

03/2012

11th April 2012

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## THE ROLE OF ILLICIT TRAFFICKING IN THE AF-PAK CONTEXT

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## THE ROLE OF ILLICIT TRAFFICKING IN THE AF-PAK CONTEXT

### Abstract:

The growing relationship between insurgent organizations and organized crime networks in the AF-Pak region has important implications for the combat of terrorism and insurgent groups in the area. The drug industry in Afghanistan, arms trafficking, the smuggling of illegal and legal goods and the pervasive corruption have contributed significantly to the financing of insurgent groups like the Taliban, besides providing them with materials, human resources, space and opportunity to attack, etc.

This paper describes the different illegal activities developed in Afghanistan and shows that organized crime in the country does not focus only and exclusively on the opium trade. Indeed, there are other illegal businesses which are very lucrative for both criminal networks and insurgent groups. Next, this analysis focuses on the cultivation and trafficking of opium, as one of the main illegal activities related to the insurgent groups. Finally, this paper describes some of the most influential insurgent groups that operate in the AF-Pak region and explains their connections with illegal activities and how those links have significantly helped to increase the insurgent forces.

### Keywords:

AF-Pak, insurgents, organized crime, drug trafficking, security

## INTRODUCTION

After 10 years of persistent struggle in AF-Pak<sup>1</sup>, the need to combine different methods and approaches has been proved necessary in order to fight terrorism and organized crime in the Afghan scenario. Their relationship with organized crime, which is increasingly widespread and intensified, has facilitated the survival and belligerency of the armed insurgent groups that operate in the region.

The connection between insurgent groups and criminal networks and structures in Afghanistan cannot be understood without taking into account their own aims and objectives. On one hand, insurgent groups pursue political objectives, mostly related to the withdrawal of the foreign troops present in the country since 2001, and the replacement of the current regime by a theocratic system. On the other hand, criminal networks seek economic profit. However, despite their different objectives, both parties are interested in helping each other, particularly if their collaboration results in mutual benefits, as has happened before within this region<sup>2</sup>. In the AF-Pak region there is a very deep connection between organized crime and insurgent groups, especially regarding the opium trade, but also the trafficking of other illicit goods, such as arms, cannabis, chemical precursors, timber, precious stones, legal goods, etc. The main, but not the only, pillar of this connection is the rendering of protection services offered by the insurgent groups to the traffickers. In fact, these services represent a main source of funding for insurgency.

This report provides a brief description of the relationship between insurgent groups and organized crime in AF-Pak since the end of 2001 to the present day. It aims to explain how this relationship nourishes insurgent groups and also its relevance for any military and civil strategy in the region.

## ORGANIZED CRIME IN AF-PAK

Despite the importance of the opium trade, which is usually seen as the most important illicit activity in the region, in recent years the importance of other illegal activities has been growing. This is the case, for example, of cannabis trafficking and the smuggling of chemical precursors. Arms trafficking is not less important, in spite of the limited reliable reports about this activity, at least as far as open sources are concerned. Other illicit activities that should also be mentioned are related to the smuggling of legal goods. A description of the most relevant cases is provided below.

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<sup>1</sup> AF-Pak is a term that refers to the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where terrorist and insurgent groups have most of their operation centers. This concept is used more broadly in this text, including the border zone as well as the rest of insurgent areas.

<sup>2</sup> For further details on collaboration between terrorists or insurgents and organized crime, see De la Corte, L and Giménez-Salinas, Crimen.org. *Evolución y claves de la delincuencia organizada*, Barcelona, Ariel, 2011 pages 319-340. On the influence of organized crime activities in the development and evolution of armed conflicts, see De la Corte, L., "Criminalidad organizada y conflictos armados", *Ejército*, 838, 18-26, 2011.

## Arms Trafficking

As it has already been mentioned, despite the fact that arms trafficking and illegal arms possession are often an essential condition for insurgent groups to operate, the efforts already undertaken to clear up the current dimension of this activity in AF-Pak have clearly been limited.

According to data given by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there are three basic ways to acquire weapons in Afghanistan. Two of them imply their importation from neighboring countries, specifically from Pakistan or Central Asia. The third option implies their acquisition through Afghan warlords. Buying arms from Pakistan is easier and cheaper but their quality is lower. The arms that come from Central Asia (of Russian origin) are considered to be of higher quality but also more expensive and difficult to acquire<sup>3</sup>. UNODC reports state the importation of brand new AK47 assault rifles from different Central Asian countries. Their price is stipulated by an exchange of opium or heroin: fifteen brand new AK47 on the northern border of Afghanistan would cost 1 kg of heroin<sup>4</sup>. In northern Afghanistan, not directly on the border, an AK47 would cost 4 kg of opium<sup>5</sup>. These reports also inform about a market on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, in a harbor beside the Panj River, where the trade of goods takes place, especially the trade of arms and precious stones in exchange for Afghan heroin<sup>6</sup>.

However, not all arms that reach the Afghan insurgency have been recently imported. There are still many weapons from the war against the Soviets. Many Afghan warlords took advantage of the USSR withdrawal to gain control of several regions and also of most of the light weapons previously offered to the mujahideen for them to fight against foreign invasion. Nowadays, insurgent groups have access to these weapons anywhere in Afghanistan. Many of the groups that are currently trading with arms stored during those years are also involved in the trafficking of weaponry from abroad. In the same way that arms are exchanged for heroin or opium in the border, further south in the country arms are exchanged for drugs.

## Drug Trafficking

In Afghanistan, the importance of drug trafficking activities has been known for years, especially in terms of the production and exportation of opium. Far less notorious is its relation with the cultivation of cannabis and the trafficking of chemical precursors, which are essential in the production of opium-based drugs like morphine and heroin. Narcotic drugs trafficking is facilitated and strengthened in Afghanistan by a variety of circumstances and factors. Poverty and state fragility play a decisive role in this respect. However, there are also other important aspects such as an extremely high level of corruption, the availability of

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<sup>3</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, Crime and Insurgency. The transnational threat of Afghan opium", Oct. 2009, 112-113

<sup>4</sup> This data is extracted from UNODC reports of 2009. A new interpretation of the data should be carried out, because opium prices seem to have risen in the year 2011.

<sup>5</sup> UNODC, *Addiction, Crime and...Op. cit.*, 112-113

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

arms or money laundering<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, each of these elements is being intensified by drug trafficking activities, creating a circular relation between all of them, in which each problem feeds and reinforces the others.

### *Opium and heroin cultivation and trafficking*

During the last decade, Afghanistan has produced almost 90% of the opium and heroin consumed worldwide. Opium trafficking involves a wide variety of classes, social strata and national figures, starting by those at the lowest level of the production chain, from farmers up to senior government officials<sup>8</sup>. At the higher levels, there is also a cross connection between warlords, insurgent groups and, of course, important regional drug traffickers.

Most of the opium production and processing is carried out in the south, although during the last few years, a slight decrease in poppy cultivation in that part of the country has been confirmed. In this case, this proves the relation between the insecurity in that area and opium cultivation. Less safe areas present the highest rates of opium production and processing.

Given its particular relevance, the issue of opium trafficking will be dealt with specifically and in greater detail in another section later.

### *Cannabis Cultivation*

In recent years cannabis cultivation has started to be monitored. In fact, the first reports by the UNODC were carried out just two years ago.

As with opium, the southern part of the country presents a higher level of cannabis cultivation, this being an activity clearly related to the insecurity of the area. It is estimated that Afghanistan has a yearly production of cannabis of 1,200-3,700 tons, a figure that does not vary greatly in comparison with that of the previous year<sup>9</sup>. The country uses a surface that is four times larger than that of Morocco to cultivate cannabis, which makes Afghanistan the world leader in this field, overtaking the North African country<sup>10</sup>. According to the latest UNODC report, the surface dedicated to cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan varies between 9,000 and 29,000 hectares, a figure far less shocking than the 123,000 hectares dedicated to opium cultivation<sup>11</sup>. Despite this important difference regarding the land under cannabis cultivation, some analysts believe that this activity may increase in the following years since it provides larger profits than those obtained from the cultivation of

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<sup>7</sup> Hristova, Hristina and De la Corte, Luis, "Narcotráfico y Criminalidad Organizada in Af-Pak: Vínculos con la Insurgencia y Consecuencias para la Seguridad", in Miguel Requena (Ed.) *La Seguridad y la Defensa en el Actual Marco Socio-Económico: Nuevas Estrategias frente a Nuevas Amenazas*, Gutiérrez Mellado University Institute (GMUI), 2011, 211-230.

<sup>8</sup> It is suspected that President Hamid Karzai's brother, Ahmed Walli, who has recently passed away, was involved in trafficking in Afghanistan.

<sup>9</sup> UNODC, "Afghanistan Cannabis Survey 2010", June 2011, 7-8

<sup>10</sup> UNODC, "World drug report 2010", United Nations Publications, 2010, 183-187

<sup>11</sup> UNODC, Afghanistan cannabis...*Op. cit.*, 11-12

opium<sup>12</sup>. Recently, the UNODC informed that production costs are far higher for opium than they are for cannabis. In particular, gross income for cannabis resin is around US\$ 9,000 per hectare, whereas for opium it is approximately US\$ 4,900 per hectare. The cannabis cultivation costs do not exceed 10% of the total gross income per hectare, while opium cultivation costs exceed 40%<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, cannabis cultivation does not present the same advantages as opium cultivation. This is because the first one has to be planted over the summer season, when irrigation is scarce, and land can be used to plant some other varieties of cultivation that take shorter time to grow and which are more useful<sup>14</sup>.

Taking all of this into account, it seems likely that cannabis trafficking will become a source of funding for the Afghan insurgency. According to the latest data from the UNODC, the *ushr*<sup>15</sup> is being charged practically in the same way on opium and cannabis cultivation. In other words, in those provinces where there is a greater insurgent control, more taxes of this type are being imposed on farmers. The southern and central provinces have the highest percentage, over 50% of the farmers pay this tax, followed by the western provinces, where the percentage of farmers is nearly 30%. In the northern and eastern provinces there is no evidence of the application of such taxation<sup>16</sup>.

According to some sources, most of the cannabis is processed in Pakistan, from where it heads either to Iran through the province of Baluchistan or to the Makran coast. Nevertheless, the cannabis processed in Afghanistan leaves from the north of the country<sup>17</sup>.

The profits earned on cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan increased 130% during the last year<sup>18</sup> alone. It is worth remembering that cannabis continues to be the world's most widely consumed psychoactive drug, and its processing is far less complex than that of opium and its derivatives. All of this makes its cultivation a temptation for a large part of the population, and it also suggests a future trend of increased cannabis cultivation. As a result, cannabis processing may become another big illicit industry in Afghanistan, from which insurgent groups will make a profit in one way or another.

### Chemical Precursors Smuggling

In Afghanistan, large quantities of chemical precursors in the opium industry are required to process that substance into heroin. One of the most essential chemical precursors for producing this drug is acetic anhydride. This precursor is illegal in Afghanistan and, therefore, the only way to obtain it is through smuggling activities. Due to the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> Shelley, Louis 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*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report nº20, December 2009, 23-41

<sup>13</sup> UNODC, *Afghanistan cannabis...Op. cit.*, 37-38

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40

<sup>15</sup> Demanded by the Islamic law, this rate is charged on agricultural production and it is equivalent to 10% of the profits earned on it.

<sup>16</sup> UNODC, *Afghanistan cannabis...Op. cit.*, 44-46

<sup>17</sup> Shelley and Hussain, *Op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> UNODC, *Afghanistan cannabis...Op. cit.*, 7-8

acetic anhydride is legal in some Asian, European and American countries, diverting it from the original market and then smuggling it into Afghanistan is quite easy.

It is estimated that the amount of acetic anhydride annually imported in Afghanistan is between 380 and 570 tons. This is a minimum figure if the acetic anhydride worldwide production figures<sup>19</sup> are taken into account. During the year 2009 alone, between US\$ 130 million and 200 million circulated in the acetic anhydride market in Afghanistan<sup>20</sup>. This business provides huge profits not only for the traffickers, but also for the insurgency located on both sides of the AF-Pak border.

In order to import acetic anhydride, usual trafficking routes for opium and heroin exportation are used. The busiest route seems to be the one that links Pakistan (Southern Route) and Iran (Balkan Route). The first one provides acetic anhydride smuggled from Asia and the second one brings the precursor mainly diverted from Europe. Noteworthy is the high quantity of cargos from Asian countries, especially from China, which have been intercepted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This fact suggests that the UAE, in particular Dubai, may be an intermediate stopover point in the route of the smuggling of precursor chemicals to Afghanistan<sup>21</sup>. Regarding the Balkan route, acetic anhydride goes through the Eastern Europe countries, Turkey and then Iran, finally ending up in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it appears that the trafficking networks of this precursor have been expanded, so Iraq may have also become a transit country, especially the north part of the country<sup>22</sup>. The third channel or Northern Route begins in the Central Asian republics. According to UNODC reports, currently this is the least exploited route, probably because most Afghan processing laboratories are mainly located in the south and east of the country, due to the fact that these regions obtain acetic anhydride mainly from Pakistan and Iran. Another factor to emphasize is that none of the former Soviet republics have seaports, a preferential infrastructure for smugglers of acetic anhydride<sup>23</sup>.

It appears that it is not only the traffickers themselves who are involved in the trafficking of this precursor, but also insurgent groups in the AF-Pak area. It is highly probable that those insurgent groups involved in the opium trafficking also collaborate in the smuggling of chemical precursors, providing the same protection services. Thus, the presence of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP) should be noted, as well as the Haqqani network, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's group (Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, HIG) or Al-Qaeda among others.

Finally, it has been observed that Afghan and Pakistani traffickers are constantly present in precursor chemical networks which operate outside their countries. This occurs mainly in Asia (Republic of Korea and Japan). In contrast, the groups in charge of the illicit acetic anhydride smuggling from Europe are mostly local and are nationals of the country of origin

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<sup>19</sup> UNODC, "The Global Afghan Opium Trade. A Threat Assessment", July 2011, 91-143

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 105-114

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 114-128

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 128-132



or of the transit country, with no evidence of there being any Afghan or Pakistani traffickers<sup>24</sup>.

### Smuggling of Minerals and Precious Stones

Afghanistan has substantial mineral deposits, mainly copper, iron, gold, cobalt, chromium, lithium and marble, as well as some precious and semi-precious stones like emeralds, lapis lazuli, etc. There are currently about two hundred mines of which the government controls only a minority<sup>25</sup>, the rest are looted by companies that operate without a license to operate and located in territories controlled by the insurgent groups and the local warlords. The operating companies often turn to insurgency to ensure that their shipments are safely exported to other countries<sup>26</sup>.

Some of the areas with the most mine deposits under insurgent control are located in the provinces of Khost, Paktia, Ghazni, Logar and Baghlan<sup>27</sup>. The provinces of Khost and Paktia belong to the region of Loya-Paktia, which is mainly controlled by the Haqqani network. It is known that members of the Zadran tribe, which is closely linked to the Haqqani, are involved in the smuggling of chromite from Afghanistan to Pakistan. It is also known that members of the Taliban group headed by Hafiz Gul Bahadur are engaged in chromite trade on the other side of the border. It is estimated that in the province of Logar there are about twenty deposits of precious stones and several deposits of copper, chromite and gold, all of which are looted by armed groups. These groups export the minerals and precious stones to Pakistan usually through the city of Parachinar. Chromite shipments are often hidden under shipments of timber, which is also smuggled<sup>28</sup>.

Instead of boosting the country's economy, mineral and precious stone deposits are detrimental to the Afghan industry and security. The poor governmental control and corruption decrease the benefits while insurgent groups exploit the deposits as a supplementary source of funding<sup>29</sup>.

### Other Illicit Trafficking Activities

Although the information available is not as plentiful and accurate as the information about the trade of drugs, cannabis, chemical precursors and arms, organized crime activities in Afghanistan also cover other illicit markets. These include a significant amount of smuggling of legal goods. The illegal trade of basic goods is very common in the areas affected by armed conflicts<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, in Afghanistan there is evidence of tobacco smuggling, illegal

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 105-132

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> DuPee, Matthew, "Afghanistan's Conflict Minerals: The Crime-State-Insurgent Nexus", *CTC Sentinel*, Vol.5, Issue 2, 11-14, 2012

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> De la Corte, Luis, "Criminalidad organizada y conflictos armados" ["Organized crime and armed conflicts"], *Ejército*, 838, 18-26, 2011

logging<sup>31</sup> and smuggling of timber in the Pakistan border<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, insurgent groups commit extortion by demanding road-charging schemes and illegal fees as well as imposing services for the protection of crops, shipments and processing laboratories.

Another illegal activity in which some warlords are involved is the trafficking of human beings<sup>33</sup>. According to the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM), in Afghanistan there are three main types of human trafficking: illegal immigration, human trafficking for illegal exploitation and kidnapping. The report also shows that the victims of these crimes end up suffering, particularly sexual exploitation, forced labor and the trafficking of organs. The main target countries seem to be Iran and Pakistan, followed by other destinations<sup>34</sup>. Evidence suggests that human trafficking is linked to the loans accumulated by poppy growers, who are often forced to give away their own daughters or wives due to the lack of money in order to settle their debts with cash.

## AFGHANISTAN AND THE OPIUM INDUSTRY

As outlined earlier, the opium business is not the only form of illegal trafficking practiced in Afghanistan, although it has the highest impact and, together with corruption, it is the most difficult activity to fight against. This section explains the performance of the opium industry with a particular focus on its connections to the insurgent groups and its consequences for the development of the ongoing conflict in this country.

### The Production Cycle of Opium

The production cycle of opium begins, obviously, by growing this substance in poppy fields. According to the *Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs* of the U.S., about 119,000 hectares of poppy fields were cultivated over the year 2010 in Afghanistan, an estimation that according to UNODC data<sup>35</sup> rises to 123,000 hectares. In contrast, it is considered that over the year 2011 the area dedicated to poppy cultivations reached 131,000 hectares<sup>36</sup>. The cultivation is carried out just like any other type of plantation. Farmers sell their crops to the traffickers in the area. Final products are usually sold over the cultivation period and not after the harvest, forcing growers to ask for loans, the so-called “salaam”<sup>37</sup>. These farming loans are mainly granted by warlords themselves, traffickers or

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<sup>31</sup> Felbab-Brown, Vanda, “The Drug economy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Military conflict in the región”, in *Narco-Jihad: Drug trafficking and Security in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report nº 20, December 2009, 1-22

<sup>32</sup> UNODC, *Addiction, Crime and...Op. cit.*, 103

<sup>33</sup> Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, “*2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*”, March 3, 2011

<sup>34</sup> International Organization for Migration, “*Trafficking in Persons in Afghanistan. Field Survey Report*”, 2008

<sup>35</sup> Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *Op. cit.*, 1-10

<sup>36</sup> UNODC, “Afghanistan Opium survey 2011. Summary findings”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Ministry of Counter Narcotics, October 2011, 2-7

<sup>37</sup> Ahrari, Ehsan, “The Dynamics of Narco-Jihad in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region”, in *Narco-Jihad: Drug trafficking and Security in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report nº 20, December 2009, 43-57



merchants interested in buying these goods. Sometimes weather and natural conditions, such as the plague of 2010 or the eradication plans implemented by the Afghan government, prevent the farmers from obtaining enough profits from the sale of their crops so as to pay off their debts. In such circumstances farmers choose to settle their debts by paying in goods: usually giving a portion of the final product, opium, or in extreme cases already mentioned, giving their daughters or wives to creditors.

As has already been mentioned in the previous section, the most important growing areas are located in the south and west of the country, which account for about 95% of the opium cultivation. However, over the year 2011 several northern and eastern provinces lost their “free area” status for poppy cultivation<sup>38</sup>, causing a decrease in the number of provinces of this nature from twenty to seventeen in the year 2011<sup>39</sup>. In some southern and eastern provinces there is a strong tradition concerning the processing of opium poppy, which results in the presence of numerous laboratories managed by insurgent groups. An important example of this is the laboratories controlled by the rebel faction headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which has been operating for many years in the east of the country. It is estimated that there are between 300 and 500 laboratories currently active across the country<sup>40</sup>. In the year 2009, 48 laboratories were eliminated; in the same line, 68 similar facilities were also closed down during the previous year<sup>41</sup>. Due to this kind of initiative, in recent years in Afghanistan and in neighboring countries traffickers have been using their own trucks as mobile laboratories to process small amounts of opium. Although it does not allow them to process large quantities, the latter method has the advantage of providing a much faster shipment of goods, since the processing is often carried out on the border with Pakistan or Iran<sup>42</sup>.

### Parallel Illicit Activities

As the opium production cycle proceeds, other illicit activities directly related to the insurgent groups are developed in parallel. These activities are, to be precise, the protection of shipments, the collection of taxes on crops and illegal tolls, the imposition of fees on the heads of processing laboratories and various corruption activities performed in order to facilitate trafficking.

One of the most important relationships between traffickers, warlords and insurgent groups found in Afghanistan and in the border area with Pakistan is related to the protection of drug shipments. Traffickers hire insurgent groups to smuggle drugs through the country or the border without facing any problems or being attacked by other criminals or by the police forces. Some sources report that the Taliban are competing, in protection tasks, against

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<sup>38</sup> Baghlan, Faryab and Kapisa provinces.

<sup>39</sup> UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium...Op. cit.*, 2-7

<sup>40</sup> UNODC, *The Global Afghan...Op. cit.*, 143-155

<sup>41</sup> UNODC, “World drug report 2010. Executive summary” [], 1-32

<sup>42</sup> Shelley and Hussain, *Op. cit.*

warlords that have strong ties with the Afghan government<sup>43</sup>. It seems that the protection monopoly is split between the aforementioned warlords and several insurgent groups, both Afghan and Pakistani, such as the already mentioned Taliban, the HIG, the Haqqani network, the TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), etc.

In the same manner that protection is sold, taxes on crops and road fees are charged. The taxes charged, such as the aforementioned *ushr* or the *zakat*<sup>44</sup>, have become “compulsory” for poppy farmers. Although in some cases these activities can be considered as a means of extortion, sometimes it is the farmers who request protection in order to avoid being affected by the government’s eradication campaigns. Moreover, the domination that the insurgent groups have had on the southern part of the country and the majority of the provinces from the East has allowed them to control the roads (especially the main road of Afghanistan) through which the drug traffickers’ go by and therefore are able to make a profit by imposing illegal road tolls to the traffickers. The existence of illicit tolls has not eliminated the police’s legal controls, which the traffickers normally overcome without much difficulty by paying the necessary bribes. This is how the extended corruption amongst the government workers that are in charge of the legal road controls becomes another factor that makes drug trafficking easy in Afghanistan<sup>45</sup>. In fact, according to reports from the UNODC, “a drug cargo can cross all Afghanistan without anybody knowing what it contains and without any documentation whatsoever.”<sup>46</sup> Also, according to the UNODC approximately 70% of drug trafficking in Afghanistan is done through the main roads. This is possible thanks to the bribes that the high-level government officials, that have strong ties with important smuggling networks, are paid.<sup>47</sup>

Insurgent groups charge protection fees to the processing laboratories just as they impose fees on the drug cargos. For example, according to reliable sources, the Taliban charge a fee between US\$ 50 and 70 per kilo on the final product, modifying the price in accordance with the category of the product (morphine, heroine, etc.).<sup>48</sup> Another way of charging these taxes is based on drug exchange; at the end they charge the corresponding percentage of money in goods.

As can be seen, all the illicit activities that take place related to the production and trafficking of opium can provide substantial direct financing to the insurgent groups that are fighting against the foreign troops in Afghanistan. It should be said that, in recent years, private donations, considered a main source of the terrorist and insurgent groups of the Jihadist movement, have decreased. As an indirect advantage for the AF-Pak insurgent groups, the social support, derived from the former’s permissiveness exhibited towards drug

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<sup>43</sup> Mahadevan, Prem, “Narcotics as a growing security concern”, in *Strategic Trends 2011. Key Developments in Global Affairs*, Center for Security Studies CSS, Zurich, 2011, 89-107

<sup>44</sup> The *zakat* is another type of tax, according to Islamic Law, that corresponds to 2.5% of the profit of a product that applies to all the merchants.

<sup>45</sup> Hristova and De la Corte Ibáñez, *Op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 213

<sup>47</sup> UNODC, “Addiction, crime... *Op. cit.*”, 137-141

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 110

trafficking practices, must also be mentioned<sup>49</sup>. Despite the fact that a great part of the population acknowledges their fear towards the Taliban and all the other insurgent groups, they depend on the growing of poppy in order to survive. For this reason, since these groups allow them to continue with their only means of eking out a living and being able to maintain their families, this justifies, for many of them, their support for the cause.

## THE CRIMINAL-INSURGENCY CONNECTION IN AF-PAK: SHORT OVERVIEW

The different illicit activities described, together with their development and the parallel activities performed by the insurgent groups and others in the Af-Pak scenario take on meaning when the whole connection between them is explained. That is to say, when the different groups that participate are taken into account, as well as those who finally make a profit from such activities. This section will be dedicated precisely to clarifying who the groups that make a profit from the large connection with the criminal activity of the area are and how they operate.

### The Insurgent Groups Involved

There are several insurgent groups in the organized criminal activity of the Af-Pak area. Each of them controls a specific geographical area, all of the groups always maintaining the same type of relationship with the rest of the elements that are part of the criminal-insurgency network (criminals, protection services, illegal payments, fees, etc.).

#### *The Taliban*

Nowadays the tag “Taliban” has such a wide range of uses that it becomes essential to define it and clarify the different groups to which it normally applies.

Let's begin with the oldest and well-known Taliban group, faithful to the leader Mullah Mohammed Omar that came into power in 1996 to transform the Sharia or Islamic law into the criteria of the political and moral jurisdiction in the whole country. Radically religious, up to this moment they will not accept the constitution approved after the fall of their regime just as they seem to not have given up in their quest to gain back power in Afghanistan. Although they keep on fighting strongly and they maintain their demand for the foreign troops to leave the country, in recent years they have declared their disposition to negotiate with their opponents and they are looking for international recognition. However, together with these Taliban who are faithful to their leader and who place their ideology before everything, there are several insurgent groups whose reasons for going to war are not only religious or ideological but of a diverse nature: economic, security, survival, tribal, etc.

In reality, up to this day there has not been any specific proof of the direct implication of the Afghan Taliban in the production of opium, which does not mean that they do not know

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<sup>49</sup> Hristova and De la Corte, *Op. cit.*, 226

about the benefits of the activity, as has already been proved in this document<sup>50</sup>. All the already mentioned illegal activities, the ones that take place in parallel to guarantee the adequate functioning of the drug network, stay under the power of the Taliban insurgents in all the areas that they control. Let's remember once again that, besides it benefiting them economically those protection and different fee payment activities also provide the Taliban with considerable social support. Those advantages contribute to the fact that the war against the Taliban is more costly and difficult.

The other category of the Taliban corresponds with the so-called Pakistani Taliban, a coalition of insurgent groups that in 2007 proclaimed their union under the common factor of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. They are linked to the Pashtun clan of the Mehsud and they are situated in the frontiers with Pakistan<sup>51</sup>. These Taliban also take advantage of the illicit business in the area, especially the drug, chemical, and arms trafficking, without excluding the smuggling of legal goods or even illegal deforestation<sup>52</sup>. However, the social support that these groups receive is significantly lower than the one provided to the Afghan Taliban, partially because of the limited territory dedicated in their areas of crop growing to the production of narcotics.

### *The Haqqani Network*

Even though the number of members is smaller and its area of control is also smaller, the so-called Haqqani network is one of the insurgent groups that have been able to gain more power in the Af-Pak territory. It is believed that it collaborates strongly with the Intelligence Service of Pakistan (ISI), at least since the nineteen-eighties. The leader of the current group is Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of the founder Jalaluddin Haqqani, although from some data Sirajuddin is more radical than his father. It is also assumed that the Haqqani have maintained and strengthened their ties with the terrorist group Al-Qaeda<sup>53</sup>, besides having a close relationship with the Afghan Taliban. Sirai Haqqani's brother, Badruddin Haqqani, also plays an important role in the leadership of the group, being the military commander-in-chief<sup>54</sup>. The sanctuary of the Haqqani network is currently located in North Waziristan (FATA). Even though it is not very big in comparison with the area controlled by the Taliban, the area controlled by the Haqqani is crossed by one of the main commercial roads where Afghanistan and Pakistan meet. That road goes from Miram Sha, one of the most important cities in North Waziristan, to Kabul, passing through the provinces of Khost, Paktya, Logar, also controlled by the Haqqani network<sup>55</sup>. Besides protecting the cargo of the traffickers, this group itself carries out drug and arm trafficking and it also participates in the smuggling of legal goods taking advantage of the aforementioned road<sup>56</sup>. Apart from the relation it has with other insurgent and terrorist groups of the AF-Pak area, the Haqqani are also thought to

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<sup>50</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime... *Op. cit.*", 102-104

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 101-137

<sup>52</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Dressler, Jeffrey A., "The Haqqani Network. From Afghanistan to Pakistan", Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan Report 6, 2010, 8-10

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 8

<sup>55</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime... *Op. cit.*", 103-104

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 103-104

have connections with Arab smugglers that traffic with opium in Western countries<sup>57</sup>. This indicates that the role of this group in the business of drugs is probably much more important than that of other insurgent groups such as the Taliban.

Even though they pledge obedience to the mullah Omar, the Haqqani maintain a wide operational independence. The Taliban need their support to control the Loya-Paktia area, where their influence has always been limited due to tribal loyalties. The public acknowledgement of their affinity for the Taliban confers on the Haqqani a good image among the local and international jihadist forces.

#### *Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)*

The insurgent group founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a well-known mujahideen of the anti-Soviet period, is involved in fighting against the government, as well as in several types of illicit activities. Despite all these negative qualities, it seems that one of this group's representatives is trying to ensure the presence of the HIG in the negotiating table between the Taliban, the U.S. and Qatar<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, even though it is an insurgent group, the HIG has a political arm, the Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan, which has a significant presence in the Afghan government<sup>59</sup>.

Hekmatyar's group controls some eastern areas of the country such as Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman in Afghanistan, as well as the agencies of Dir, Bajaur and Khyber on the Pakistani side of the border. It also has a certain influence in several Northern provinces such as Kunduz and Takhar<sup>60</sup> and in other more central ones such as Wardak and Ghazni<sup>61</sup>. According to the data provided by UNAMA, Hekmatyar's men have several drug-processing laboratories in Nangarhar as well as in Badakshan. By maintaining its power over these areas, this group can control the illegal traffic that crosses the Pakistani border and charge tolls on the roads in their area, as well as those trafficking activities in the points that border with Pakistan<sup>62</sup>. Gulbuddin is also considered to be involved in wood and precious stone smuggling.

#### *Al-Qaeda*

The global terrorist organization currently led by Ayman al-Zawahiri shows signs of being involved in the trafficking of low-level arms on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, there is no precise information that proves its direct participation in opium dealing. The organization cannot exercise any control over Afghanistan, due to its

<sup>57</sup> Peters, Gretchen, "Seeds of terror. How heroin is bankrolling the Taliban and Al-Qaeda", Oneworld, Oxford 2009, 128-130

<sup>58</sup> Escobar, P. (January 7, 2012), "The road map to the Afghan endgame", Al Jazeera available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/20121610014530356.html> (accessed January 20, 2012)

<sup>59</sup> International Crisis Group (2011), "The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland", Asia Report n°207, 14-15

<sup>60</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime...Op. cit., 103

<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, Op. cit., 16-17

<sup>62</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime...Op. cit., 103

withdrawal from the tribal areas in the year 2001<sup>63</sup>. In fact, Al-Qaeda's clandestine profile and its progressive marginalization hinder it from participating extensively in any of the illicit activities carried out by the rest of extremist groups in the region. Nevertheless, several analyses point out that the relationship between Al-Qaeda and these insurgent groups indirectly contributes to the persistence of said illicit activities.

### The Warlords

The warlords have been developing illicit activities since the eighties and the Soviet occupation. They are powerful men, tribal leaders, former mujahedeen, politicians, businessmen, etc. They are strong men with private armies at their disposal, which not only protect them but also provide them with extortion activities.

Currently, many of the warlords are collaborating directly with insurgent groups both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They can even end up operating in the same areas. One of the warlord's main profit sources is the tax they charge on the main Afghan road (Ring Road). Many of them have founded companies that provide security and protection services for any kind of goods that transit through the areas under their control. They are especially present in the south, east and west of the country<sup>64</sup>, frequently operating together with different insurgent groups, such as the Afghan Taliban in the south or the Haqqani network in the southeast. Moreover, many of these warlords are part of the Afghan government and hold important political offices. According to data provided by the UNO, in the year 2005, 60% of the government members were warlords<sup>65</sup>.

There are significant examples of how the warlords take advantage of their public office to put an end to any competition. It is a common practice for the province governors to cooperate with the poppy field eradication measures supported by the government. However, their aim is normally to eradicate cultivation in those provinces they do not control and, by doing this, destroy the crops belonging to competing traffickers whilst maintaining cultivation in those provinces that are more related to them<sup>66</sup>.

It is believed that many of the warlords that run the protection companies pay the insurgent groups who control the areas their goods will travel through so as not to be attacked<sup>67</sup>. This form of extortion that is put into practice by the Taliban seems to have been used to finance their attacks against the Coalition troops.

### The Traffickers

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 102-103

<sup>64</sup> Tierney, John F. (2010), *"Warlord, Inc. Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan"*, Report of the Majority Staff, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, 19-21

<sup>65</sup> UNODC, *"Addiction, crime...Op. cit."*, 105-106

<sup>66</sup> Felbab-Brown, *Op. cit.*, 1-22

<sup>67</sup> Tierney, *Op. cit.*, 34-40



Most of the traffickers that operate in AF-Pak are natives of the region, although many of them have their homes and operation bases on the other side of the Afghan border, in some of the neighboring countries. These traffickers normally do not dedicate themselves to just one type of illicit trafficking, but normally combine different types of goods: arms, opium, cannabis, etc. Sometimes they even foster the smuggling of legal goods.

According to an investigation carried out by the UNO and the World Bank, it is known that in Afghanistan there are between 25 and 30 traffickers that hold leading positions in the country's organized crime<sup>68</sup>. Furthermore, traffickers are well connected both to the insurgent groups and the corrupt politicians in Karzai's government. Their connection to the insurgents provides them protection at crop level as well as during the transportation of their goods and in the laboratories. On their behalf, their relationship with corrupt civil servants allows them to carry out many activities such as buying the elimination of competition, preventing the eradication of crops in their areas or transporting their goods across the country without any documentation.

### The Corrupt Civil Servants

According to data published by *Transparency International* in its annual publication, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2011*, Afghanistan is the fourth most corrupt country in the world<sup>69</sup>. Corruption is widespread in the country from lower levels up to high government officials. Bribery is not only taking place among those who hold a political position. According to UNO data, members of the police forces are also corrupt, along with members of the military and other types of civil servants, etc.<sup>70</sup>. As already stated in the previous paragraph, bribery is used for everything: to prevent some crops from being eradicated and also to eradicate others. Moreover, these bribes account for 70% of the drug transportation that is carried out through Afghanistan's main road and crosses its borders without any problem<sup>71</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

The connection maintained by insurgent and terrorist groups towards organized crime in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a factor that fosters the increase of their resistance in this scenario. On one hand, the direct consequences are the funding of these groups, with a different funding percentage depending on the agency that has carried out the financing study. On the other hand, the insurgent group's involvement in illegal trafficking also provides them much of the social support they receive. This said, such social support does not put an end to the extortions, threats and coercions towards the population carried out by the insurgent groups as a means of obtaining money and recruiting combatants. In this

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<sup>68</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime...*Op. cit.*", 104-105

<sup>69</sup> Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2011", available at: [http://www.transparency.org/publications/publications/other/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2011](http://www.transparency.org/publications/publications/other/corruption_perceptions_index_2011) (accessed January 24, 2012)

<sup>70</sup> UNODC, "Addiction, crime...*Op. cit.*", 137-141

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

regard, it is the key to understanding the role that different types of organized crime play in the AF-Pak scenario. It is not only opium and cannabis trafficking, arms smuggling and human trafficking that must be taken into account, but also to the rampant corruption in the Afghan state. The insurgent groups make a profit from these breaches within the political system to achieve their final objective, namely to threaten our troops on Afghan soil.

The relationship between the insurgent groups and organized crime ultimately creates a hybrid structure that becomes stronger due to the bonds that are established over time. The insurgent groups provide their services to criminal organizations, while these finance the former's bombing campaigns with money and arms, cars and space to operate. As long as this relationship continues to exist, both parties will benefit from it to the detriment of the law enforcement forces that operate in the country.

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