

Bratislava Model United Nations 2011

UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME



AFGHANI OPIUM TRADE

Study Guide

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B R A I M U N
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Letter from the chair

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the Bratislava Model United Nations 2011. My name is Alexandra Lačoková and I am honoured to be the chair of the simulated UN Office on Drugs and Crime. I previously experienced 3 years of BratMUN, having been both an underchair and a page, which has given me a great overview of what a Model United Nations should look like and how much fun it can be. Last year, I also had the very enriching opportunity to participate in Wroclaw Model United Nations as a delegate of the International Court of Justice. Regarding my experience and enthusiasm, I hope to be a good chair who will lead you to a fruitful debate and a promising conclusion. In order for the discussion to live up to our expectations, I kindly encourage you to prepare yourself for the topic using the study guide and further reading. You are expected to know the general information about the problem and the position of your chosen country.

This year we will be discussing the complex issue of the Afghan opium trade, which takes place between the mountainous borders of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and reaches further into the world. We will look into the undoubtedly linked problems of the addicted populace and widespread crime. In 2007, Afghanistan reached the record of opium poppy crop, providing 93% of the world's opium. Opium trade forms the basis of financing of various criminal and terrorist groups.

Alexandra Lačoková, Chair of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime

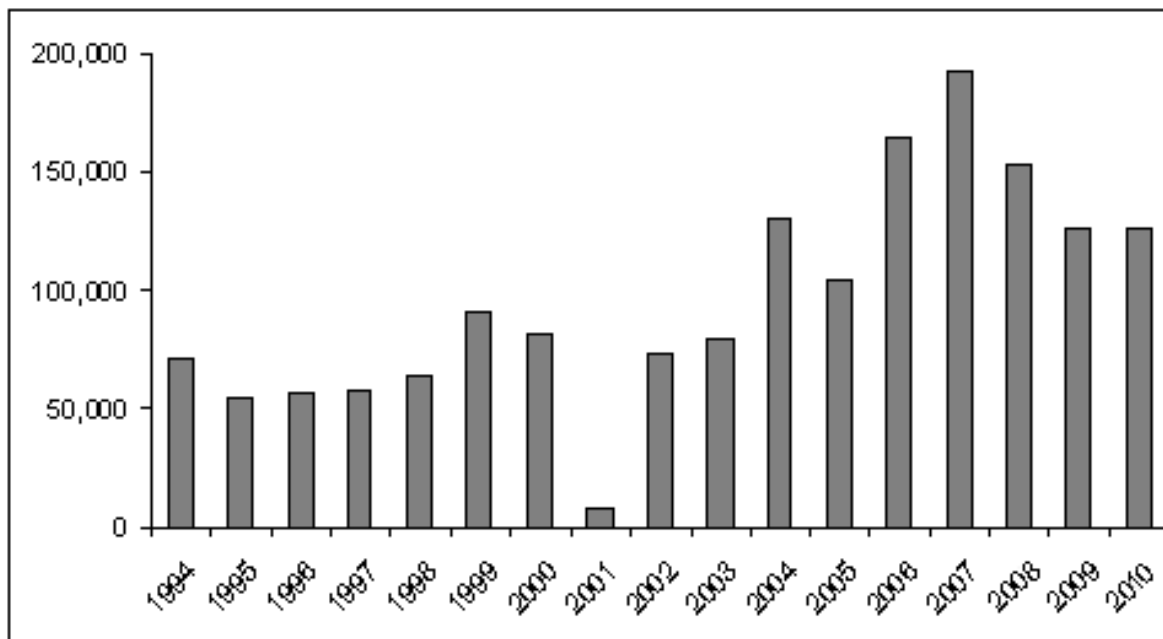
History

Soviet invasion (1979-1989)

The major wave of drug trafficking in Asia started with the international prohibition. The 1955's Persian prohibition of opium triggered production of opium in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and thus the Golden Crescent was born, with Afghanistan and Pakistan being the producers and Iran the consumer. Another reason why it was even more successful later on was when the U.S. President Richard Nixon's admission declared the war on drugs in 1971, offering financial aid for drug eradication. A year later, Turkey agreed and its effect was soon visible on increased opium production in Golden Crescent. In 1978, Moscow signed a treaty of cooperation with Afghanistan, with its army to help and maintain the Marxist regime in Afghanistan. However, as the insurgencies spread, the relations between Soviet Union and Afghanistan became colder because of Hafizullah Amin's refusal of help on how to stabilize the government. Thus Soviet Union entered the dangerous world of Afghan politics with its forces and as a reaction to that, majority of Afghan people joined the rebel forces, Mujahedeen. In order to finance their military supplies, they cooperated with the U.S. and by CIA's intervention, opium production considerably increased. Thus Golden Crescent together with Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, and Thailand) ruled the opium trade in the world. However, it was not only the United States who was involved in the drug trade during that time. On May 27, 1986, a Soviet cargo ship, the *Kapitan Tomson*, was busted by Dutch authorities in Rotterdam with 220 kilos of pure heroin aboard. At the time, it was the largest heroin seizure in European history.

Taliban era (1989-present)

After 1989, when Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan and the U.S. were no longer interested in Afghanistan, Mujahedeen, who filled the power vacuum, decided to compensate for the lack of US funds by cultivation and marketing of the opiates. Soon enough Taliban managed to establish its position like it is also nowadays and opium trade flourished. In 1991, Afghanistan became the number one producer of opium in the world. The worsening situation in Afghanistan negatively influenced also the one in Pakistan, where the opium addicted population rose from 5000 to 1.3 million in a span of just eight years. By the end of 1998 Taliban occupied 90% of Afghanistan limiting the opposition to minimum. By extreme interpretation of Islam Taliban restricted the rights of Afghani people, mainly the ones of women and minorities. After short time, Taliban established a monopoly over opium large enough to present a threat to the government. There was one occasion when the opium trade extremely dropped and that was when Taliban put a ban on opium in 2001.



Afghanistan – opium poppy cultivation, 1994-2010

That was a great success with the reasons behind it not entirely certain. Some claim that it was what Taliban always wanted to do and now also did after agreement with United Nations, others say that prices for opium were decreasing, so in order to rise them again, opium cultivation was stopped for one year so the demand and its price was higher again. Either way the opium cultivation went back to previous standard a year later, despite the U.S. invasion. There was a message which could be taken by the world. The Taliban had control over and was in power of poppy cultivation, and effective changes could be made if Taliban wanted. United States made little effort to stop the opium cultivation at this level, mainly due to the fact that it funded not only Taliban, but also many warlords and some members of North Alliance as well.

The Problem

The Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran)

Afghanistan is the main producer of opium among the three. The cultivated opium from Afghanistan travels via the golden route where the opium makes its way through the crescent first into Pakistan, where a large part of it gets processed into a morphine base. Afterwards, the goods are shifted into Iran where a small part of it is consumed, and then onto Turkey which is the major centre for conversion of the morphine-based opiates into heroin and hashish. After this it gets into European markets and feeds the addicted population in the continent. Another route that is used for opium trafficking is the northern route. It leaves Afghanistan from the north and through central Asia it finally enters Russia through Kazakhstan. Russia has been possibly the worst affected state by the modern boom in Afghan opium production. Yet another route which is frequently used is the Balkan route. It originates in Afghanistan, passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, then Turkey and reaches the Balkans via Bulgaria, with a smaller flow through Greece.

What makes it easy to use these routes is the corruption of the guards, their lack of willpower and fear of allies of Taliban. Moreover, the mountainous terrain of the environment makes it ideal for drug traffickers to smuggle opium across the crescent as it is hard also for satellites to track the smugglers.

However, there is one factor which makes the largest difference. The corruption begins even in the highest circles as also the government of these countries is being bribed by the drug traffickers and therefore they make it possible to continue with the opium business. Afghan, Pakistani and Iranian leaders have all been involved in their fair share of drug scandals.

The current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has been forthcoming in his intentions to eradicate the drug plantations; he even readily combined with US forces to push for an eradication program. However, the most effective methods to do it include aerial spraying of the crops with poisons, mainly glyphosate. The US forces support this way of getting rid of the opium production. Negotiations began between US, NATO and the Afghanistan government regarding this. Karzai, backed strongly by the UK, argued that this would not have the desired effect. According to them, the uneducated farmers and opium cultivators will be intimidated by the outlandish devices, which the primitive farmers have never seen before. The risk is that if the deeply religious Afghan masses find out who is behind it, they will join terrorist groups like Taliban. In January 2007, conclusion which has been made says that they should use more old fashioned, and less alien techniques of ground based eradication. However this was strongly criticized by Russia as well as other nations, who accused the government of inadequate resolve.

Russia plays an important role in the system, as it has suffered the worst from Afghan opium production. 30,000 Russians, many of them in their youth, die annually because of consumption of Afghan opium. The Russian government has not been actively involved in Afghanistan since the end of the Soviet invasion in 1989. However, it still keeps itself updated on the US' activities in the region, attempting to speed up eradication processes by pressuring the concerned governments into accelerating their efforts. They support the US in their modern strategy on drug eradication; however Afghan government didn't allow them to start an offensive of any kind in the region. In 2010, Russian and American forces took part in a joint raid where they destroyed opium and hashish worth an estimated 250 million dollars. Karzai called it a violation of sovereignty and criticized Russia for the act. Russia simply reacted that what Karzai claimed was not possible since the Afghan Interior ministry took part in the joint raid and hence knew that Russian forces would be there.

Iran, on the other hand, had it easier and has succeeded in reducing its heroin addiction, trafficking and cultivation. Since historic times, the shahs of Iran have banned poppy cultivation, reducing their people's financial dependence on poppy farming. However, it did not help much with reducing the addict population. After the revolution that established the Islamic Republic in 1979, a tough anti-drugs campaign was launched in Iran. Individuals caught in possession of drugs received fines, imprisonment and corporal punishment. Even the death penalty was used for serious drug offences. Thousands of troops were deployed to stop trafficking along the border. Next, under President Mohammad Khatami rehab centres were set up and an anti-narcotic campaign was carried out. However, under President Ahmedinejad, policies once again shifted back to supply side policies, with a resurgence of troops on the border shared with Afghanistan. As a result of these policies, Iran has been the most successful country in combating trafficking of the drugs. Pakistan on the other hand, has been hugely unsuccessful in dealing with the problem due to greed and graft. Suffering from a massive population of addicts, the government has been helpless in the face of powerful drug lords who own laboratories all along the Afghanistan – Pakistan border. It is estimated that 80% of Afghanistan's heroin is processed there.

Possible solutions

Certainly, there is no easy solution to this problem, otherwise it would have been done much sooner. Air-spraying will allow crops to be eliminated in the heartland of Taliban controlled territory, with relatively less risk. However, as previously mentioned, the Afghan people are against aerial eradication as they fear it, and ground based eradication is comparatively slow and unfeasible. However, without the fear of eradication, no farmer will willingly give up a crop as lucrative as poppy. No change is needed to the incentives provided to farmers to change from poppy growth. The real reform must come in two areas: border security, to prevent the opium from leaving, and the legal system. Trapping the heroin and opium within the country might bring prices down so much that poppy might become unprofitable. Secondly, the jails of the country need to be secured, to prevent inmates (especially traffickers) from escaping while strengthening the legal system to prosecute more traffickers and drug lords. An innovative idea to dissuade the people from growing poppy and countering Taliban logic is to conduct an advertisement campaign, by highlighting the costs of poppy to the nation. An alternate way of approaching this problem is to crack down on the Hawla system of money transfer. This would choke the Taliban of funds.

Opposition to traditional eradication

Ground poppy eradication would be an option, except for being costly and inefficient. Once, the central eradication force went to eliminate poppy crops in an area but were met with such resistance, that they had to retreat. Therefore the ground eradication is not the best possible option. However, President Karzai is against aerial eradication fearing it will turn the public against the government. Karzai also claims that poppy farmers are extremely poor; claiming that there is no way this section of the Afghan population will be able to survive financially without their current means of livelihood. However, he encourages any ways of turning farmers away from poppy cultivation. A great deal is being done to eliminate trafficking, but corruption runs so deep, that it is impossible to catch anyone, since everyone from the judges to the policemen are corrupt. The former attorney general attempted to prosecute some of them, but was stopped by Karzai for political reasons.

The role of poverty

Recently, however, new proof has been found that it is mainly the wealthy farmers who grow poppy now, not the poor farmers, as consistently propagated by the Afghani government. Satellite photos have shown that in the southern part of Afghanistan wells and canals are being dug, fertilizer used and poppy is being grown on massive industrial-size plots, which are undoubtedly the signs of their wealth. Farmers are deliberately abandoning their traditional lifestyles to get into the more profitable business of poppy cultivation. It is the high margins that have made it the most effective poverty eliminator in rural Afghanistan. Per hectare, wheat yields 250-300 dollars, while poppy yields 1200 dollars.

Poppy cultivation is quickly rising in the wealthier districts, while it is on a decline elsewhere. As poppy ensures that many people are not completely poor, there were even daring ideas to allow growing poppy, but for medical purposes only. However, this was not accepted by international community. The Afghan government keeps pointing out the poverty of poppy growers, which makes other countries sympathize with the government in not following hard-core cracking down on opium production. Many believe that the poor poppy farmers are in fact the ones who would be easier to convert to licit crop-growers, and that the government's claim that eradicating opium fields would cause a loss of livelihood, is not entirely true.

On the other hand, the government's statement that the opium trade is the only means of livelihood for millions of Afghans is partly true, no matter how exaggerated now.

It is said that majority of the poppy growers are the rich ones with large fields and effective technology, making great amounts of money on the business. Most of these farmers also have the protection of major warlords and sometimes even the Taliban. Thus, the government has obvious, and justified fears regarding storming these regions. US and NATO forces stay away from this dangerous and volatile regions well. Even if they tried to persuade the farmers to cultivate another crop instead of the poppy they do, they would not give up their precious source of money.

On the other hand, in the Northern regions, where the farmers are poorer, there are less and smaller poppy fields. So as a result, the farmers are poorer and have less chances of coming up to the Southern standard. Also, the government of Afghanistan has more control over the Northern region, therefore it is easier for US and Afghan forces to carry out raids in these regions without fear of being attacked by the Taliban and its allies. The poorer farmers having never experienced true wealth offered by the opium industry in its fullest, it makes it easy for the government to go up to these farmers and offer them other crops as poppy replacement. The farmers in Afghanistan rely mainly on traditional methods of farming and therefore it is hard for them to adapt to the means of cultivation of the replacement crop, which may require different techniques from the ones practiced by the farmers. They soon come to realize that the only crop which can ensure them of a yield every year and also a steady market is opium. As replacement crops do not have such high demand and their price is extremely lower than that of opium, the soon-to-be ex-opium farmers from the north have become poorer. Because of this, the government does not want to eradicate all the poppy immediately fearing loss of occupation and insolvency for several farmers. In the areas where the cultivation is greater, the farmers are also richer.

International concerns

Narco-terrorism

Narco-terrorism, probably the worst thing coming from opium cultivation, is a grave issue that needs resolution. It can be understood as actions of drug traffickers against anti-narcotic policies of governments or authorities. These actions are mainly in form of bribe or violence, therefore come under terrorism. However, this is a particularly extreme form of terrorism as it feeds itself. The illegal opium cultivators harvest more and more opium and more and more terrorism is needed in the form of more violence on authorities to expand this trade. Opium cultivation and expanding trade in refined opium poppy are forms of terrorism which are dependent on each other; therefore, you just need to get rid of one to eradicate the other as well.

In Afghanistan, in recent times, large transactions of drug money are being laundered through various methods to allow the Taliban to utilize it for their various purposes. This is done all over the world by specialists. The Hawala, or informal value transfer system, has allowed thousands of dollars to cross continents with ease and it is deeply connected with money laundering but the money trail left cannot lead us to the Taliban.

Impact of foreign involvement

CIA director Charles Cogan admitted that they sacrificed the war on drugs to fight the war on communism.

It was always believed that the involvement of United States in the opium trade in Afghanistan was great from the very beginning. Since 1980, the CIA has been active in the region first working to undermine the government run by Soviets by providing resources and support to the Mujahedeen. In the words of an unnamed CIA officer, the CIA needed the lucrative profits of drug trafficking to fund its paramilitary activities all over the world. Once its purpose had been achieved, they ceased to support the Mujahedeen making it depend on the most lucrative means of funding itself, opium. The CIA entered the scene in 2001 again, when they began paying off several drug lords, to help undermine the Taliban rule in Afghanistan which directly followed from poppy production increase in the years after. CIA is believed to have many links with the drug businesses in Afghanistan. The most prominent of their alleged contacts was Ahmed Wali Karzai, Afghan president Hamid Karzai's late brother, who used to have many alleged links to Pashtu Drug Lords. Recently in Afghanistan a new deadly disease is destroying the poppy crop, and although accusations are being thrown, no proof has been found yet. Farmers blame mainly the US and Great Britain.

Impact on the international community

The most potent, and widely used product obtained from poppy is heroin. Heroin consumption, especially among the youth, is on the rise, driven by lower prices, higher purity and availability. Heroin feeds a global addict population of between 12 to 14 million (2009), 30,000 of which die in Russia alone each year. Afghanistan alone retains 3%, a significant proportion of its crop, to feed its massive addict population. The number of underage users of heroin is also incredibly high. Heroin has several destructive effects on the body in the long and short term, the worst being heart attack as a short term and heart diseases as long term. However, heroin trafficking causes death even sooner by creating gang violence and clashes with security forces, that leave hundreds dead annually. The profits from these illicit enterprises are ploughed straight into the criminal underworld fuelling organized crime. Apart from the obvious terrorist activities, heroin has many hidden effects including mugging and armed robbery by addicts to pay for their addiction. The cost to countries in terms of human capital is enormous. It is not crime which fuels drugs, but drugs that fuel crime. The international cost due to this addiction is many times that which is spent in its prevention. Therefore, the solution lies in prevention, as in this case it is much better and more efficient than cure.



Questions a resolution must answer

- What can be and should be done about corruption in the legal system in Afghanistan? Are special autonomous prosecuting courts a viable option? You must also ensure that your interference in the same does not impede Afghanistan's sovereignty.
- Is eradication of opium crops a viable option? If not, what are the alternatives? What is the way forward concerning eradication? If yes, how will the population of Afghanistan be affected by eradication?
- Is heroin production truly a monopoly of the rich or last resort of the poor?
- What incentives can and should be offered to wean farmers of poppy production? Taking into account why the presently available incentives are unsuccessful, how can you ensure that farmers will accept the alternative crop/occupation?
- Is legalisation (in whole or in part) a viable option, attempting to harvest the poppy for legitimate purposes like medicinal or others?
- How can flow of funds across the world by terrorists be shut down? How can we identify their money laundering and transferring entities and shut them down?
- How can we identify agents of smuggling and stem flow through heroin smuggling routes across Eurasia, particularly through the Golden Crescent?



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