of the foreign troops by the year 2014 will spark an opium war in Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan.

2. From Poppy Cultivation Status Quo to an Uncertain Post-2014 Political Environment

Afghanistan and Pakistan are linked in many ways, but one of the most negative manifestations of their bilateral relationship is the problem of the illegal opium economy that

[8] The map is a construction by the authors, based on an empty map licensed under *Creative Commons*.

they share. In 2010 Afghanistan produced an estimated 74 percent of the world's raw opium, which accounted for 63 percent of the world's total cultivation.[9] A substantial part of the opium produced in Afghanistan is smuggled through Pakistan, as will be explained in more detail below in part two of this article. Before reaching structurally low levels of opium production in Pakistan, the country had witnessed considerable opium production in the 1970s. Production was only 90 metric tonnes in 1971 but reached a record high of 800 tonnes in 1979.[10] While Pakistan switched from being a substantial opium producer[11] to a trafficking country, this shift could be reversed if counter-narcotics policy inside Afghanistan were to become more successful or if the security transition process changes the power structure of the illegal opium economy, its cultivation and production centers and the power dynamics along the major trafficking routes into Pakistan.

Afghanistan, the center of global heroin manufacture, has surplus stocks in opium or morphine form, both inside the country and along major trafficking routes, which are equivalent to 10,000-12,000 tons.[12] Furthermore, the country also has approximately 300-500 laboratories in operation with an approximate output of 380-400 tons of heroin per year – more than enough to meet an annual global demand of an estimated 375 tons of heroin.[13] These statistics become all the more relevant when juxtaposed with the fact that 97 percent of the Afghan economy is tied to international military and donor spending.[14]

Behind these numbers also lies the subtext of addiction among a global population, including Afghans and their neighbours. Opiate consumption has sharply increased over the last decade in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.[15] Whenever the metrics for measuring the worth of Afghan opium trade are used, the narrative of addiction, suffering, and instability created at societal level is almost lost. Thus, it is not only the Afghan economy that is at stake, but also local and global populations. Despite these high stakes, the Afghan opium problem has so far been overshadowed by international concerns about terrorism, insurgency or the political stability of Afghanistan. Since 2002 it has always been on the international political agenda but never among the highest priority issue areas.

Ten years of the international community's presence in Afghanistan has failed to address the scourge of the illegal opium economy and the huge negative impact it has had on the broader development and security processes taking place in the country. In fact, the problem has grown in size parallel to the increased military presence of international forces since 2001. At the moment, illicit poppy cultivation levels have stabilised in Afghanistan at around 123,000-130,000 hectares,[16] confirming that the counter-narcotics strategy since 2003 has not produced a sustainable reduction despite the billions of euros and dollars poured into

[9] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011): *World Drug Report 2011*, New York, UNODC, Table 13, p. 60.
[10] "Opium. Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy", *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[11] By the late 1970s, Pakistan had become a leading producer country, following increased demand for opium and opium derivatives in Europe and a reduction of poppy cultivation in Turkey, Mexico, Thailand, Burma and Laos. See: Murphy, Jack W.: 'Implementation of International Narcotics Control: The Struggle against Opium Cultivation in Pakistan', *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (1983), pp. 203-204.
[12] UNODC (2011): *The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 5.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] "Afghans fear for economy after US leaves", *Los Angeles Times*, 19 August 2011, at http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/19/world/la-fg-afghan-economy-20110819. All online sources of this article were last checked on May 8, 2012.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] UNODC (2011): *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011. Summary findings*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 1.

alternative livelihoods, general rural development, forced crop eradication, interdiction and broader law enforcement efforts.[17] Between 2002 and the end of 2011, the US alone allocated USD 5.67 billion (€4.32 billion) for counter-narcotics programmes in Afghanistan.[18] This means that funding alone is not going to solve the Afghan opium problem after 2014. It is not about 'doing more of the same', but instead about refocusing the international community's efforts towards development and public health policies. That means investing in more cost-efficient and impactful policies, thus 'doing more with less' resources after the transition, and moving towards a more regional counter-narcotics approach.

For 2012, the poppy cultivation status quo seems to continue as poppy cultivation levels in Helmand province are expected to remain stable, and expected decreases in Kandahar province will probably be offset by increases in Badakhshan, Badghis, Farah, Ghor, Herat, Kunar, Nangarhar and Uruzgan,[19] Appendix I shows the levels of cultivation and crop eradication since 2002. While illicit poppy cultivation levels have remained stable for about three years, opium production again increased by 61 percent in 2011.[20] Both the relative stabilisation at high levels of the illicit opium economy and, paradoxically, its volatile nature are a cause of great concern, especially in the uncertain political environment in Afghanistan leading up to the security transition year of 2014.[21] At the end of that year, the withdrawal of most foreign forces should have been completed. At the same time, presidential elections will take place, adding further uncertainty to the political course of the country. Because of this unstable political environment, poppy cultivation levels may well rise in coming years, partly because of the fact that sustainable, profitable alternatives are still scarce but also because of the withdrawal of foreign military forces from the main poppy growing areas in southern Afghanistan and expected parallel decreases in international spending.

3. Pakistan's Role in the Illegal Drug Trade

According to the most recent estimates, Pakistan's opiate market reported at least USD 1.2 billion (€0.91 billion) in profits in 2009, accounting for both transnational trafficking and domestic consumption.[22] Pakistan's geographical proximity with Afghanistan places it in a vulnerable position in terms of trafficking of Afghan drugs, and exposing the local population to the possibilities of HIV infection and drug addiction. Data shows that while world demand for opium and heroin is quite stable, demand has been increasing in countries along trafficking routes, bringing with it increased health risks, including higher rates of HIV infection.[23] According to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

[17] For more analysis on the lack of Afghanistan's counter-narcotics policy, see: Van Ham, Peter and Kamminga Jorrit: 'Poppies for Peace: Reforming Afghanistan's Opium Industry', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Winter 2006-2007), pp. 69-81.
[18] United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (2012): *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, p. 53.
[19] UNODC (2012): *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012. Opium Risk Assessment for all Regions (Phase 1&2)*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 2.
[20] Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011, *op. cit*., p.1.
[21] The security transition is the process in which the responsibility for Afghanistan's security and stability is gradually handed over to the Afghan government and its security forces.
[22] UNODC (2011): *World Drug Report 2011*, New York, UNODC, p. 83.
[23] UNODC (2009): *Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: the transnational threat of Afghan Opium*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 1.

(UNODC), of the 100-105 tons of Afghan heroin that is trafficked through Pakistan, at least 40-50 tons is consumed in Pakistan annually.[24]

Sharing a 2,640 kilometre (1640 miles) porous border with Afghanistan, the country reports at least 40 percent of Afghan heroin and cannabis passing through its borders to the rest of the world.[25] Pakistan's current role in the Afghan drug trade does not lie in the massive cultivation of opium (as yet), but in offering a trafficking route for Afghan cannabis and heroin. Since 2006, illicit cultivation of opium poppy has remained below 2,000 hectares in Pakistan and is reported to occur in the Khyber district of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), and parts of Baluchistan and Sindh.[26]

Although poppy cultivation has been kept under control in Pakistan, it is the sixth largest source of cannabis resin in the world, while Afghanistan is the second largest source, after Morocco.[27] Pakistan also ranked second (16 percent) after Spain, as the country that reported most seizures of cannabis resin as a percentage of the world total in 2009; the share of seized cannabis resin originating from Afghanistan is purported to be 98 percent.[28] Furthermore, over the period from 1999 to 2009, 41 percent of so-called 'significant individual drug seizures' reported by Pakistan in this period involved cannabis resin.[29]

Pakistan also smuggles precursor chemicals required for the processing of opium to morphine and heroin to Afghanistan. Acetic anhydride and ammonium chloride (locally known as *navsagar*), the main precursor chemicals required for processing of opium to morphine and heroin are smuggled into Afghanistan mainly from Pakistan via Karachi or other seaports on Baluchistan's coast and cross over to the southern Afghan provinces of Nimroz, Helmand and Kandahar.[30] Although there is a regional programme in precursor control to stem the flow of precursor chemicals to Afghanistan, its results have been only recent and are still limited.[31] In general, the precursor control strategy often suffers from a lack of information about the precursor trafficking routes and border crossings, from inefficient law enforcement apparatuses and under-prioritisation of fighting precursor trafficking.

4. Regional Dynamics: Afghanistan and Pakistan as Integral Parts of the same Problem

The problem of illicit drug cultivation, production and trafficking in Afghanistan cannot be fully understood without looking at its regional context. The close ties, economic links and social interaction among people across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border play an important role in the drug trade. Transnational organized crime and trafficking groups, with ethnic, tribal or family links on both sides of the border, as well as a *diaspora* along the trafficking route are notable players who benefit from the drug trade.[32] The relationship between the drug trade

[24] *Ibid*., pp. 1, 9.
[25] "World Drug Report 2011", *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 190.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 203.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 200.
[30] "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: the transnational threat of Afghan Opium", *op. cit.*, p. 71.
[31] UNODC (2009): *Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control*, Vienna, UNODC, p. 2.
[32] "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: the transnational threat of Afghan Opium", *op. cit.*, p. 18.

and the violence in southern Afghanistan (regardless of the direction of causality, whether the conflict fuels the drug trade, or the drug trade fuels the conflict), is nourished by the tribal linkages in both drug trafficking and Taliban[33] networks.

Conflict, tribal networks and the drug trade are strongly interconnected in southern and eastern Afghanistan, and this interaction extends into Pakistan's tribal areas.[34] The opium trading networks in these border areas had come into existence as a by-product of the international support for the Mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Tribe and clan have traditionally claimed the loyalties of populations across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border first, while state authority at best comes second. The border regions of both countries consist of impoverished populations with poor social indicators, making their inhabitants susceptible to the pressures of criminal or insurgent groups through either direct or indirect threats of violence.[35]Furthermore, while geographical proximity to Afghanistan is a major factor in creating trafficking routes via Baluchistan, FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, conflict as a variable cannot be discounted. Conflict in present day Baluchistan is a multi-layered phenomenon. Sectarian groups, Taliban factions, armed nationalist groups, organized criminal groups, military, and intelligence agencies act in disparate ways, but contribute to conflict in the province at different scales. Unpacking Baluchistan's complexity is not an easy task. There are different variables to consider: there are strong tribal connections between Pashtuns across both sides of the border and into neighboring FATA; centers of power have shifted from tribal elders to those who have control over guns and money, and those who are attuned to the voices of the common people[36]; the long and porous border shared with Afghanistan and Iran that is difficult to control due to insufficient resources available to law enforcement agencies and low personnel numbers; and some Pashtun areas in Baluchistan are reportedly host to Taliban, Al Qaeda and other powerful militant groups.

Besides, the amount of profits generated from drug trafficking via Baluchistan makes it tempting for the trade to continue or prosper further. UNODC estimates that Pakistan's opiate market was worth USD 1.2 billion in 2009, with most of the profits benefitting extremist groups in FATA and criminal groups in Baluchistan.[37] Although the non-state actors are not acting in unison at present[38], it is not far from the realm of possibility to do so, with the temptation of controlling natural resources of Baluchistan, uniting to fight a common enemy, i.e., or the state of Pakistan, or simply to reap the profits from an extremely lucrative drug trade.

Similarly, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and FATA have been under duress since the *War on Terror* due to military operations by Pakistan's military against the Taliban, and the drone attacks carried out by the United States. In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, just as in parts of the tribal

[33] In this article, the term Taliban either refers to the Taliban regime during the 1990s (1995-2001) or to the loosely connected but often very diverse and decentralised groups of insurgents that are currently trying to destabilize Afghanistan. The authors acknowledge that behind the abstract term "Taliban" there is a very complex and rapidly changing reality.

[34] "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: the transnational threat of Afghan Opium", *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[35] Shelly, Louise I, and Hussain, Nazia: "Narco Trafficking in Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Areas and Implications for Security", in "Narco-Jihad: Drug Trafficking and Security in Afghanistan and Pakistan, National Bureau of Asian Research", *NBR Special Report #20* (December 2009), p. 26.

[36] An opinion of the authors based on conversations in 2011 with several Baluch experts.

[37] "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment", *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[38] *Ibid*, p. 36.

areas, the *Pakistani Taliban*[39] has emerged in recent years. All the variables are in place in these areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border for an explosive mix that can ignite following a change (or possibilities for change) in the power relationships between these various groups.

Given this unstable environment, it comes at little surprise that illicit drug cultivation has also predominantly taken place in these areas. Pakistan's cultivation of opium poppy declined during the 1990s to reaching almost opium-free status in 1999 and 2000. However, poppy cultivation returned on account of high opium prices following the Taliban's ban of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in the 2000/2001 growing season.[40] The patterns of illicit cultivation moving across the border, contingent on market dynamics, manifest how intricately both countries are tied to the drug trade. Besides existing poppy cultivation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (then still NWFP) and FATA, poppy cultivation was also found for the first time in Baluchistan in 2003.[41]

While opium poppy cultivation in Pakistan has been controlled to date by a combination of crop eradication and alternative development, there has been less focus on cannabis production, eradication and seizure. Cannabis is widely grown and consumed at low prices, in particular in the Khyber Agency in FATA, which also accounts for the bulk of opium poppy cultivated in Pakistan.[42] In 2010, the Khyber Agency cultivated 1,538 hectares of opium poppy, almost 86 percent of total cultivation.[43] UNODC noted in its assessment in 2008 that while the area cultivated in 2007 was equivalent to only 1.2 percent of the area cultivated in Afghanistan, the risk was that poppy cultivation in Pakistan could increase substantially.[44]

In this region it is very difficult to isolate the need to address the problem of illegal drug production and trafficking from broader security and development concerns. In 2008 Ahmed Rashid wrote that after the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001:

> "[...] *one of the major reasons for the failure of nation building in Afghanistan and Pakistan was the failure to deal with the issue of drugs.*"[45]

The Afghan opium problem was under-prioritised given the more urgent concerns of the international community to transition from the Taliban regime towards a new political arrangement that would be stable and aligned with the west and its values. That meant little attention was paid to a problem that had incrementally increased in size and scope. This problem had once started out as a war economy in Pakistan, which helped defeat the Soviets in the late 1980s, and crossed the border in the 1990s. Illicit cultivation subsequently increased throughout the country in line with the expansion of the Taliban regime.[46] By the

[39] The Pakistani Taliban can be described as a loose alliance of militant groups and leaders across Pakistan, committed to the holy war in Afghanistan, but also focusing on targets inside Pakistan. For more information, see: Lieven, Anatol (2012): *Pakistan. A Hard Country*, London, Penguin Books, pp. 420-441.
[40] UNODC (2008): *Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan*, Islamabad, UNODC, p. 6.
[41] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] UNODC (2011), *Drug and Related Crime Challenges Facing Pakistan: Informing Responses and Strategies*, Islamabad, UNODC, p. 8.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] Rashid, Ahmed (2009): *Descent into Chaos. Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Threat to Global Security*, London, Penguin Books, p. 318.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 319.

time the Taliban declared a ban on poppy cultivation during the 2000/2001 growing season, the infrastructure of the Afghan opium industry had already been well established within the country for at least a decade.

At the same time, illicit cultivation of poppies on the other side of the border gradually dwindled, and Pakistan achieved 'poppy free' or 'near zero' status in the 2000-2001 growing season.[47] This was partly achieved by illicit crop eradication programmes, but the degree of direct success of these programmes is difficult to assess given the rapid increase of cultivation on the other side of the border. Cultivation may even have increased more rapidly in Afghanistan because of increased law enforcement activities in Pakistan, in which case it would be a clear example of the so-called 'balloon effect': increased law enforcement activity in one area simply leads to resurgence of the problem in another, often regardless of borders.

Whether the 'balloon effect' explains the shifts in poppy cultivation from Pakistan to Afghanistan is difficult to prove as there are many other factors at play. Martin Jelsma writes:

> "*The expansion* [of poppy cultivation in Pakistan] *between 1985 and 1992 was effectively countered, with 1995 being the breaking point. This may be partly related to the increase in Afghanistan, but it is certainly also attributable to the effects of rural development activities as well as the government's determination to take firm action against opium production.*"[48]

Appendix II shows the figures of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and Pakistan for this period. Independent of how strong the balloon effect really is and the exact nature of its causality, firm action against the illegal drugs trade is needed simultaneously on both sides of the border, otherwise poppy cultivation in Pakistan could rise again in the future. In the short term, the border areas of Baluchistan, FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa could easily absorb some of Afghanistan's poppy cultivation to make up for any profits lost inside Afghanistan. Despite maintaining a 'poppy-free status' in recent years, Pakistan is a crucial link for the Afghan opium trade, as its restive border provinces, with their geographical terrain, lawlessness, criminal groups, ethnic and tribal linkages across the Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan border offer opportunities to drug traffickers. The presence of Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives in the border provinces, and the Baluch insurgency that has waxed and waned over the years, but which has not been quelled to date due to deep-seated issues of dispute between Baluchis and government of Pakistan, adds to the limitless possibilities offered by a lucrative drug trade.

Furthermore, reports from the ground document how seasonal workers from bordering provinces go to Afghanistan during the harvest season to earn money.[49] This trend documents how Pakistan offers resources to enable the drug trade, despite – for the moment – maintaining low cultivation levels of opium. Thus, Pakistan remains instrumental in the Afghan drug trade, regardless of its 'poppy-free' status, and the country's various direct and

[47] "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan", *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[48] Jelsma, Martin (2002): "Alternative Development and Drug Control. A Critical Assessment", keynote speech at the International Conference on The Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation, Feldafing, at http://www.tni.org/es/archives/act/1572.

[49] "Illicit drug production: Balochistan madrassa students harvest poppy on holidays", *The Express Tribune*, August 5, 2011, at http://tribune.com.pk/story/224821/illicit-drug-production-balochistan-madrassa-students-harvest-poppy-on-holidays/.

indirect connections with the Afghan opium economy suggest that it could absorb a substantial part of Afghanistan's poppy cultivation and processing capacity following changes in the power structure after the security transition.

Regardless of where cultivation and production takes place, both Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from the negative impact of the enormous illicit opium economy, which not only fuels criminal networks and insurgent groups, but also increases corruption and instability on both sides of the border. In addition, it poses a huge public health challenge in terms of the number of opium and heroin addicts, especially in Pakistan, but also increasingly in Afghanistan where addiction numbers have doubled between 2005 and 2009.[50] Opiate addiction data for Pakistan is scarce, but 2006 figures suggest the country has at least 628,000 chronic opiate users and 484,000 heroin users.[51]

Given the negative impact of the opium problem experienced in both countries and the links between Afghanistan as the main producer country and Pakistan as one of the main transit countries, it is essential to approach the problem in a regional way, viewing both countries through a similar lens as established with the "AF-PAK" strategy.[52] The fact that by the year 2006 roughly 70 percent of the Afghanistan's opium poppy cultivation was grown in five provinces along the border with Pakistan confirms that such a regional perspective is the only way forward.[53] By 2011, this number had grown to 74 percent, partly reflecting the increasing concurrence of strong insurgency presence and poppy cultivation.[54] The cross-border nature of the problem is well known, but – similar to the operational restrictions of ISAF to only operate in Afghanistan – it is hard to see how an international support mechanism could function effectively on both sides of the border. NATO's role in counter-narcotics policy since the start of its mission in Afghanistan provides an interesting case study.

5. NATO-ISAF´s Role in Counter-Narcotics Policy in Afghanistan

Since NATO took control over the ISAF mission in August 2003, it mainly had an indirect, supporting role with regards to counter-narcotics policy. This supporting role was firmly established by NATO's Operation Plan 10302, adopted in April 2004 and grew in importance when NATO took over control of major poppy cultivation provinces in southern Afghanistan.[55] In an issue of *NATO Review*, the following explanation is given:

> "[NATOs] *presence in Afghanistan through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), cannot be isolated from this issue* [of drugs]. *Operation Plan*

[50] UNODC (2009): *Drug Use in Afghanistan: 2009 Survey. Executive Summary*, Kabul, UNODC, p. 5.
[51] UNODC (2011): *Drug and Related Crime Challenges Facing Pakistan: Informing Responses and Strategies*. Islamabad, UNODC, p. 31.
[52] On March 27, 2009, President Barack Obama announced a new strategy to deal with the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan within the same policy framework. The security strategy was complemented with a civilian component in the form of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy (last updated in February 2010). This strategy is available online at http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/135728.pdf.
[53] UNODC (2007): *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, Kabul, UNODC and Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, p. iii.
[54] Calculation by the authors based on UNODC's Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011 (*op. cit.*), excluding the provinces Kunar and Zabul.
[55] NATO, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SACEUR) (2005): *Oplan 10302 (Revise 1). ISAF*, Appendix 3, at http://www.ft.dk/samling/20051/UM-del/Bilag/44/242709.PDF.

> *10302, the guidance document according to which ISAF forces should operate as they expand into southern Afghanistan, a major poppy-growing area, specifies the role of NATO forces in supporting Afghan counter-narcotics efforts. This includes logistic support, sharing intelligence and information, and providing training assistance to the Afghan National Army and police in counter-narcotics procedures. While ISAF must perform these duties, NATO-led forces must also avoid becoming so entangled in counter-narcotics activities that their ability to implement key tasks is undermined.*"[56]

Such a supporting but limited role is problematic as the opium problem has a huge impact on the stability and security situation of the country. The debate since then has been mainly between those that think ISAF forces should use their capabilities on the ground to confront drug traffickers, and those that fear that too much involvement may jeopardise the ISAF mission's objective of winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan population.[57] NATO's position since 2004 seems to have been somewhere in the middle of this two-sided debate: using part of its on-the-ground capabilities and intelligence to support the Afghan government's counter-narcotics endeavours, but without getting stuck in the quagmire of the illegal opium trade.

In 2006, UNODC openly requested NATO to expand its role in counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan, claiming that:

> "*Since drug trafficking and insurgency live off of each other, the foreign military forces operating in Afghanistan have a vested interest in supporting counter-narcotics operations, destroying heroin labs, closing opium markets, seizing opium convoys and bringing traffickers to justice.*"[58]

According to UNODC, NATO's role in the destruction of the drug trade would win popular support, thus countering the argument that a more pro-active role would decrease local support for its mission.[59] In September 2008, the Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, reiterated this request, stressing the need to militarily regain control over all major opium producing provinces in Afghanistan to limit illicit activities.[60]

Apart from destroying heroin labs and interdicting drugs convoys, UNODC asked specifically for an expanded role to help target and arrest the major drug traffickers.[61] The argument was backed by increasingly stressing the linkages between the insurgency and the illegal opium economy in Afghanistan from 2006 onwards.[62] Some other observers have also

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[56] Mikhos, Alexia: "Afghanistan's drugs challenge", *NATO Review* (Spring 2006), at http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2006/issue1/english/analysis.html.

[57] Blanchard, Christopher M.: "Afghanistan: 'Narcotics and U.S. Policy'", *Congressional Research Service paper*, 12 August 2009, p. 14, at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32686.pdf.

[58] "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007", *op. cit.*, p. iv.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] NATO: "UN suggests ISAF expands its support to countering narcotics", *NATO news briefing document*, 3 September 2008, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-23144924-3B4658DD/natolive/news_43529.htm.

[61] *Ibid*.

[62] The preface to UNODC's Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006 already addresses the issue of insurgents reaping the profits of the illegal opium economy, but subsequent Surveys have increasingly stressed the relationship between illegal opium and the insurgency in Afghanistan, and underscored that Afghanistan is turning into a narco-state.

stressed the need for NATO to go after the traffickers because of the relationship between 'drugs and terror'. For example, Gretchen Peters writes in her book *Seeds of Terror*:

> "*The top ten traffickers working with the Taliban and al Qaeda within Afghanistan should be targeted – just as top terrorists themselves get targeted – by NATO.*"[63]

While there is growing evidence that insurgent groups and the illegal drug trade have become strongly intertwined in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the mistake should not be made to completely regard traffickers and insurgents as one and the same. Often, their cooperation, joint operations, or shared use of logistics, transportation, or human resources is no more than a 'marriage of convenience'. Nevertheless, at the political level, the linkages between drugs and terrorism have generally become more important since 2001. Irrespective of whether the pressure of the UN, in this regard, was effective or not, NATO-ISAF did change its policy after October 2008 when it decided to play a more direct role in the fight against the narcotics trade.[64] An Op-Ed in the New York Times about NATOs counter-narcotics capabilities triggered the Atlantic Alliance to explain this shift on its SHAPE-blog:

> "*Until the October 2008 North Atlantic Council decision to pursue the nexus between the insurgency and narcotics trade, NATO's counter-narcotics actions were conducted principally in support of Afghan National Security Forces. Since this decision and the issuance of counter-narcotics operational plans to the Commander of ISAF, Gen David McKiernan in February 2009, ISAF has been fully engaged against the narcotics trade.*"[65]

The decision to fully engage with the narcotics trade was taken at an informal meeting of NATO defence ministers in Budapest on the 9th of October, 2008.[66] However, disagreement remained among the NATO member states, especially because of the legal uncertainty about whether their military forces would be allowed to be involved in counter-narcotics operations, and surrounding the previously stated argument that this involvement may upset Afghan local communities and work at cross purposes with the Alliance' hearts and minds campaign.[67]

NATO's more proactive stance led to its involvement in some major counter-narcotics operations, resulting especially in the confiscation of large amounts of illegal opium, and the identification and dismantling of heroin labs and opium storage places.[68] According to NATO the operations especially targeted insurgents that used the profits derived from the illegal

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[63] Peters, Gretchen (2009): *Seeds of Terror. How Heroin is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, p. 225.

[64] NATO: "NATO steps up counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan", *News Brief*, 10 October 2008, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-4C021A5A-2F3CA587/natolive/news_50120.htm.

[65] NATO: "ISAF Counter-narcotics Activities – The Facts", *Shape Blog*, 18 March 2009, at http://www.aco.nato.int/page29620395.aspx.

[66] Belkin, Paul and Morelli, Vincent: "NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance", *Congressional Research Service paper*, 3 December 2009, p. 15, at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf.

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] "ISAF Counter-narcotics Activities", *op. cit.*

opium industry to wage their insurgency war.[69] As such, while NATO underlined that ISAF forces could operate beyond a mere supporting role, it also confirmed that its counter-narcotics operations were directly related to the counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan. Paradoxically, that partly confirms one of the arguments of the New York Times Op-Ed that sparked NATO's reaction:

> "[...] *NATO plays a key role in individual antidrug operations* [in Afghanistan], *but there is no way to integrate its forces into broader counternarcotics efforts.*"[70]

Figures are scarce, but between January and April 2009, ISAF conducted 37 counter-narcotics operations resulting in the confiscation of 40 metric tons of opium.[71] Although such numbers are very small compared to the 6,900 metric tons of opium produced that year, NATO maintains that these operations have prevented income from reaching the insurgency, thus underlining again the link between their counter-narcotics (support) role and their broader counter-insurgency objectives. ISAF-coordinated drug laboratory raids have continued since then, in addition to and sometimes in collaboration with parallel efforts by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), US special forces, specialized Afghan security forces, and since October 2010 even the involvement of Russian drug enforcement agents.[72] In September 2011, the Afghan Counter-narcotics Policy and ISAF forces jointly destroyed three large laboratories in Helmand province and confiscated what was a record amount of chemicals and drugs for such a joint operation.[73]

Despite the increased role and impact of ISAF forces in the field of counter-narcotics policy since October 2008, the long-term sustainability of these efforts are seriously hampered by the security transition process. Without the foreign boots (and eyes) on the ground in the strategically important poppy growing centers such as Helmand and Kandahar province, the ability of the international community to assist the Afghan counter-narcotics policy will be seriously undermined. Even a full-scale ISAF-supported *war on laboratories* between now and the end of 2014 could not change that, as this would at best lead to an increase in laboratories on the Pakistani side of the border, in areas where ISAF soldiers are not allowed (and Pakistani law enforcement officers have difficulties) to operate.

Lastly, there will also be indirect consequences for the counter-narcotics support role of the international community caused by the withdrawal of NATO-ISAF forces. When it comes to support for law enforcement, for example through the DEA, this support often relies on using the foreign military's infrastructure (e.g. airports, military bases) and sharing some of the military's equipment (e.g. using the military's planes and helicopters, or its information and communication platforms). This side effect of the security transition process could be

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[69] *Ibid*.

[70] Boot, Max, Kagan, Frederick and Kagan, Kimberly: "How to Surge the Taliban", *The New York Times*, 13 March 2009.

[71] NATO Media Operations Centre: "NATO's support to counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan", *factsheet*, June 2009.

[72] Weitz, Richard: "Global Insights: Russia's 'New Thinking' on Afghan Narcotics", *World Politics Review*, 22 November 2011.

[73] The Afghan and coalition forces destroyed the processing facilities, along with 6,870 liters of morphine solution, 100 kilos of heroin, 80 kilos of opium, 12,065 kilos of precursor chemicals and drug processing equipment. See: U.S. Army Sgt. Campbell, April: "Afghan forces becoming increasingly effective against drug producers", *News on the NATO website*, 29 September 2011, at http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/afghan-forces-becoming-increasingly-effective-against-drug-producers.html.

beneficial as it reinforces the need to move to a predominantly civilian support and shift away from law enforcement and security-related operations.

6. International and Regional Responses so far

Over the years, several international and regional initiatives have been launched to tackle the Afghan drug problem. Most notably, the Paris Pact Initiative came into being in May 2003. It comprises a group of 56 countries dedicated to reducing both the trafficking and consumption of Afghan opiates.[74] While the Paris Pact has led to a number of interesting projects and initiatives such as the Rainbow Strategy[75], its impact has suffered severely from one important external factor: the enormous growth of opium production (and therefore trafficking) in Afghanistan since the Pact was launched in 2003.[76] The evaluation report released in January 2011 shares a candid assessment:

> "*Despite the continued growth in commitment and ambition of the Paris Pact partners, the problem of opiate trafficking from Afghanistan continues to worsen.* [...] *Given the ongoing prevalence of opium trafficking in Afghanistan, and the trends that are being noted in the region and beyond, the work of the Paris Pact Partners is not yet complete.*"[77]

Thus, in June 2007 an important platform called the Triangular Initiative was created within the framework of the Paris Pact Initiative. The platform brings together Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to discuss law enforcement, cross-border cooperation and other aspects of counter-narcotics policy.[78] Given the short duration of the initiative it is difficult to assess its added value, but a stronger regional dialogue on coordination and cooperation in this field is the only way forward, given the fact that both poppy cultivation and trafficking routes can easily shift along and across borders.

What seems to be missing from the international and regional initiatives is a joint strategy to assist the Afghan government with its supply reduction strategy, especially in terms of the creation of alternative livelihoods and general rural development. Of course there is the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy to steer the contributions of individual states, but so far these contributions have been rather disconnected and geographically tied to the area where a country is or has been working with a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The linkage between a country's work on development and counter-narcotics and its contribution in terms of security and stability is another reason why continuation of counter-narcotics efforts beyond 2014 is so important when the latter is scaled down.

At the moment, there are serious doubts about whether the international community will be willing to devote the same or more resources to counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan

[74] For more information, see the website of the Paris Pact Initiative at https://www.paris-pact.net.
[75] The Rainbow Strategy is a regional response to the challenge of supply, trafficking and demand of Afghan opiates.
[76] Illegal opium cultivation increased from 80,000 hectares in 2003 to 131,000 hectares in 2011, reaching a record high in 2007 (193,000 hectares).
[77] UNODC (2011): *The Paris Pact Initiative. Evaluating the achievements: From Partnership to Policy, to Action. Discussion Paper*, Vienna, UNODC, pp. 3; 20.
[78] "Drug and Related Crime Challenges Facing Pakistan: Informing Responses and Strategies", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

after the counter-insurgency part of the international engagement has been decreased significantly following the security transition. In general, development spending, already dwarfed by military and security related spending since 2001, may further decrease. In 2008, a report in the advocacy series of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) estimated that the US military alone spent about USD 100 million (€76.2 million) per day in Afghanistan (before the *military surge*[79]), while the average volume of non-military aid given by international donors since 2001 was about USD 7 million per day (€5.33 million).[80]

While the Paris Pact does not really focus on the development side of supply reduction, its member states have rightly stated that all development in Afghanistan should, where possible, contribute to the broader counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan.[81] After 2014, the much needed boost of civilian efforts should therefore not only bridge the gap left by the withdrawal of military resources and infrastructure, but should also bring about a more coherent international support strategy for Afghanistan's counter-narcotics policy. Such a *counter-narcotics surge* strategy can build on what the international community and NATO have done so far in Afghanistan, but should be much broader in scope. It should focus on alternative development and general rural development in a more coherent and integrated international development approach. Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy writes:

> "*Alternative development as a strategy* [in Afghanistan] *has not failed because it was the wrong approach to drug supply reduction but rather because it has barely been tried and because drug supply reduction has consistently been considered separate from poverty reduction.*"[82]

With development being the key solution, the completion of the security transition offers clear opportunities to disentangle the supply reduction strategy from the security and counter-insurgency framework (embodied by NATO-ISAF's role in counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan) and place it firmly within the economic development strategy. While interdiction and broader law enforcements efforts are essential to tackle the problem of opium trafficking and heroin production, counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan should be a development-driven affair, taking into account the specific development needs on both sides of the border.

7. Future Scenario: Security Transition Could Spark Opium Turf War in 2014

Despite the fact that NATO-ISAF coalition forces and the international community at large steered away from ineffective poppy crop eradication[83], the security transition process could

[79] In 2009 President Obama announced a military surge that gradually increased US troop numbers in Afghanistan with about 33,000.
[80] ACBAR (2008): *Falling short. Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, Kabul, ACBAR, p. 7.
[81] "The Paris Pact Initiative. Evaluating the achievements: From Partnership to Policy, to Action. Discussion Paper", *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[82] Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud (2009): *Opium. Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, London, I.B. Taurus & Co, p. 183.
[83] The late US envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, announced the reversal of US policy at a G-8 meeting in June 2009, which entailed a shift away from support for crop eradication toward more interdiction and development.

weaken the government-led efforts in the realm of interdiction and law enforcement. Without the foreign military infrastructure and foreign 'boots on the ground', and without a strong and convincing law enforcement policy to back up the Governor-led Eradication (GLE) programmes, the end of the transition could very well create tension new opportunities for trafficking groups and spark a turf war for Afghanistan's illegal opium trade.

This scenario could become real as the upcoming presidential elections in 2014 will undoubtedly give rise to renewed power struggles centered on the opium trade. Traditional feuds along ethnic or sub-tribal lines may become intertwined with criminal groups. Whether these will evolve into Colombian and Mexican style drug cartels is yet to be seen.[84] Afghanistan still does not witness the levels of drug-related violence associated with the aforementioned countries, but a new power vacuum in the main poppy growing areas may give rise to more violence and instability. UNODC already warned in 2009 for the first signs of the birth of Afghan narco-cartels:

> "*There is growing evidence – from tougher counter-narcotics and improved intelligence – that some anti-government elements in Afghanistan are turning into narco-cartels.*"[85]

The trend described by UNODC was that some insurgents were moving from mainly taxing poppy cultivation or opium production towards producing and exporting the drugs.[86] The perceived impact this phenomenon could have on the stability of Afghanistan demands a thorough analysis of what NATO could do to stop it. But even if NATO-ISAF further steps up its efforts to support the Afghan-led counter-narcotics policy in the strategically important regions in the south before 2014, there is enough opium to go around, with huge stocks built up in past surplus years. And reinforced efforts will be useless if there is no continuation of policies.

As such, a *counter-narcotics surge* will have little impact if it is mainly limited to the work of NATO-ISAF soldiers and foreign law enforcement officers on the ground, and if it is not sustained after 2014. Even if fiercer interdiction campaigns prove to be successful, they may drive up prices and lower availability – two key elements that could drive traffickers, criminal and insurgent groups into waging a violent turf war on Afghan and Pakistani soil. Or they could simply move the problem to the other side of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This border is virtually non-existent, given the strong ethnic and tribal ties between both areas and the ingrained presence of local opium trafficking networks in this region. As such, an opium war that starts in Afghanistan will immediately spill over to the border areas in Pakistan.

The year 2011 already showed that there may be important opportunities for new actors in the illicit opium economy. That year four important figures who were allegedly involved in the opium trade were killed: The former governor of Uruzgan and special advisor to president Karzai Jan Mohammad Khan, president Karzai's half brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, the head of

[84] International Council on Security and Development (ICOS): *Afghanistan Transition: The Death of Bin Laden and Local Dynamics*, Kabul, ICOS, p. 37, at http://www.icosgroup.net/static/reports/bin-laden-local-dynamics.pdf.
[85] UNODC (2009): *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009. Summary findings*, Vienna, UNODC and Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Commentary by the Executive Director.
[86] *Ibid.*

police for the northern region General Mohammad Daud Daud and the provincial police chief of Kandahar Khan Mohammad Mujahid. However, while these events were linked in some of the media to show the power vacuum in the opium trade[87], it is not clear whether they have already changed the power structure of the illegal opium economy in Afghanistan.

There are clear historic precedents in Afghanistan of a *quasi* turf war for control over the opium trade. Both after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989 and after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 several regional leaders and groups tried to increase their share of the business and their control over the production centers and trafficking routes out of the country. The possibility of turf wars between different players to seize control of the opium trade is not a far-fetched imaginary. Hafvenstein notes that in the aftermath of the Communist troops' pullout, a power vacuum was created, which led to war between the Akhundzada family, and Khans of Kajaki and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami.[88] The Akhundzadas were able to control most of Helmand province and secure their stake in the lucrative opium trade. Their local power allowed them to even decrease Helmand's poppy cultivation in the late 1989 in exchange for US development aid.

The decision to decrease poppy cultivation in Helmand did not please Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose Hezb-e-Islami faction operated many of the heroin laboratories along the Pakistan border, and who couldn't afford the disruption of supply of opium, given the sharp decrease of US funding following the Soviet troop withdrawal. The Akhundzada chief, Mullah Nasim was assassinated as a result, a killing allegedly ordered by Hekmatyar, leading to bloody reprisals by the Akhundzada family. Mamdani argues that the turf war battles between Mullah Nasim's camp and Hekmatyar turned out to be the largest single battle during the Afghan jihad at that time.[89] Opium-centered conflicts, based on shifts in local power structures and control over the lucrative opium trade, could easily happen again following the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2014, spelling disaster for the stability of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the wider region.

Similarly, after the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, a scramble for the opium trade occurred, in parallel to broader changes that completely altered the dynamics of the power structure in Afghanistan. The fall of the Taliban regime did not allow for a consecutive second year of the opium ban, drawing poppy farmers back to poppy cultivation, restoring the vast illegal opium economy and creating all the incentives for different tribes, groups, local strongmen and families to claim their piece of the pie.[90] Part of this change in the power structure was caused by the side effects of foreign intervention. Barnett Rubin writes:

> "*The empowerment and enrichment of the warlords who allied with the United States in the anti-Taliban effort, and whose weapons and authority now enabled*

[87] See for example Anderson, Jon Lee: "Will Hamid Karzai Have the Chance to Retire?", *The New Yorker*, 19 July 2011, at http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/07/karzai-murder-afghanistan.html.

[88] For a detailed description of this conflict, see: Hafvenstein, Joel (2007): *Opium Season: A Year on the Afghan Frontier*, Guilford, Connecticut, Lyons Press, pp.128-130.

[89] Mamdani, Mahmood. (2004): *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*, New York, Three Leaves Press, p.145.

[90] For more information about this period, see, Goodhand, Jonathan: "Frontiers and Wars: the Opium Economy in Afghanistan", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 191-216; Goodhand, Jonathan: "Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Post-conflict Peace building in Afghanistan", *International Peacekeeping*, vol.15, no.3 (June 2008), pp. 405–423 and Rubin, Barnett (2004): *Road to Ruin: Afghanistan's Booming Opium Industry*, New York, Center on International Cooperation, at http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-road-ruin-opium-afg.pdf.

them to tax and protect opium traffickers, provided the trade with powerful new protectors."[91]

The combination of new competitors and new protectors of the Afghan opium trade, whether inside or outside of Afghanistan could again be an unintended and undesired by-product of international policies, if the short timeframe or mismanagement of the security transition process creates serious shockwaves and temporal or structural shifts in the (local) power structure and relationships within the Afghan illegal opium economy.

8. Conclusion

The completion of the security transition will in many ways be a game changer in Afghanistan's security and development process. Its effects are difficult to predict, but the transition is likely to lead to less engagement, less commitment and less resources of the international community dedicated to Afghanistan.

Despite these potential setbacks, the transition also provides the international community with a window of opportunity. It can partly disentangle its support for the counter-narcotics policy of Afghanistan from the security, law enforcement and military endeavours that have dominated so far. As such, it can firmly place its support for Afghanistan's counter-narcotics where it belongs: in the broader strategy of alternative livelihood creation, general economic development and poverty reduction, and public health interventions to address the problems of drug addiction inside and outside of Afghanistan.

From having become an embedded part of the counter-insurgency strategy and an area of direct action for NATO, counter-narcotics policy should be introduced in the economic development paradigm. Such a shift demands a long term commitment that looks beyond the year 2014 and requires additional resources to support the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy – a much needed but difficult political decision in economically challenging times worldwide.

According to recent World Bank figures, Afghanistan will suffer a recession in 2014 and beyond after foreign troops leave and aid flows decrease substantially, with chances of a complete economic collapse if the security situation gets worse.[92] The Bank forecasts a USD 7 billion (€5.33 billion) deficit in the Afghan budget annually through 2021.[93] Economic adversity of such a magnitude coupled with conflict across both sides of the border bodes ill for the local population, in and outside Afghanistan's borders. Investment is urgently needed to revive the agricultural sector of Afghanistan, together with a strong focus on agro-industrial and other forms of non-agricultural development, and infrastructure to connect rural areas to markets and decrease the gap between the political center of Kabul and the peripheries.

A strong commitment is needed as the Afghan opium problem can easily spiral out of control after 2014. If counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan continue to have limited impact,

[91] "Road to Ruin: Afghanistan's Booming Opium Industry", *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[92] World Bank (2011): *Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014. Executive Summary*, Washington DC, World Bank, pp. 1-5, at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/305984-1297184305854/AFTransition.pdf.
[93] *Ibid*.

both Afghanistan and Pakistan could suffer even more from the negative consequences of the illegal opium economy if an opium turf war should break out after the security transition. To avoid this gloomy scenario, a civilian counter-narcotics surge should be put in place on the short term that departs from a truly global perspective and approaches the problem primarily as a development and public health challenge.

Appendix I: Afghanistan's illicit poppy cultivation and eradication efforts since 2002[94]

Year	Cultivation in previous year (hectares)	Amount of hectares eradicated	Net result
2002	8,000 (under the Taliban regime)	17,500 (not verified)	Cultivation **increases** to **74,000** hectares (925percent increase)
	Eradication policy largely based on compensation agreements (UK and Afghan government). The power vacuum following 11 September 2001 enabled farmers to replant opium poppy before the interim government could declare an effective opium ban. Eight provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		
2003	74,000	21,000 (not verified)	Cultivation **increases** to **80,000** hectares (8 percent increase)
	Afghan national drug control strategy adopted by President Karzai on 19th May 2003. More farmers and more provinces started to cultivate. The cultivation level has returned to the levels of before the Taliban declared the opium ban (82,000 hectares in 2000). Only four provinces were unaffected by poppy cultivation.		
2004	80,000	25,000 (not verified)	Cultivation **increases** to post-Taliban high of **131,000** (64 percent increase)
	The total of 25,000 hectares was the attempted amount, but not (fully) carried out. Cultivation spread to all 32 provinces (then still 32) and increased in nearly all of them. Counter-narcotics policy was not given enough priority, especially given the planning of the first democratic elections, and the coalition's involvement in ensuring security on the ground.		
2005	131,000	5,000-5,100	Cultivation **decreases** to **104,000** (21 percent decrease)
	This is the first year that UNODC starts to verify eradication, thus figures are more reliable from this year onwards. 22,000 hectares of the total decrease of 27,000 hectares (81 percent) cannot be attributed to eradication. Although during the 2004-2005 growing season, the first comprehensive eradication programme was initiated, the main reason for the decrease is that farmers switched to legal crops. The reasons are unclear but a combination of a religious fatwa against opium and the government's strong anti-cultivation messages may have helped. The three main poppy growing provinces (Nangarhar, Badakhshan and Helmand) also received most investment in alternative livelihoods this year. Seven provinces were considered 'poppy free' out of a total of 32 provinces.		
2006	104,000	15,300	Cultivation **increases** to **165,000** (59 percent increase)
	A 210 percent increase in eradication coincides with a net increase of 59 percent of cultivation, so no "negative correlation" between eradication and net cultivation.		

[94] The table is based mainly on the annual Afghanistan Opium Surveys released by UNODC. Although figures released by the United States are often different, the general trend since 2002 is similar.

	The main increase was witnessed in the south, which has been attributed to the adverse security situation in which insurgent and other groups were able to encourage and/or threaten farmers to cultivate opium poppy. The net result was that the south alone (101,900 hectares) produced almost the same as the entire 2005 cultivation level. Six provinces were considered 'poppy free' out of a total of 34.		
2007	165,000	19,047	Cultivation **increases** to **193,000** (17 percent increase)
	A further 24 percent increase in eradication does not show positive net result, as cultivation further increases. Again, no desired negative correlation. The link between insurgency and opium-growing was stressed even more. UNODC speaks about increased polarization between the lawless south (increased cultivation) and the relatively stable north of the country (decreased cultivation), with the first clear indications that cultivation is not poverty-driven as the south is relatively richer than the north. Thirteen provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		
2008	193,000	5,480	Cultivation **decreases** to **157,000** (19 percent decrease)
	A 71 percent decrease in eradication coincides with a substantial net decrease in cultivation, while you would expect a further increase with less eradication efforts. This again shows there is no correlation. 31,000 hectares of the total decrease of 36,000 (86 percent) cannot be attributed to eradication. According to UNODC three factors were decisive for the decrease in cultivation: 1) "restraint at planting (but not eradication)" following pressure from governors, shuras and village elders; 2) Lower prices for both fresh and dry opium (down about 20 percent in nominal terms), and 3) higher revenues from wheat, lowering the gap between the price of illegal opium and legal wheat. Eighteen provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		
2009	157,000	5,351	Cultivation **decreases** to **123,000** (22 percent decrease)
	A 2 percent (so stable) decrease in eradication coincides with another substantial net decrease in cultivation. 29,000 hectares of the total decrease of 34,000 (85 percent) cannot be attributed to eradication. After the harvest season, Richard Holbrooke announces shift in US policy away from support to eradication towards development and interdiction. The additional decrease was mainly caused by the 34,000 hectare decline in Helmand. According to UNODC, this was attributed to 1) governor leadership (Governor Muhammad Gulab Mangal), 2) a more aggressive counter-narcotics offensive, 3) higher prices of licit crops and 4) the successful introduction of so-called "food zones" to promote licit farming. Twenty provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		
2010	123,000	2,316	Cultivation **remains stable** at **123,000**
	A 57 percent decrease in eradication coincides with the first year of a period that cultivation has appeared to be stabilised around 120,000-130,000 hectares. Again, with a decrease of eradication, you would at least expect a (slight) increase in cultivation. Link between insurgency and poppy cultivation that was first witnessed in 2007 is again stressed. Almost all opium production (96 percent) takes place in the same southern and western provinces were cultivation is concentrated. In stressing the link between the insurgency and poppy cultivation, the eastern region is not mentioned (completely "poppy-free" for two consecutive years except for limited cultivation in Badakhshan). Twenty provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		

2011	123,000	3,810	Cultivation **increases** to **131,000** (7 percent increase).
	A 65 percent increase in eradication coincides with a further (albeit slight) increase in cultivation. No real reasons given for modest increase in cultivation, but shifting geographical patterns witnessed: The Northern region is no longer "poppy-free", and poppy cultivation also increased in the Eastern region (significant increases in Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces). The south showed a modest decrease in cultivation (e.g. Helmand 3 percent). Seventeen provinces were considered 'poppy free'.		

Appendix II: The shift of poppy cultivation from Pakistan to Afghanistan[95]

Year	Cultivation in Pakistan (hectares)	Cultivation in Afghanistan (hectares)	Commentary
1986	6,034	10,000	While illegal poppy cultivation already increased in Afghanistan between 1986 and 1994, it only started to decrease significantly in Pakistan in 1996. The delay in this shift can be partly attributed to the increase in rural development and law enforcement activities in Pakistan that only occurred from 1995 onwards. The 'poppy-free' status of Pakistan reached in 2000/2001 did not last long as poppy cultivation again increases in 2002 following the Taliban regime's opium ban in Afghanistan. Since then, Pakistan has managed to keep illegal poppy cultivation levels relatively low, fluctuating between 1,500 and 2,500 hectares.
1987	5,463	25,000	
1988	6,519	32,000	
1989	7,464	34,300	
1990	7,488	41,300	
1991	7,962	50,800	
1992	9,493	49,300	
1993	7,329	58,300	
1994	5,759	71,470	
1995	5,091	53,759	
1996	873	56,824	
1997	874	58,416	
1998	950	63,674	
1999	284	90,583	
2000	260	82,171	
2001	213	8,000	
2002	2,500	74,000	

[95] The figures in this table are taken from: UNODCCP (1999): *ODCCP Studies on Drugs and Crime. Global Illicit Drug Trends 1999*, New York, UNODCCP, p. 23, at http://www.unodc.org/pdf/report_1999-06-01_1.pdf and UNODC (2003): *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2003*, New York, UNODC, at http://www.unodc.org/pdf/trends2003_www_E.pdf.