

DRUGS AND 21ST CENTURY ARMED CONFLICT

ICRA Background Discussion Paper

Author: Freddie Bainbridge, Exeter University

Contributor: Niamh McCaughey, Exeter University

Contributing Editor: Christopher Langton, ICRA

Abstract

This paper discusses the linkages between drug trafficking and 21st Century armed conflict. Whilst drug trafficking cannot be attributed as a direct cause of conflict, the conditions of instability resulting from conflict often allow trafficking of illicit substances to thrive. Violent Non-State Actors and terrorist organizations co-habit the realms of organized crime. Lucrative commercial gain seduces some groups away from their original ideological goals as personal financial gain from illicit drug trafficking in a wide range of products becomes more appealing. This has consequences for the continuation and path of conflict, with the lure of profit limiting any incentive for disarmament and conflict resolution. The lines between drugs and conflict remain blurred, but linkages certainly exist.

ICRA will publish a separate case study on drugs and conflict in Afghanistan

The Problem

The nature of 21st Century armed conflict is complex, involving a growing number of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) and facilitators new to the conflict environment such as the internet, climate change, global organised crime, and mass transportation. Weak governance and instability provide conditions for the conduct of illicit activity beyond the reach of central government, with the trafficking of drugs, people and resources being sources of funding for VNSAs.

Moreover, illicit trafficking enables and prolongs conflict¹. Trafficking in 'conflict diamonds'² from Sierra Leone and illicit narcotics from Afghanistan are examples. Although, trafficking takes advantage of conditions established by conflict, rather than being a cause. However, there are exceptions to this premise; one being the drugs wars of Mexico.

Data collected by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) between 1990-2003 indicates states that produced either opium poppies or coca plants in significant quantities for the supply of drugs to global markets made up 15 out of 109 intrastate armed conflicts. In addition, out of 9 countries listed as major producers of either opium or coca – Afghanistan; Bolivia; Colombia; Laos; Mexico; Myanmar; Pakistan; Peru and Thailand – only Thailand and Bolivia were not involved in an intrastate armed conflict.

Weak and failing governance; a lack of the rule of law; corruption; and a lack of state presence in certain regions provide adequate conditions for the conduct of illicit activity – including the trafficking of drugs, with many VNSAs engaged in conflict taking advantage of these conditions to raise revenue for their militant activities.

Drug trafficking in conflict zones presents a significant problem for the development of sustainable and long-term resolutions to armed conflict, with many VNSAs afforded limited incentives to disarm and establish conditions of conflict management towards resolution due to the overriding attraction of financial benefits from drug trafficking³.

Crime & Terror nexus

Blurred lines between organised criminal organisations and VNSAs add a further layer of complication, with such linkages being noted since the end of the Cold War⁴. A key difference between VNSAs and criminal organisations is motive. VNSAs and armed groups engaged in conflict are initially motivated by an ideological or political struggle and a desire to establish either political control over a given geographic territory, or to overthrow the government in its entirety. *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)* in Colombia for example was formed as a communist guerrilla Marxist-Leninist movement fighting the Colombian government for political control, to establish a Bolivarian communist state. The *Afghan Taliban* was formed with the prime objective to overthrow the Government of Afghanistan and establish a State with a strict ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam. Both groups engaged in conflict to achieve specific political objectives; trafficking in drugs were the means to fund their campaigns. However, in the case of the FARC this led to a change in objective and motive so that the group mutated from an ideologically driven insurgency to a violent 'multi-national' corporation intent only on commercial and financial gain. This change may be reversing now as the group is brought to talks on unfavourable terms. Some

¹ Ross, M.J. (2004) – 'What Do We Know About Natural Resources and Civil War?' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.41 No.3, pp344-345

² https://icra.uk.net/?page_id=147 Conflict Diamonds

³ Bjornhead, E. (2004) – 'Narco-Terrorism: The Merger of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror', *Global Crime*, Vol.6 No.3-4 p307

⁴ Makarenko, T. (2004) – 'The Crime Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay Between Transnational Crime and Terrorism', *Global Crime* Vol.1 No.1, pp129-145

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

members of the Afghan Taliban were seduced and became corrupted by the financial benefits of the drugs trade, but the movement remains true to its origins.

VNSAs regularly turn towards illicit activity such as drug trafficking to fund the continuation of their activities, with the growth of narcotics in conflict zones *“likely to disproportionately benefit the non-state actor in financial terms, enabling them to pay fighters acquire weapons and potentially even legitimacy from within the local population”*⁵.

Unlike VNSAs, criminal organisations have no desires to establish control over the state, rather seeking economic benefits from their illicit activities. However, the lines quickly begin to blur as both VNSAs and criminal organisations interact with one another and accrue mutual benefits. Criminal groups have extensive knowledge of trafficking routes which is useful for the operations of VNSAs, whilst VNSA military experience and weapons are useful for criminal organisations. This interaction frequently results in group cooperation across battle lines in order to maximise profit.

The illegal nature of both groups and the exercise of the same space under the radar of central governments sees a high degree of mutually beneficial interaction between groups. In Colombia, in an act of mutual convenience, FARC hired forces from another left-wing movement *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) to construct car bombs and target Colombian judges and political figures. Members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) also acted as ‘trainers’ in some improvised technologies useful for the FARC. In this way VNSAs can be seen to cooperate globally for convenience and commercial gain. The IRA men were unlikely to have had any interest in the original FARC ideology, but would have been paid for their skills and knowledge.

The most dangerous impact of the linkages between narcotics and conflict is the potential for changing motivational structures, with VNSAs involved in drug trafficking to generate funds losing their political motivations in the pursuit of economic advantages from the trafficking of drugs⁶. The ELN and FARC in Colombia arguably present one example. It becomes easy for VNSAs to shed their political ambitions in pursuit of economic gains, and therefore move towards organised criminal activity. This results in the increase of large-scale drug production in conflict zones, establishes economic functions for the continuation of violence, and results in difficulties establishing incentives for disarmament and sustainable conflict resolutions.

The continuation of ethnic conflicts in Myanmar as well as the continued problem of violence in Mexico by various cartels presents other examples of the problem of motivational changes, and trading across ‘battle lines’ between VNSAs and corrupt officials on the side of governments.

Globalisation – the facilitator

Globalisation in the 21st Century has increased the ease by which both VNSAs involved in the trafficking of illicit drugs⁷, as well as criminal organisations can traffic drugs from production sites in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Mexico and Colombia – to international markets where the demand for drugs is high. Criminal organisations are increasingly sophisticated in their cross-border and global operations, taking advantage of **mass transportation** means such as shipping containers to move products as they are difficult to search and criminals develop methods to alert them to searches at ports of entry and exit⁸. The **internet** and the rise of the *“dark web”* has also revolutionised the international trafficking in drugs. According to Europol and the EMCDDA⁹,

⁵ Cornell p754

⁶ Cornell p758

⁷ See: Hariss-White,2002; Williams, 2000; Levitsky,2003; Cornell,2004

⁸ <https://www.smh.com.au/technology/crime-syndicates-can-track-container-searches-20120328-1vyth.html>

⁹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

between 2011-2017 there were 103 darknet websites operating globally¹⁰, with the use of private networks and virtual currencies such as bitcoin, and 'hawala' practices, making the tracing of supplies difficult and enabling consumers to purchase drugs anonymously. Europol and the EMCDDA further estimated that between 2011-2017 the sale of drugs across 16 darknet sites amounted to 172million Euros (\$222million)¹¹. The sale of methamphetamine, cannabis and cocaine were the highest earners, with sales in Germany accounting for over 25million Euros; the UK 20million Euros; and the Netherlands 18million Euros¹². Globalisation and the internet have revolutionised the way consumers interact with the market in illicit drugs. Demographic changes in cities as well as a global trend of urbanisation have also had significant impacts on international drug trafficking trends¹³, with the origin of many of the products in conflict zones.

In the UK as a reaction to successful police operations disrupting networks, traffickers have adapted relatively sophisticated logistic operations using socially disadvantaged children from large urban areas to sell their products in rural areas and other localities where the police presence may be less and the intelligence on groups scarce. 'The County Lines' trafficking operation is an example of how easy it is for drug gangs to find different markets when necessary and in the knowledge that boundaries between police forces as well as national and international borders can be exploited. Typically, countries find it hard to cooperate across borders; VNSAs and criminal gangs exploit this weakness with mass transportation means and global communications being key enablers.

Continued Global Demand and Global Impact

Estimates published in the UNODC World Drug Report 2018 suggest that 35million people worldwide suffer from drug use disorders¹⁴. This figure puts significant strain upon both the global governance health regime, as well as on health and social service in individual countries. In the UK for example, the estimated cost of drug addiction across society is approximately £15.4billion¹⁵. The continued global demand for drugs, much of which originates in countries engaged in conflict therefore directly fuels the continuation of conflict, as well as having severe 'knock-on' socio-economic implications in market countries. To return to the example of the UK and the rise in '*county lines gangs*' with the manipulation of vulnerable people trafficking drugs from inner-city urban areas to rural areas across the country; this practice has seen a wave of knife crime¹⁶ and gang related violence across the UK – often associated with the control of territory for the sale of drugs, but crucially placing an increasing burden on the State in terms of health and security in dealing with associated violence, injury and drug abuse.

The rise in drug related violence in the UK can be correlated broadly with an increase in global demand for drugs – particularly heroin and cocaine. Both these products are sourced from the conflict zones of **Afghanistan, Colombia, Mexico and Myanmar** and are trafficked internationally by a sophisticated network of organised criminal groups with strong associations with VNSA's engaged in conflict (see Crime-Terror Continuum **Figure One**). Both the cultivation of coca and opium poppies

¹⁰ UNODC (2018) – 'World Drug Report', p34

https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018/prelaunch/WDR18_Booklet_2_GLOBAL.pdf

¹¹ EMCDDA and Europol (2017) – 'Drugs and the Darknet' p35

¹² EMCDDA and Europol p47

¹³ For more information see ICRA reports – on Urbanisation and Violence Available at: <https://icra.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Urbanization-and-Violence.pdf>

¹⁴ UNODC (2019) – 'World Drug Report 2019', p1

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2019/June/world-drug-report-2019-35-million-people-worldwide-suffer-from-drug-use-disorders-while-only-1-in-7-people-receive-treatment.html>

¹⁵ Morse, G. (2017) – 'Addiction and Substance Misuse Pathways', Turning Point UK <http://tvscn.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Gordon-Morse-Addiction-and-Substance-misuse-pathways-1.pdf>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48186035>

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

in these regions reached record yields in 2017, reflecting an increasing global demand for drugs. The business model of the FARC has at its centre the principle of supply based on demand in the market. The manufacture of cocaine for example, reached record levels in 2017 with a recorded 1,976 tonnes – a 25% increase from figures recorded in 2016¹⁷. The markets in Europe and North America remain particularly demanding in terms of the supply of narcotics – with an estimated 2.1 million people globally using cocaine in the past year, with the largest proportion located in North America¹⁸.

The trafficking of illicit narcotics has broader global implications. The most obvious being related to global health. The intravenous use of drugs such as heroin have the most sweeping global health implications, accounting for two-thirds of global drug related deaths in 2017. An estimated 11 million people worldwide use drugs intravenously, and this has much more serious implications for global health – increasing the risk of the spread of bloodborne diseases and infections such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. Globally, approximately 5.6 million drug users that take drugs intravenously are infected with Hep C, and a further 1.4 million with HIV positive.¹⁹

The result – economics and health

According to the World Drug Report published by the UNODC, the number of people using drugs globally has risen 30% since 2009 – to an estimated figure of 271 million people. This figure is indirectly linked to increased drug production in conflict zones as a means for VNSAs to fund the continuation of conflict, with these figures illustrating the scale and complexity of the problem, as well as illustrating the continued but poorly understood linkage between drugs and 21st Century armed conflict.

The Product

Cocaine

Cocaine is a highly addictive substance produced from the '*coca leaf*', a native plant in the high-altitude regions of South America. Bolivia, Colombia and Peru are three of the largest cultivators of the coca, with Colombia subsequently the world's largest producer of cocaine, with the country's enduring conflict and the role drug trafficking plays in financing elements of the conflict. Furthermore, the cultivation of the coca bush and the manufacturing of cocaine reached a record high in 2017 according to UNODC reports, with Colombia seeing a 17% expansion of coca bush production and a 31% increase in the production of cocaine between 2016-2017.

There are two derivative forms of cocaine – each with differing socio-economic connotations. Powdered cocaine is more regularly associated with middle-class consumers and is normally inhaled through the nose and absorbed into the user's blood stream. '*Crack*' cocaine appears in the form of rocks or crystals with this purer, cheaper and more addictive form of cocaine usually smoked and associated with users from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Both the health and social effects of crack cocaine are much more pronounced. A surge in the use of crack cocaine in US inner cities during the 1980s/1990s resulted in a nationwide '*crack*' epidemic, with social consequences such as an increase in gang violence and violent crime in inner city neighbourhoods being linked to an influx of crack cocaine.

The production of cocaine is a long, labour intensive process but due to high demand in North American and European markets, is a profitable enterprise. In the past year, an estimated

¹⁷ UNODC (2019) p 8

¹⁸ Ibid, p9

¹⁹ UNODC (2019) – '*World Drug Report*'

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

18.1million people used cocaine, with the majority in North America (2.1%)²⁰. The proximity to the porous 3,000km border between the US and Mexico makes the large North American market a prime target for cartels and criminal organisations trafficking cocaine from producers in South America through Central America, particularly Mexico, to reach the US market. Much of the production of cocaine takes place deep within the upland areas of South America, with cocaine laboratories largely protected by thick jungle. Production has three distinct stages; firstly, the coca leaves are harvested and crushed in a large vat, before being mixed with kerosene. A more complex process of crystallisation as well as the addition of further chemicals, including sulphuric acid follows. Finally, the cocaine base is dried out and filtered before being pressed into bricks²¹.



Powdered Cocaine



Crack Cocaine

Heroin

Globally, approximately 15million people consume illicit opiates²², which is a group of drugs that includes opium, morphine and heroin. Of these, heroin is the most potent; and addiction is very difficult to treat. Amongst all the illicit narcotics, opiates are the costliest in terms of medical treatment, medical care, and drug related insecurity.

Heroin is most commonly associated with intravenous injection, which brings a plethora of associated health problems and complications. Estimates suggest that 11 million people worldwide take drugs intravenously, with 50% living with Hepatitis C, and one in eight contracting HIV from drug use²³. Half of all global heroin users reside in Southeast Asia²⁴, close to the production areas centred around the *Golden Crescent* (Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan) and the more infamous *Golden Triangle* (Thailand-Laos-Myanmar) within which traffickers are using Rohingya Muslims displaced from Myanmar's Rakhine State as drug mules.

As well as the detrimental effects of heroin consumption on global health, there are also significant implications for regional stability and security. Afghanistan is a conflict zone affected by the production and trafficking of heroin, with militant groups such as the Taliban levying taxes on the cultivation of opium poppy as well as profiting from international trafficking to fund their insurgency.

Afghanistan overtook Myanmar to become the largest producer of heroin in the 1990s, with concern expressed by the



²⁰ UNODC World Drug Report, 2019, p9

²¹ For a more in-depth examination of the chemical processes involved in cocaine production see: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/drug-profiles/cocaine>

²² UNODC World Drug Report, 2010, p37

²³ UNODC World Drug Report, 2019, p2

²⁴ UNODC World Drug Report, 2019, p8

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

UN General Assembly in 1998 regarding the *“links between illicit drug production, trafficking and involvement of terrorist groups and transnational organised crime”*²⁵. In some regions, the nexus between terrorist organisations and organised crime are exacerbated by the conditions of conflict – with a lack of state presence and the rule of law unable to curb the cultivation of opium poppies and the production of heroin.

The cultivation of opium poppy and trafficking of heroin sourced from Afghanistan has continued to grow as the conflict drags on. In 2018 Afghanistan continued to dwarf its nearest rivals (Myanmar and Mexico) in terms of the cultivation of opium poppies and production of heroin. An estimated 263,000 Hectares of opium poppies were cultivated in Afghanistan in 2018 – a stark comparison to the 37,000 hectares in Myanmar and 30,600 hectares in Mexico. Despite these significant figures, global cultivation dropped 17% in 2018 to a total of 346,000 hectares, although this can largely be attributed to droughts across Afghanistan’s poppy producing provinces²⁶.

The market for trafficking heroin produced in Afghanistan is extensive, with an estimated annual value of \$55bn²⁷. The supply source of heroin remains centred on three key areas (all of which remain engaged in some form of intrastate conflict) – Afghanistan; Myanmar; and Latin America (Mexico and to a lesser extent Colombia). Afghanistan however stands out as the number one supplier and producer of global heroin, accounting for approximately 90% of production and 85% of supply²⁸. Russia and Europe make up the two largest consumer markets for heroin, which reaches Europe via the Balkan route transiting – Iran; Turkey; Bulgaria; Macedonia; and Albania before moving through Eastern and Northern Europe. Heroin arriving in Russia transits through the Caucasus and Central Asia to Russian markets.

Figures Two and Three provide an illustration of the most common global trafficking routes for cocaine and heroin – predominantly sourced in Colombia/Mexico for cocaine, and Afghanistan for heroin.

²⁵ UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, June 8th-10th 1998

²⁶ UNODC World Drug Report 2019, p11

²⁷ UNODC World Drug Report 2010, p37

²⁸ UNODC World Drug Report 2010 pp37-38

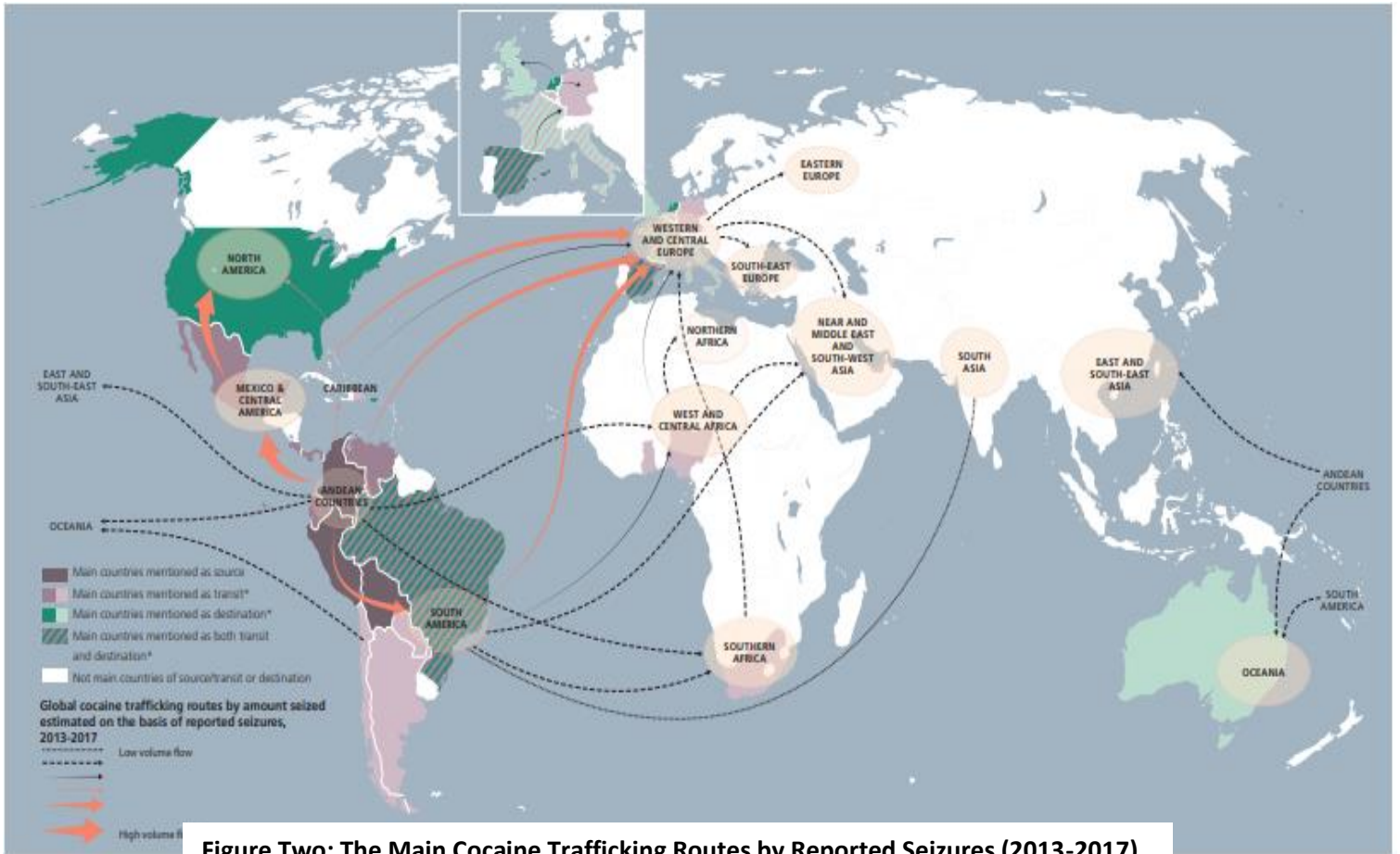


Figure Two: The Main Cocaine Trafficking Routes by Reported Seizures (2013-2017)

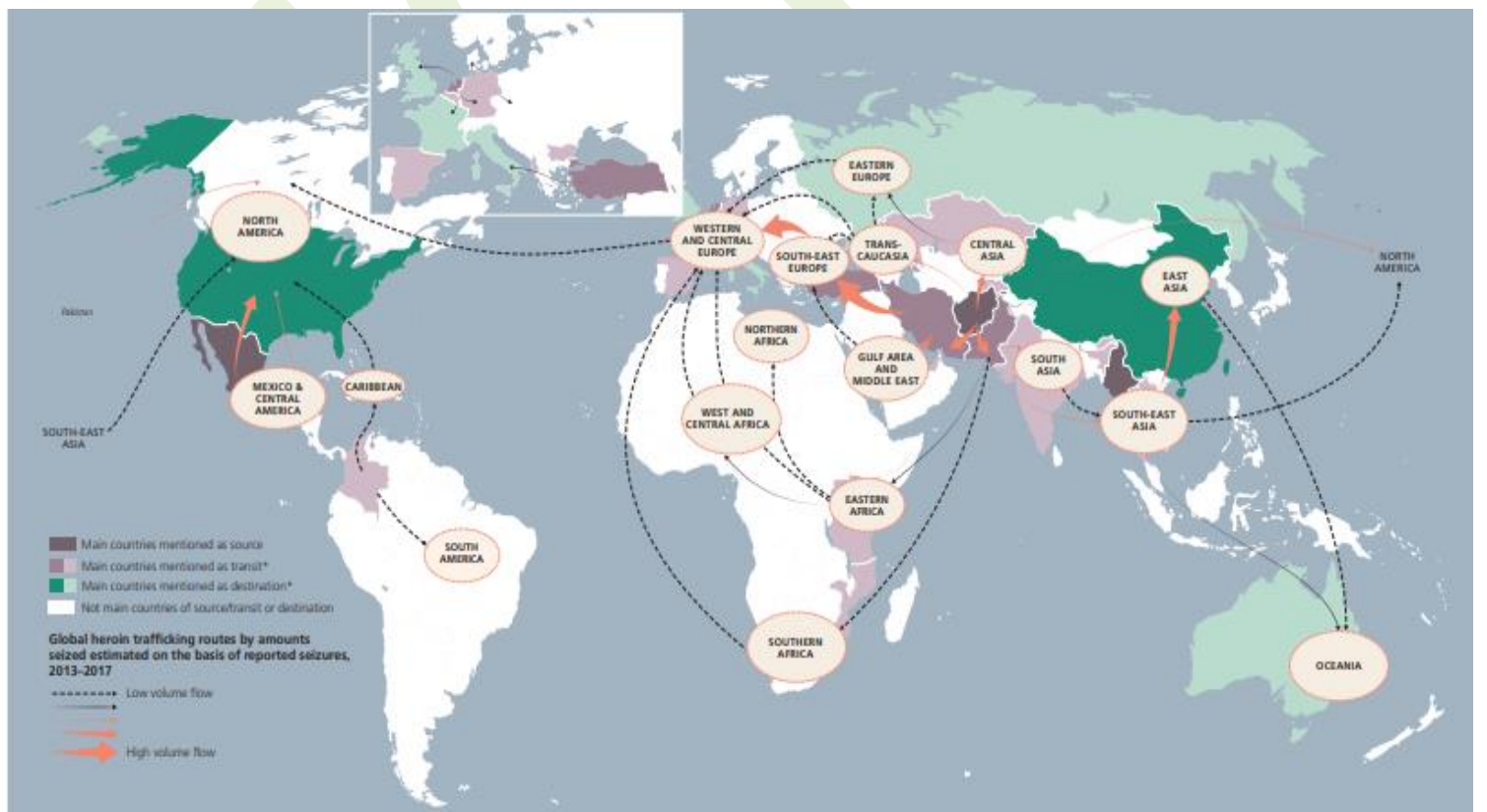


Figure Three: The Main Heroin Trafficking Routes by Reported Seizures (2013-2017)

Methamphetamines

Methamphetamines are a type of synthetically produced drug which come in either crystal (crystal meth) or pill varieties. Crystal meth is most commonly smoked whilst in its pill form the drug is orally ingested.

The production and international trafficking of methamphetamines is largely focused on Southeast Asia, with Myanmar taking on the role of the largest global producer and supplier of Methamphetamines, since being overtaken in the global heroin trade by Afghanistan in the 1990s. The production and supply of Methamphetamines is largely centred on the production of *Yabba* – a synthetic drug containing a dangerous combination of methamphetamine and caffeine, and commonly produced in the form of a pill which can be ingested by the user. The synthesis of methamphetamines into *yabba* pills is cheaper and faster than the production of crystal meth, allowing for huge levels of production.

The quantities of methamphetamine seized in East and Southeast Asia (around the Golden Triangle region) rose almost eightfold in the decade between 2007-2017, with the seizure of 82 tons of methamphetamines in this period accounting for 45 per cent of global seizures of the drug²⁹. The market for the production and supply of methamphetamines is growing in Southeast Asia and is centred upon Myanmar as a result of its centralised location within the Golden Triangle, and the ease of cross border exchange between Myanmar and China and facilitated by residual aspects of ethnic conflicts on the borders of Myanmar, China, Thailand and north-east India. The production and supply to markets outside the Myanmar depends on a degree of “predictable insecurity”³⁰ which arises from the continuation of these ethnic conflicts.

Crystal meth also has a significantly higher value than heroin, resulting in a global trade worth \$40 billion annually which is centred on the Mekong Sub-region³¹. Several large seizures of the drug have occurred within the last few years. For example, in January 2018 30million Yabba pills, 1,750kg of crystal meth, 500kg of heroin and 200kg of caffeine powder (often used in production as a cutting agent) were seized from an abandoned house in Myanmar’s Northern Shan State. The drugs bust, the largest in Myanmar’s history had an estimated value of \$54million³².



Yabba – Methamphetamines in Pill format commonly produced and trafficked across Southeast Asia

These kinds of seizures of methamphetamines produced in Myanmar are increasingly common according to reports. For instance, 1.2tonnes were seized in Western Australia in 2017 and a further 0.9tonnes in Melbourne the same year;³³ 5 tonnes seized in Thailand in 2017 and 15tonnes in the first six months of 2018;³⁴ 1.6tonnes in Indonesia in February 2018;³⁵ and 1.2tonnes in Malaysia in May 2018³⁶. Myanmar seems to be the source of almost all the drugs taken in these seizures, illustrating the huge extent of the methamphetamine production and supply problem facing the

²⁹ UNODC World Drug Report 2019, p8

³⁰ International Crisis Group (2019) – ‘Fire and Ice in Shan State’, Asia Report No.99 p8

³¹ International Crisis Group 2019 p7

³² International Crisis Group 2019 p7

³³ ABC News (2017) – ‘Australia’s biggest ever methamphetamine haul sees 1.2 tonnes of the drug seized at Geraldton’, 22nd December 2017

³⁴ CNN (2018) – ‘Thai officials reveal largest ever crystal meth haul’, 4th April 2018

³⁵ Reuters (2018) – ‘Indonesia seizes record 1.6 tonnes of crystal methamphetamine’, 20 February 2018

³⁶ Reuters (2018) – ‘Malaysians make record bust of crystal meth, shipped from Myanmar’, 28th May 2018

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

Mekong subregion and continuing to fuel elements of Myanmar's ethnic intrastate conflicts; with reports of involvement of state security forces.

Cannabis

Despite the continued global drugs regime attitude towards the illegality of cannabis cultivation and usage, global attitudes towards cannabis are beginning to change. The UNODC World Drug Report estimates that cannabis remains the world's most widely used drug, with 188million people using the drug in 2017. Derived from the cannabis leaf, the drug can either be smoked or ingested in the form of Cannabidoil (CBD). In the UK, the use of cannabis is under increasing scrutiny as debates surrounding legalisation intensify. Currently, the use of all cannabis related products – (except CBD in exceptional medical circumstances) is deemed illegal.

The ability to cultivate cannabis both indoors and outdoors makes it difficult to pin a precise estimate on levels of global cultivation, however the high number of users also suggests cultivation remains high – with the widespread production and consumption of cannabis, reaching almost every country in the world. Europe remains the largest consumer market for cannabis. Morocco and Afghanistan are thought to be the largest producers of cannabis resin (hashish) which is then transported to both licit and illicit European markets. Whilst Afghanistan also remains high on the list for the cultivation of hashish, the drug market in Afghanistan (**as the case study in Annex 1 will illustrates**) remains dominated by the cultivation of opiates. Whilst Morocco and Afghanistan occupy the spot as the world's two largest producers, it is thought that cultivation on a lesser scale also occurs in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Lebanon.

Uruguay became the first country to legalise the recreational usage of Cannabis in 2012, with strict government controls over the market. Cannabis for medicinal usage is also permitted in some US states, with Colorado and Washington states voting to legalise the full recreational usage of cannabis the same year. Canada became the first of the advanced economies (G7) countries to fully legalise the use of cannabis in 2017 – where a lucrative legal cannabis market is beginning to blossom. This not only raises revenue in the form of taxation for the government, but provides legislation relating to substance control much like those centred around tobacco and alcohol – which arguably can be considered more harmful substances.

The full socio-economic implications of the legalisation of cannabis across individual countries, remain to be seen. However what is certain, is that many countries are looking at the example set by the legalisation of cannabis in Uruguay in 2012, and the full legalisation of recreational usage in Canada in 2017. Some examples where the legislation debate is beginning to change in are listed below³⁷:



A Cannabis Leaf

- Decriminalisation of small amounts of Cannabis in countries such as **Brazil, Portugal** and **Jamaica**
- Legal usage in private in **Spain**, whilst the regulated sale and usage of cannabis occurs in Coffee Shops across the **Netherlands**

³⁷ See: Collins, J. (2018) – 'Why are so Many Countries Now Saying Cannabis is Ok?' BBC 11th December 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-46374191>

ICRA DISCUSSION PAPER

- Doctors have been permitted to prescribe medicinal cannabis in specified cases in the **UK** since November 2018 and some CBD products are readily available on the 'high street'.
- **South Korea** has legalised the strictly controlled medicinal use of cannabis
- **South Africa's** high court has legalised the use of cannabis by adults in private places
- **Lesotho** has become the first African country to legalise the cultivation of cannabis for medicinal purposes
- **Lebanon** is currently considering the legalisation of cannabis for medicinal purposes

More and more countries across the world are beginning to consider legislation surrounding the use of cannabis, with regulated legalisation providing a potential solution to the problem of global drug usage.

Exploring Solutions

Unilateral and multilateral solutions exploring solutions to the cultivation of and international trafficking of drugs from conflict regions, are commonly spearheaded by the US. Under the remit of the 'War on Drugs' launched in the 1970's, the most common solution to the problem has been the forced eradication of crops cultivated for the manufacturing of drugs at the source. Programmes of aerial crop eradication in Colombia under the 'PLAN Colombia' programme (2000-2015) serves as a notable example, with the eradication of coca production in rural Colombia tied in with the pursuit of a resolution to the countries conflict. Targeted strikes on manufacturing laboratories and poppy fields in Afghanistan serve as a second example of eradication policies, with the targeted eradication of opium cultivation in Afghanistan seeing a merger of the US policies towards the 'War on Drugs' and the 'War on Terror'. This merger is in part as a result of the ability for VNSAs such as the *Taliban* in Afghanistan to raise revenue for the continuation of their insurgency and therefore prolongation of the conflict through involvement both direct and indirect in the opium industry.

However, the merger of policies relating to the War on Drugs and the War on Terror is problematic. As Bjørnehed (2004) notes "*in some areas the war on drugs and the war on terror can be fought like one homogenous war. However, in other areas they remain two different wars and there is a risk that the focus on only the similarities between narco-terrorist organisations results in neglect in certain areas of counter measures*".³⁸ The assumption often follows that the eradication of crops cultivated for the manufacturing of drugs at the source accelerates the end of armed conflict. Whilst these elements are certainly interlinked this is an oversimplification of the role drugs play in armed conflict. Whilst eradication policies are the go-to policies in addressing this problem, the viability and success of such policies is worthy of scrutiny.

Some **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Is a securitized approach to the cultivation of illicit drugs, a viable solution?
- How to replace the livelihoods of farmers growing opium poppy and other illicit substances
- Legalisation of the market or prohibition?
- Is it possible for a state to reach agreement with a Violent Non-State Actor in order to limit the traffic in illicit drugs?

³⁸ Bjornehed p318

ICRA