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## *‘Narco-Jihad’ – Haram money for a Halal cause?*

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*“It is a part of our noble responsibility to spoil the Western society with drugs”*. With these words, Badruddoza Chowdhury Momen, a Bangladeshi food firm tycoon who had been incriminated for trafficking large quantities of heroin, worth few hundred millions of dollars into Great Britain, justified his drug smuggling operations. The Chairman of BD Foods Ltd, which supplied spices and other food products to UK, was sourcing the heroin mainly from Afghanistan via the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where he maintained offices. His statement exemplifies a widely supported stance of a religious-based justification of the opium trade. Similarly, the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid published an interview with an Afghan official where the latter asserted that: *“Opium is permissible because it is consumed by Kafirs (unbelievers) in the West and not by Muslims or Afghans”*.

The nexus between narcotics and terrorism is inherently controversial and a deeply politicized concept. This paper aims to examine the historic manufacturing and trade of drugs, derived from the poppy plant, which flourishes at the Golden Crescent - Asia’s current principal area of illicit opium production, encompassing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. It also aims to lay bare the hypocritical ongoing narrative of various terrorist organizations, which use the intrinsically un-Islamic mass-production and distribution of drugs as a pretext for advancing their religious and ideological goals, where the evidence for pure economic gains is in abundance. Furthermore, the paper will underline the various instances where Muslims directly suffer from this narco-terrorism, which unveils the mask of duplicity worn by those who are involved in justifying the so-called *‘holy’* war against the West.

Since the opium trade remains a substantial source for financing the *Jihad* led by the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the AfPak region, this paper will elaborate that the rationale behind this ostensibly *‘sacred’* cause of spoiling the Western *‘infidel’* forces with drugs and consolidating the Islamic reign in the region, is not ushered by faith, but by a calculated action plan. Finally, the paper will put forward recommendations for the adoption of effective policy measures by Afghanistan, its regional neighbours and the international community since all of these actors are either accomplices or victims of the growing opium trade.

### Introduction

The dimensions of Afghanistan’s opium production has reached unparalleled degrees of significance considering the impact it has on the global economy. The relationship between Afghanistan and the poppy seed has existed for thousands of years, however, it is only in the last 30 years that the country has become responsible for cultivating an astonishing amount of opium.

Warlords, insurgents, drug traffickers and corrupt officials saw an opportunity of abusing the vulnerability of the State, which resulted from the ongoing violent conflicts and extreme autocracy, and were capable of establishing dominion and monopoly over key territories inland and particularly at its peripheries. As a consequence, Afghanistan provided the ideal milieu for the establishment and maintenance of a strong and enduring illicit economy based on the cultivation of opium. Currently, Afghanistan is at the epicentre of worldwide drug trafficking, with more than 90% of the world supply of opium and heroin originating from the country.

The triggers behind this hegemony of Afghanistan's opium production at the global market are several; years of ceaseless warfare and civil insurgency, the historical absence of a legitimate centralized government, the effective control and ruling imposed by religious extremist groups, lack of legitimate opportunities for development outside the opium trade and the failure of the international community of imposing successful interdiction programs.

The drug industry additionally fuels corruption, which erodes the legitimacy of government institutions, particularly those responsible for security, defense and justice. The opium economy has made its way through the highest echelons of policy and decision-making bodies, posing an imminent threat to the positive growth and constructive state-building of Afghanistan. Farmers routinely bribe police and counter-narcotic eradication personnel to turn a blind eye. Law enforcement members are also paid by drug traffickers to ignore or protect their movements and Afghan government officials are also believed to be involved in at least 70% of the opium trafficking. Many more actors than simply the Taliban, participate in the opium economy, and they exist throughout all levels of the social strata. As a result, what could be seen is a perplexed relationship based on utility and profit between terrorist organizations, insurgents, farmers, corrupt governmental officials and drug traffickers.

The vast magnitude and illegal nature of the cultivation of the poppy plant implies serious repercussions for the country's economy, socio-political life and State governance. Afghanistan is a country with very few natural resources, less than 12% of arable land while 80% of its rural population lives in poverty. Only 23% of Afghans have access to safe drinking water, and only 6% to electricity. It does not come as a surprise that the opium plant has provided outlets for employment and income for the rural population, which would otherwise, have been unable to sustain their livelihood through other means, since the opium economy generates the highest revenues in comparison with other crops. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the ultimate profits are generated outside the country. As the former President Karzai pointed out: *"We take 3% of the revenue and 100% of the blame"*.

### [The Roots of Opium Cultivation](#)

Prior to the Soviet occupation in 1979, Afghanistan was self-sufficient in food production and also able to generate surplus. The counterinsurgency operations, which followed, destroyed the rural economy and brought a massive decline in agricultural produce. As a

result, the *mujahideen* began taxing the opium crop, not only because the economy was in shambles, but also because the competition between various Jihadist groups and the financing of weaponry used against Soviet troops required reliance on independent sources of funding. Many of the *mujahideen* commanders and warlords, the future political actors of a post-Soviet Afghanistan, thus became narco-leaders. At the same time, the United States, which also wanted to cripple and immobilize the USSR forces, established an arms pipeline in Afghanistan. American CIA agents were assisting with the smuggling of opium out of Afghanistan, either into the West, in order to raise money for the Afghan resistance, or into the Soviet Union, in order to weaken it through drug addiction. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992, internal conflicts between the various *mujahideen* groups erupted, leading to a widespread destabilization and in 1998, the hard-line, Pakistani sponsored, Taliban gained control over the country and consolidated their power by using the opium trade as a tool towards achieving political and economic ends. War turned out to be good for business. Yet, the Taliban had to justify the production of opium, which is forbidden by the Quran, in order to secure their own victory. Despite the fact that the Taliban acknowledged the evil nature of drugs, they emphasized the ‘evil’ nature of the West and Western Kafirs, whose eradication was worth more. Many Afghan farmers despite being ideologically abhorrent to the concept of cultivating drugs and desiring to abstain from it were coerced, either through exploitative sharecropping agreements or under the threat of violence.

### Post 9/11 Era

In 2000-2001, the Taliban government, headed by its leader Mullah Mohammed Omar and in collaboration with the United Nations imposed a *Fatwa* or a religious decree, which successfully banned the cultivation of opium, and aimed for its eradication after declaring that growing poppies was in violation of fundamental Islamic tradition. Any lack of respect for the edict would have prejudiced the religious leadership of Mullah Omar and the strength of the Taliban rule.

District administrators established monitoring groups called *Shuras* in their territories, which consisted of the Chief of the Police, the Chief of the Vice and Virtue Department, spiritual leaders - *Ulemas* from local mosques, and tribal commanders. Prior to the ban, the *Shuras* spread information about it and its enforcement to local farmers, exhorting them to terminate the cultivation of poppy. After the *Fatwa* came to power, the *Shuras* became its primary enforcers and often complied with their mandate with abrupt and brutal efficiency. Many farmers in violation of the prohibition were not only forced to destroy their own crops, but were also subjected to imprisonment or various forms of corporal punishment including whipping and public beatings. If a higher-ranking Taliban caught a poppy farmer, village elders had their heads shaved and had to accompany the violator during his “*walk of shame*” through the streets, making sure that the whole population would comply with the decree. Overall, the Taliban ban on poppy farming was administered via threats, forced eradication, and public punishment for transgressors.

It appeared as the most efficient anti-drug campaign that has ever been carried out. Opium production declined by almost 99%, roughly three quarters of the world's supply of heroin

at the time. However, the ban was effective only for a brief period and from the following year, farmers started to replant poppy on an extensive basis.

Many questioned the Taliban's motives. Why did Mullah Omar only then decide to prohibit the cultivation? The most obvious answer is political double-dealing. The poppy ban was an artifice towards obtaining legitimacy, as before that only three nations, namely Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, officially recognized the rule of the Taliban as legitimate. In addition, it was a form of market manipulation as the price of opium increased during that year. The Taliban might had stopped poppy cultivation, but they did not outlaw the drug's possession or sale. Dried opium, unlike most agricultural products, can easily be stored for long periods without refrigeration or other expensive equipment. Although the Taliban emphasized that the ban was rooted in religious principles, the huge stockpiles of opium stored in secret hideaways and the substantial profits generated by the quadrupled prices, revealed the real motivating force behind this convenient strategy of window dressing.

### [Impact of Narcotics on the Islamic World](#)

Another argument that exposes the false religious virtues, which the Taliban alongside their major supporters abide to, is the fact that the drugs economy promulgated by them does not only 'spoil' the Western world, but the fellow Islamic one as well.

The Afghanistan National Drug Use Survey 2015 found that up to 2.9 million Afghans use drugs, which accounts for 11% of the population, and up to 2.3 million use opiates, about 7% of the population. Approximately 1 million use cannabis, about half the rate of opioid users. Among adults, the survey suggested that 13% would test positive, including 8% in urban locations and 15% in rural locations. Rural drug use by household reached as high as 86% among villages in Ghor province, while the highest urban rate reached 28% in Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz province. Nationally, 9% of Afghan children under the age of 14 tested positive for drugs, overwhelmingly opioids, including 2% in urban areas and 11% in rural areas. The data indicates that between 1 and 1.2 million children would test positive for one or more drugs, and 0.7-0.8 million would test positive for opioids.

Tariq Sulaiman, from Najat, a local addiction charity, commented on this alarming trend:

***"We are already losing our children to suicide attacks, rocket and bomb attacks, but now addiction is another sort of terrorism which is killing our countrymen".***

The availability and abundance of opium in the country plays an essential part in this grave problem. "To buy heroin in Kabul is as easy as buying yourself something to eat", addicts say. "One gram costs about \$6, and it's available in every corner of the city".

***"Traditionally, what we tend to argue is that the demand causes the supply", says Jean-Luc Lemahieu, regional representative of the UN drugs agency UNODC, "What we have forgotten, though, is that.....the sheer appearance of that product on the market causes a local demand".***

No one is immune to the narcotics plague. A report conducted by The Guardian in 2011 disclosed the detailed account of the commanding officer of five British service members, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Walker, shortly before being killed by a rogue Afghan police officer, who claimed how local Afghan officers were open to corruption and were often trading ammunitions in return for drugs with the Taliban.

Additionally, the decades of violent conflicts, war and terrorism through which Afghanistan has gone maintain the ongoing addiction crisis. Many of those who tried to escape took refuge in Iran and Pakistan, where addiction rates have long been high. By attempting to run away from the deadly warfare setting, they ended up in even more toxic environments, namely the one of drug addiction. In Iran, the number of people suffering from drug addiction has more than doubled in the last six years. A survey carried out by a drug control group has found that about 2.8 million people are regularly consuming drugs in the country. The UN stated that Iran has one of the worst addiction crises in the world, affecting people from all walks of society. Factors such as political instability, economic stagnation, high unemployment, lack of opportunities for development and poverty – the lingering results of years of US sanctions - induce feelings of hopelessness and anguish, and that sense of desperation could drive people towards drug abuse. Subsequently, addiction could lead drug users into criminality in order to support their habit and usher them towards imprisonment due to arrests for sales or possession of drugs. Out of the 170,000 people in jail in Iran, 68,000 are there for drug trafficking and 32,000 are there because they are addicts. Iran's theocracy has tried even harsher anti-drug measures, sentencing huge numbers of convicts to death row. Last year, hundreds of Iranians were reportedly executed for drug crimes, prompting a movement among lawmakers and activists to abolish capital punishment for nonviolent (drug) offenses.

Pakistan's drug addiction, which kills 700 people daily, also bankrolls terrorists. According to the Drug Use in Pakistan 2013 Survey Report, a collaborative research by the Narcotics Control Division, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and the UN, there are 7.6 million drug addicts in Pakistan: 78% male and 22% female. These addicts increase at a rate of 40,000 per year putting Pakistan amongst the top drug abusing countries in the world.

The injection of opiates have also caused an HIV/AIDS epidemic in many Central Asian countries. More Russians die from Afghan drugs per year, than the total number of Russian fatalities during the entire 10-year Soviet-Afghan war. And if mortality rates are measured alone, then the Taliban's involvement in opium production has been a more successful war tactic than any act of terrorism they have committed so far.

As Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime stated in 2007:

***"Drug traffickers have a symbiotic relationship with insurgents and terrorist groups such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Instability makes opium cultivation possible; opium buys protection and pays for weapons and foot soldiers, and these in turn create an environment in which drug lords, insurgents and terrorists can***

***operate with impunity. Opium is the glue that holds this murky relationship together. If profits fall, these sinister forces have the most to lose”.***

The UNODC further maintains that the drugs trade has become a major source for financing suicide bombers due to their so-called ‘*marriage of convenience*’, which further alludes to the instrumental usage of suicide attacks by terrorist organizations. Alike, resorting to the cultivation of opium and trafficking of drugs, the intentional act of ending one’s life, which additionally endangers the lives of innocent people and children, is condemned by Islam. Jihadists justify suicide bombing via arguing that the killing of infidels allows having recourse to extreme means and war tactics, and in return, they will be granted martyrdom. Yet, the Quran asserts that only the Almighty grants martyrdom and no one is allowed to claim martyrdom by force. The example of suicide bombers further illustrates the continuous and unceasing hypocrisy of extremist groups, which are willing to blasphemously abuse the Islamic doctrine in order to meet their immoral ends.

If one replaces ideology with hard cash, religious devotion with vicious perversion of virtuousness, and the Jihadists-claimed Islamic Caliphate territory with a drugs-fuelled gangland, the image of a terrorist’s actual ‘Islamism’ becomes clearer.

#### [Drugs-Fuelled Terrorist Bankrolling](#)

For more than two decades, opium has been Afghanistan’s leading cash-generating economic activity. Officially, profits from the poppy cultivation are claimed to represent about 10-15% of the country’s GDP. However, when the macroeconomic spill overs are taken into consideration, with drugs sustaining financially a great deal of other ostensibly legal activities, drugs happens to constitute almost half of the overall economy.

The Senior Terrorism Prevention Officer of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Irka Kuleshnyk, while speaking at a conference in Istanbul named "The Role of Drug Trafficking in Promoting and Financing Today's Global Terrorism", said:

***"While it is difficult to establish how widely terrorist groups are involved in the illicit drug trade, or the breadth and nature of cooperation between these two criminal groups, the magnitude of the numbers involved make the relationship worrisome".***

According to the UNODC's World Drug Report of 2007, the total potential value of Afghanistan's 2006 opium harvest accruing to farmers, laboratory owners and Afghan traffickers reached about \$ 3.1 billion.

What proportion of that money is used for perpetrating acts of terrorism? Estimating the size of illicit economies and their profit levels has proven to be notoriously difficult, yet it is evaluated that somewhere between 30-40% of the Taliban’s income comes from drugs, with the lion's share coming from fundraising in the Gulf and Pakistan. According to the United Nations Al-Qaeda & Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team’s assessments, out of the total 2011-2012 budget of the Taliban of \$ 400 million - one third was raised from the poppy trade. To raise money, the Taliban run a sophisticated protection racket from poppy farmers

and drug traffickers, collecting taxes from the farmers and pay-offs from the traffickers for transporting the drugs through insurgent-controlled areas.

However, it is crucial to mention that terrorists are far from being the only fish in the drug trafficking pond. As previously stated, various criminal gangs, often connected to the government, the Afghan security forces, tribal elites, many ex-warlords and government officials are also active players.

***"The Taliban are involved in some opium smuggling to Pakistan. However, this business is dominated by affiliates of the main Pakistani political parties and figures in the Pakistani army and intelligence services. And, like the Afghan politicians who also profit from the poppy trade, they launder the proceeds in Dubai and the UAE,"*** says Vanda Felbab-Brown, an expert in international conflict and organised crime.

The latter's argument shows the wide spectrum of international agents involved, which infers the possibility of expansion of the opium cultivation to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. By far the worst scenario from a global security perspective would be the shift of drug production to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa or even Punjab in Pakistan. For over twenty years, Pakistan has been a major heroin refining and smuggling hub in the region, with the large-scale hawala system facilitating the transfer of drug profits. Today, these territories also have extensive and well-organized Salafi insurgency and terrorist groups that aim to overturn the Pakistani government.

Furthermore, Pakistan already bears a history of growing opium, which makes such scenario quite conceivable. During the heyday of illicit poppy cultivation in the 1980s, opium was grown in FATA and the then North-West Frontier Province (NWFP; now renamed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), with prominent and official actors, such as Pakistan's military and intelligence services deeply involved in the heroin trade. In many of these highly isolated, both geopolitically and socio-economically areas, opium poppy cultivation accounted for the majority of the revenues and frequently involved entire tribes. A relocation of the extensive poppy cultivation here would be extremely adverse to international security challenges and counterterrorism strategies since it would contribute to a critical undermining of the Pakistani State and further fuel Jihadism.

### [Drug Trafficking Routes](#)

According to the UNODC 'Afghan Opiate Trafficking through the Southern Route' 2015 report, Afghan heroin is trafficked to every part of the world except Latin America. Having such an extensive global market network requires a web of secure routes facilitated by the supervision of domestic and international criminal groups. Some routes emerge and develop due to the geographic proximity, while others are associated with lower risks, migrant connections, higher profits or less complicated logistics. Although, generating an accurate picture of the nature of drug trade routes is difficult due to their clandestine nature and the insufficient available evidence, certain long-lasting patterns could be recognised. The Balkan route (through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey) has traditionally been the primary trafficking route, which has been dedicated to mostly supplying single

destination markets, such as Russia and Europe. However, a changing trend could be observed, with the southern route - which is a collection of trafficking routes that serve a number of diverse destinations including Asia, Africa, Western and Central Europe - gaining predominance. Notably, the geographic location of Iran and Pakistan turns them into major transit points along the southern route, which further explains the tremendous challenges for these countries in dealing with the large flows of opiates.

Traditionally the drug trafficking route from Afghanistan to Pakistan passes through the Torkham border crossing, Ghulam Khan, Kunjrab and Karachi. Nevertheless, more than 60 alternative drug trafficking routes run through Baluchistan Province. Drugs are smuggled overland to Iran, Turkey and onwards to Europe. Another portion is smuggled by sea to UAE, Saudi Arabia, Africa and the rest of South Asia through Chaman, Noshki, Chagaghi, Dalbandeen, Panjgor, Turbat, Gawadar and Jeewani areas of Baluchistan Province.

The Russian Federal Drug Service (FSKN) reports that since the former secure route of transporting drugs to the West through the Balkans has split, a lot of the heroin trafficking goes through Iraqi territory. Thus, what could be observed is that other terrorist groups often affiliated or under the patronage of the Islamic State (formerly known as ISIS) make up to \$1 billion annually on Afghan heroin trafficked through their territory. Terrorist and organized crime groups could be seen to obtain profit from the Afghan opium trade at other parts of those trafficking routes as well. According to the Turkish Trafficking and Organised Crime Police, the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) is involved in heroin trafficking from the Turkey–Iran border to Western and Central Europe, through the taxation of traffickers, with potential profits of \$200 million annually.

The great diversity of trafficking routes, the complex modus operandi of traffickers, the protectionism of terrorist groups and the support on behalf of additional actors prove the significant dimensions of the rising Narco-Jihad, which imposes acute threat over regional security.

### [Policy Implications](#)

What policies should be adopted in order to curb down or at least diminish the deadly impact of the opium economy? Various counter-narcotics strategies have been put forth, with no or very little success. This paper will not disregard them, since such an intricate problem requires set of elaborate resolutions, yet it will argue that additional aspects must be taken into account so that the issues achieve reasonable settlements while considering the changing dynamics of the trade. Recommendations that have been discussed in academic literature and various media outlets up to date, have focused on fighting corruption, establishing greater border security, providing meaningful agricultural assistance, improved incentives to framers, development of infrastructure, and tackling the nexus between drug producers, traffickers, government officials and insurgent commanders.

However, what one must bear in mind is that counter-narcotic and counter-terrorist strategies must go hand in hand in order to even begin to turn the current against this powerful and well-established industry. The concept of 'Narco-Jihad' – the contradictory



and absurd justification of acts of violence in the name of religion, which is nourished by the revenues of the illegal trade of drugs – needs to be fully recognized and condemned by all parties involved, including the common people, opium cultivators, insurgents, government officials and policy makers.

If the Taliban and the drug lords use the Islamic rhetoric to give righteous grounds for their actions, then this very same rhetoric must be used and backlashed against them, in order to unveil their hypocritical and counterintuitive stance. This could be achieved through nationwide public campaigns, which involve all sectors of society – religious, educational and governmental. In order for such endeavour to be successful, the Afghan Government, along with religious leaders, should be given the necessary resources to make such movements effective and widespread.

***As the Terrorism Monitor suggests, “For every leaflet and exhortation from the insurgents justifying opium, the Afghan government should be there to highlight the Taliban’s hypocrisy and advertise the damage done to other Muslims”.***

The same way in which Western campaigns generated slogans and documentaries exposing the anti-Islamic custom of ‘*Bacha Bazi*’ (boy for play) - where rich men buy boys as young as 11 from impoverished families, dress them in female clothes and make them dance and sing before being used as sex slaves, in a country where homosexuality is not only strictly forbidden but savagely punished - the international community must deplore the very same moral hypocrisy, which defends the opium cultivation. As a result of the widespread recognition of the ‘*Bacha Bazi case*’, the United Nations created a National Action Plan, which included the adoption of national strategies to address sexual violence against children; develop and adapt national laws and issuance of directives to protect children from sexual violence; insurance that offenders are held accountable through civilian and military justice mechanism; and initiation of comprehensive education and community awareness raising campaigns.

A similar shift in social attitudes is also required in Muslim societies to combat the Narco-Jihad nexus. Muslims need to attach stigma to similar practices; otherwise, acceptance of such behaviour will make them complicit not only in the commission of atrocious crimes but also in the violation of sacred religious norms. The same way, it takes continuous time, effort and resources to fully eradicate the *Bacha Bazi* custom in Afghanistan, the Muslim communities must learn from this lesson, and start undertaking the first steps towards ensuring that all people involved in the opium trade are saved from this menace, instead of continuing to sweep the issue under the carpet.

Anti-drug campaigns, which additionally emphasize on the anti-religious and hypocritical terrorist rhetoric could be held in schools or mosques to raise awareness about the serious problems associated with the cultivation, production, trade, and use of illicit narcotics. The same standpoint could be expressed by governmental officials, criminal justice bodies or religious speakers at the annual National Mobilization Week against Drugs and Illicit Trafficking in Afghanistan, which ultimately could generate recommendations and objectives for the upcoming Afghan National Drug Action Plan of 2020.

The “*starving farmer who grows poppy*” has been a convenient scapegoat for long enough and it must be finally acknowledged that drug kingpins, terrorist commanders and corrupt government officials bear the responsibility for this worldwide drug crisis. Rather than implementing poppy field eradication operations, which will further leave many innocent Afghans in a state of destitution and poverty and will alienate them from the Afghan government, which in return will make them an easy target for the Taliban and the insurgents, policies with respect to counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism must be focused more on reconstruction rather than destruction. Disrupting the drug trade should take place through integrating and strengthening legal rural livelihoods, providing treatment to drug addicts, raising awareness and providing public education about the evils of heroin abuse and developing State institutions to combat drug trafficking.

Moreover, counter-narcotic and counter-terrorism forces should start pinpointing the Taliban’s treacherous line of reasoning, by highlighting how Afghanistan’s opium has started plaguing the Muslim world, with the fellow Islamic countries of Iran and Pakistan as examples. The millions addicted to heroin and the pervasive spread of HIV/AIDS in Muslim countries is a strong antithesis to terrorist propaganda. Public diplomacy must disseminate information, reinforce religious stigmas and point out that the opium trade does not justify the Jihad waged against the West, as hypocritically claimed by the Taliban.

The Afghan government, along with religious leaders within the country, must emphasize on the anti-poppy narrative, focusing on the anti-Islamic nature of drugs and the increasing addiction rate in Afghanistan. Demonizing opium cultivation will meet both counter-narcotic and counter-terrorist objectives: farmers will feel discouraged to cultivate poppy in a changed social setting with social unacceptable connotations to the trade and the Taliban’s legitimacy will face questions.

Another important strategy that will have a successful result is targeting the essential precursor chemicals smuggled into Afghanistan used to enhance the capabilities and refine the opium plant into morphine and heroin. According to the World Drug Report 2010, each kilogram of Afghan heroin requires 7 kilograms of Afghan opium to produce. Acetic anhydride is the essential ingredient necessary for this process and since the chemical is not produced in Afghanistan, it illicitly enters the country. Law enforcement efforts focused on capturing the transport trucks, which carry shipments of the precursor chemical, could help lower the amount of heroin and further alleviate the law enforcement efforts applied when trying to capture the already refined amount of heroin that leaves the country. Clearly, such scenario could exist only as long as the political protection for these types of convoys, which is provided not only by the Taliban commanders and insurgents but also by corrupt elements in the Afghan government, is dealt with in the first place.

### Conclusion

The drug trade in Afghanistan has evident repercussions and destabilizing effects on regional and global security levels. The increasing drug addiction among the citizens of the neighbouring countries portrays how the narco-trafficking industry does not simply deteriorate the economic stability and political situation in the region, which is already

tormented by wars, terrorism and insurgencies, but further creates acute social issues. The booming drug economy, which goes hand-in-hand with the operations of Islamist terrorist groups, has turned the Sub-continent in a violence-ridden wasteland. Any policies emphasizing the stabilization of Afghanistan through the elimination of violent extremist outfits, without effectively addressing the narco-trade will be unsound and unsustainable, since the drug economy remains one of the main sources of funding for terrorism in the region. Counter-terrorism and counter-narcotic strategies must go alongside since the causes and dynamics of drug trafficking and terrorism are intrinsically linked.

As the former President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai asserted in one of his most famous statements:

***“Either Afghanistan destroys opium or opium will destroy Afghanistan.”***

The current realities require a rephrasing of this claim, because if Afghanistan with the help of the international community does not destroy the opium funded terrorism and the terrorism funded opium cultivation, this interlinked Narco-Jihad will destroy not only Afghanistan, but will have detrimental consequences worldwide.

Nevertheless, what must not be forgotten is that realistic expectations and patience must follow all policy implementations throughout, since the fight against the Narco-Jihad will be indeed difficult and long, and will require a lot of dedication. Progress does not occur without initiation.

The hypocritical reasoning of terrorist organizations, which abuse the religiosity of the local population in order to fight their alleged holy cause through ultimately unholy means, requires to be exposed. The double negative of illegal (*drugs and infidels*) cannot positively justify the Narco-Jihad propaganda undertaken by these extremist groups.

The decades of bloodshed, warfare, killings of innocent people and contamination with drugs, cannot be diminished to merely a mathematical equation.



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