



THE BLUNDERS IN THE WESTERN CROSS-CUTTING POLICIES IN AFGHANISTAN: THE OPIUM ECONOMY AS A CASE OF STUDY

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Abstract:

In Afghanistan, opium cultivation was part of an economy of survival in the decades preceding the Afghan resistance war against the Soviets and, during the subsequent civil war, cultivation and trafficking of opium poppy became one of the main methods of financing the so-called warlords. However, the Taliban regime would be the first to convert the cultivation and trafficking of this drug into a state business stimulating cultivation and production and the corresponding taxation. Finally, the international community has allowed that cultivation and trafficking become a substantial part of the current Afghan political structure, given its inability to understand the problem in its real and proper dimension and to define an integrated anti-drug strategy.

Keywords: Opium, war economy, clientelist political network, Afghanistan, Integrated Counternarcotic Strategy

Titulo en Castellano: Los errores de las políticas occidentales en Afganistán: la economía del opio como caso de estudio

Resumen:

Si en las décadas previas a la guerra de resistencia afgana contra los soviéticos, el cultivo de opio era parte de una economía de supervivencia, a partir del final de esta guerra, el cultivo y tráfico de la adormidera se convertiría en uno de los principales métodos de financiación de los denominados warlords durante la guerra civil subsecuente. Sin embargo, el régimen Talibán sería el primero que convertiría el cultivo y tráfico de esta droga en un asunto de Estado mediante su impulso y correspondiente tasación. Por último, ha sido la propia comunidad internacional la que ante su incapacidad para comprender el problema en su justa dimensión y para definir una estrategia antinarcóticos integrada ha permitido que su cultivo y tráfico haya llegado a constituirse en parte de la estructura política afgana.

Palabras clave: *Opio, economía de guerra, red política clientelar, Afganistán, estrategia antinarcóticos integrada.*

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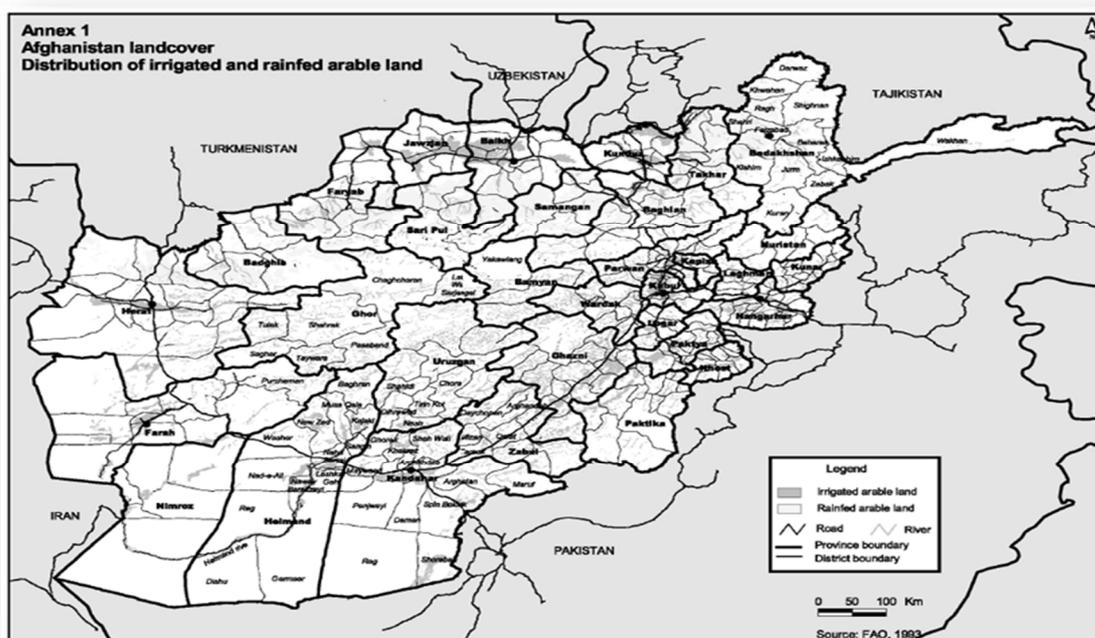
1. Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate the hypothesis that the current situation of intimate entanglement of drug trafficking networks with the Afghan political and social structure, particularly in institutions and political parties, has been due to the mistakes made by the international community during the great national reconstruction operation undertaken in the Hindu-Kush country. Special mention is made of a rapid process of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) where immediate results prevailed before the governments and public opinions of the donor countries, instead of in a detailed manner and with the necessary operational pause to assure the correctness of the errors that could be committed in its implementation.

2. The Cultivation of Opium in Afghanistan as Part of a Survival Economy

The natural conditions of Afghanistan with moderate spring temperatures and sandy soils in large parts of the country make it suitable for cultivation². However, it has been the socioeconomic conditions generated during the last forty-five years which have made the country the ideal place to become the largest producer of opium in the world, as will be seen in the following sections.

Map 1. Distribution of irrigable and dry land



Source: UNODC: *Afghanistan opium survey 2002*, p. 42

There are records in the United Nations that Afghanistan was already cultivating opium in the 1930s³, but it was a minor crop because didn't represent 2% of the number of hectares currently

² Hogshire, Jim (2005): *Opium Poppy Cultivation, Morphine and Heroine Manufacture*, Rhodium Site Archive, at <https://erowid.org/archive/rhodium/chemistry/opium.html>.

³ Buddenberg, Doris (2017): *On the cultural history of opium and how came to Afghanistan*, Afghan Analysts Network, p. 4, at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/on-the-cultural-history-of-opium-and-how-pottery-came-to-afghanistan/>.



cultivated, so it was around 201,000 hectares⁴. Although in 1945 the Afghan government issued a total prohibition decree, it is unknown the level of implementation that reached. In any case, the United Nations in 1972 expressed concern that the Afghan authorities were too passive to the recognition of cultivation and the adoption of measures to control it.

We have known that arable land in Afghanistan has never accounted for more than 12% of the total, due to the abruptness of the land and the existence of saline deserts. That 12% represents approximately 7.9 million hectares. We are also aware of the destruction of arable land suffered by Afghanistan during the so-called war of resistance against the Soviets, and due to that at the beginning of the 1990s, only 3.2 million hectares were arable land, of which 1.5 million were irrigated. So, we can say that 40% of farmland is no longer used and productive⁵. But it is even more interesting to know that this area fell again by 37%, due to the destruction of infrastructure and land abandonment in rural communities⁶ because of the two civil wars that it suffered without a break. The following table shows the destruction of arable land along the so-called civil war between mujahedeen and the war against the Taliban.

Table 1. Reduction of arable land in the southern and southeastern provinces

Province	Start of 1990 decade	Ending of 1990 decade	Hectares' difference	Percentage
Badakshan	270,000	103,000	- 167,000	- 62%
Helmand	238,000	181,000	- 57,000	- 24%
Uruzgan	59,000	29,000	- 30,000	- 51%
Kandahar	202,000	137,000	- 65,000	- 32%
Kunar	22,000	16,000	- 6,000	- 27%
Laghman	21,000	21,000	0	0%
TOTAL	908,000	576,000	- 332,000	- 37%

Source: Own elaboration with data from UNODC: *Afghanistan opium survey 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 24

This means that, for two decades and due to the succession of three wars (resistance, mujahedeen's and Taliban), the overall reduction of arable land in the whole Afghan territory could be estimated at almost 5, 7 million hectares, thus reducing arable land available to not more of 2.0 million hectares⁷.

In the years 1995-1996, the years of Taliban expansion in the South and East Afghanistan, and the takeover of Kabul there was a containment in the production of opium with amounts that did not surpass 51% of the world production. However, in the years 1997-1998, it increased in such a way that represented 58% of the world total, coinciding precisely with a substantial period of drought that prevented an even more significant growth. In 1999, Afghanistan would produce 80 percent of the world total due to good climate on that year and

⁴ UNODC.org, *Afghanistan: Total area under opium poppy cultivation expanding, threatening sustainable development in the country*, at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2017/May/afghanistan-total-area-under-opium-poppy-cultivation-expanding--threatening-sustainable-development-in-the-country.html>.

⁵ Nations Encyclopedia, *Afghanistan Agriculture*, at <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Asia-and-the-Pacific/Afghanistan-AGRICULTURE.html>.

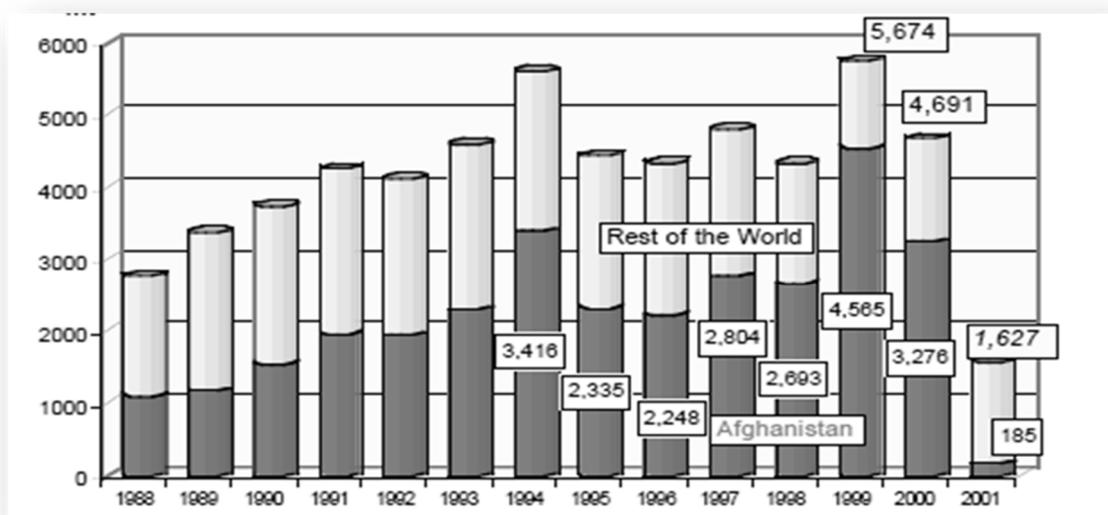
⁶ UNODC.org, *Afghanistan opium survey 2002*, p. 5, at https://www.unodc.org/pdf/publications/afg_opium_survey_2002.pdf.

⁷ The data provided by UNODC in its annual reports differ substantially from the data provided by the World Bank (The World Bank, *Arable Land, % of land area*, at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.ZS?locations=AF&page=6>). We refer in this work to the data of UNODC since its sources are numerous and of proven reliability, being coherent among them.

above all to the need of amortising the high level of debt that farmers had acquired during the preceding two years due to the drought experienced during the previous ones⁸.

In 1999, the government of the Emirate decreed a reduction of one-third of the cultivated area of opium, equitably to carry out for each farmer who planted this crop. Despite the decrease in area under cultivation, Afghanistan succeeded in producing 70% of world production in 2000⁹. A new ban in that year, in this case of 100% of arable land, would result in a drastic reduction of the 2001 crop. Primarily due to the decline in crop area, almost reduced to zero in the south, and by the fact that production moved to areas not controlled by the Taliban (specifically to the northern province of Badakhshan that accumulated more than 80% of that year).

Figure 1. Afghanistan and World-wide production of opium, in MT



Source: UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 11

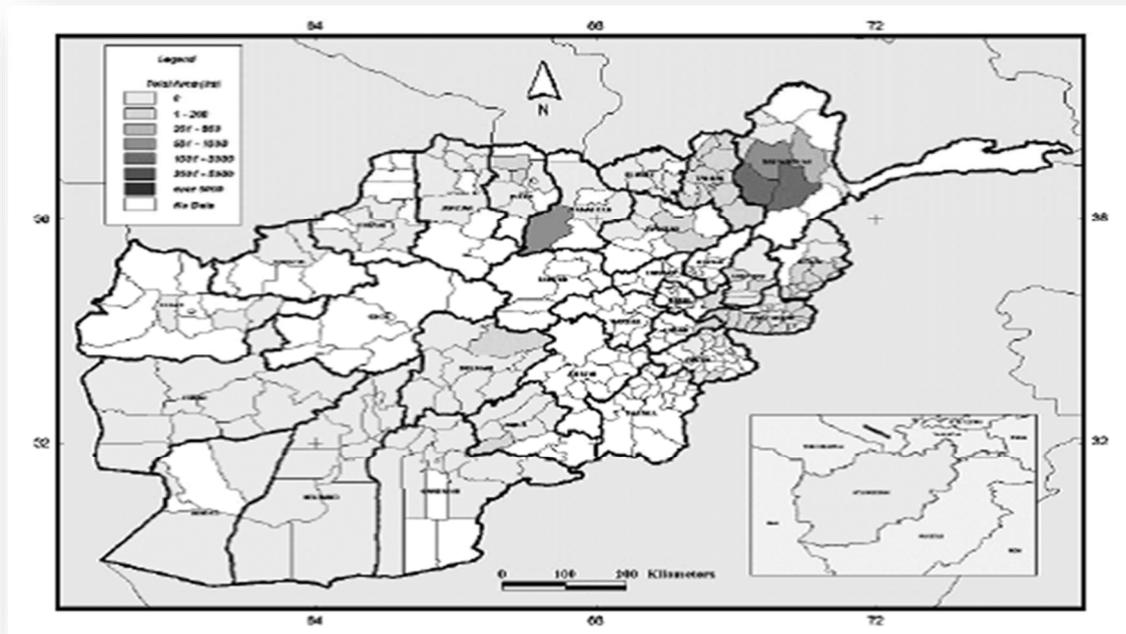
But who suffered this economic policy in the most intense way was the small farmer who had to endure a year of shortages since he didn't have the annual production of opium that would allow him to face the debts contracted previously and with a severe loss of income that affected 3.3 million people in rural communities¹⁰. In sum, it was the rural peasantry who suffered the economic crisis caused in 2001 by the decision of the Taliban emirate of an absolute prohibition of opium, not so the trafficker who saw to increase its profits placing in the market the resin of opium stored in previous years and at exorbitant prices. Finally, this situation of crisis and the consequent famine would cause an important sector of the rural population to welcome the US campaign for the overthrow of the Taliban regime.

⁸ We must not forget that the small Afghan farmer who, on average, has a plot of no more than 0.5 ha, and who normally must request an annual loan (called *salam*) to meet annual crop costs and payment of labor for collection of opium resin, in addition to having enough cash to feed his family.

⁹ UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends 2002*, p. 16, at https://www.unodc.org/pdf/report_2002-06-26_1/report_2002-06-26_1.pdf.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Map 2. Opium cultivation areas in 2001



Source: UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

3. Cultivation and Trafficking Resurgence

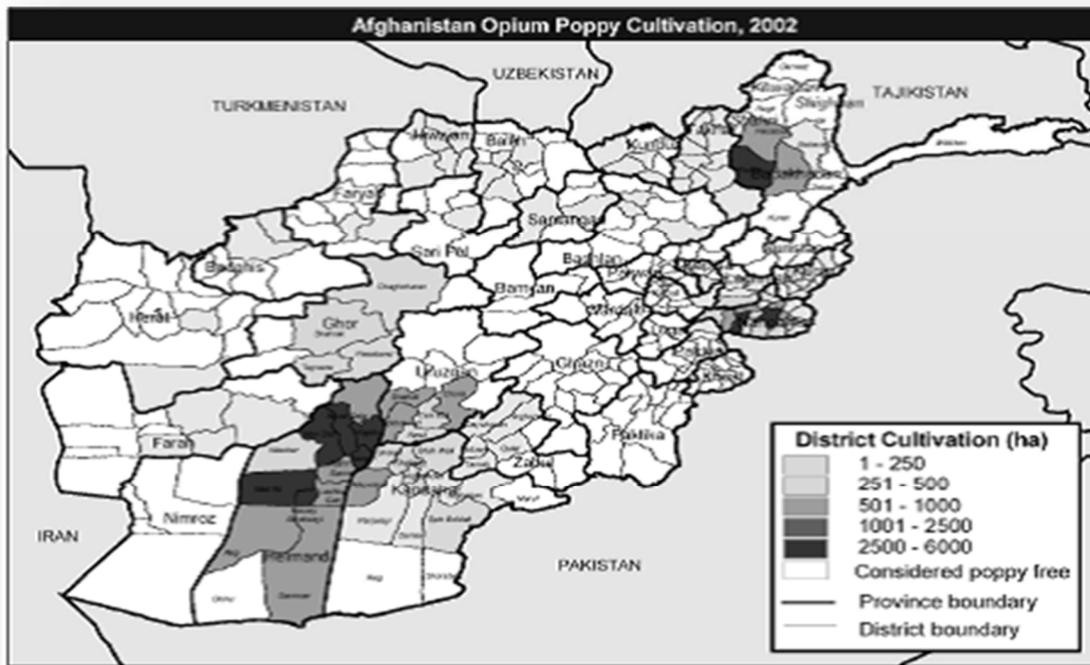
Although the new Afghan Interim Authority issued a decree in January 2002 prohibiting the cultivation and trade of opium, the situation had changed radically precisely during the months in which the Northern Alliance with the support of US was fighting the Taliban. Taking advantage of the fall of Taliban regime, the farmers of the southern and eastern provinces, who had not been able to plant the previous year, engaged in intensive planting to get out of the debt that the last year's ban had caused them¹¹.

Opium grows in irrigated and non-irrigated land, with an average yield of 31 kg per irrigated hectare and 18 kg per non-irrigated hectare¹². Contrary to what is expected, the largest opium crops in Afghanistan are located precisely in irrigated areas where annual production is highest and with better control of legal authorities. The regions, where production increased during the first year after the fall of the Taliban, coincided with those areas close to the most important traffic routes. In any case, the portion of arable land devoted to the cultivation of opium would not reach one percent of the total arable land.

¹¹ See UNODC: *Afghanistan opium survey 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² See UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Map 3. Increase in opium cultivation in 2002



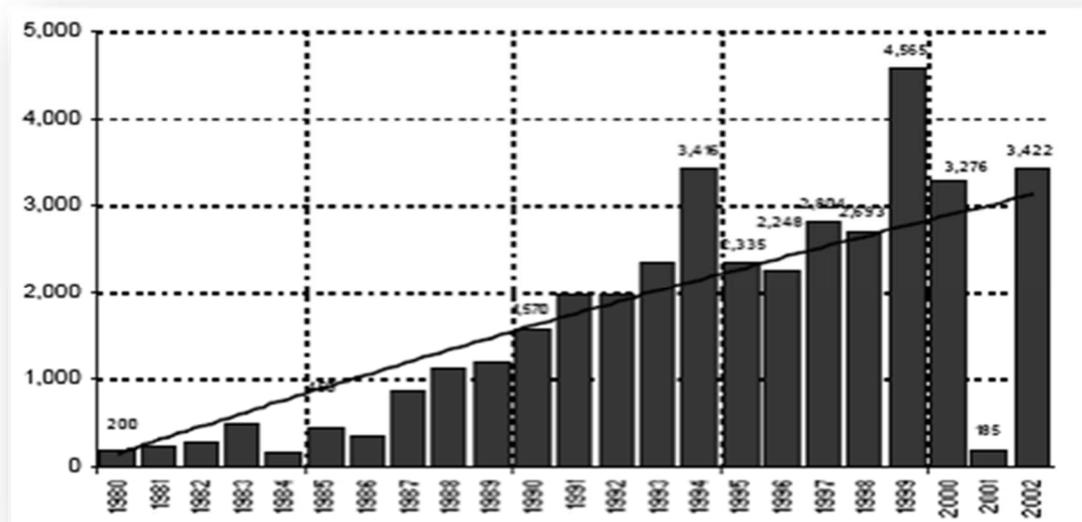
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2003): *The opium economy in Afghanistan: an international problem*. New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p. 7

An uncomfortable question must refer to the first year of Afghan Interim Authority and subsequent Transitional Authority with international support: What made it possible for the Taliban regime to be able to eradicate the cultivation of opium virtually and yet the failure of the Interim Authority and the international community was so sound from its inception? We will leave this answer to the final paragraphs of this chapter. Contrary to what one might think, opium crops are produced mainly in irrigated arable land areas (Helmand and Kandahar) and not in remote mountain areas as it happens in Myanmar, Laos or Cambodia because they are desert areas that without irrigated water would make impossible their cultivation¹³. They are areas where the control action of the governmental authorities can easily arrive (Places of easy access mainly located in the irrigated areas, established in the 1950s and 1960s, as it is the case of the irrigated lands gained to the deserted by the Kajaki dam project at the headwaters of the Helmand River). This leads us to conclude that there was necessarily collusion between the newly appointed provincial governors and the farmers, which in turn would lead to the resurgence of opium cultivation. Always bearing in mind that those became enriched with this illegal economy were those who held the positions of government in the provinces and districts because they were enriched as "real usurers"¹⁴.

Harvesting that took place in April of that year recovered the figures of the best year in the period of the civil war between the mujahedeen. A new decree of the Interim Authority issued that same month in which it authorized the eradication of the crop arrived too late because the harvest season ended those weeks.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2003): *The opium economy in Afghanistan: An international problem, op. cit.*, p. 13.

Figure 2. The opium harvest of 2002, in MT


Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2003): *The opium economy in Afghanistan: An international problem, op. cit.*, p. 6

The prices for that year 2002, although down from the previous one, remained between \$ 350-540 / kg, resulting in a gross family income of \$ 6,500 or just under \$ 5,000 after discounting production costs and commercialization when annual Afghan per capita income stood at \$ 373¹⁵. Opium cultivation led even to increase the number of consumers reaching 0.6% of the population, a figure never reached before being an unknown drug in the Afghan culture, although it was still lower than that of its neighbouring countries (0.9% in Pakistan and Central Asia, and almost 2.88% in Iran).

Table 2. Dollar prices of opium resin in the northern provinces

Province	July 2001	May 2002	Difference
Badakshan	365	257	- 30%
Takhar	238	215	- 10%
Badghis	174	605	+ 248%
Baghlan	212	312	+ 47%
Balkh	235	178	- 24%
Fary ab	173	338	+ 95%
Jawzjan	194	100	- 48%
Kunduz	229	248	+ 8%

Source: compilation made with data from UNODC: *Afghanistan opium survey 2002*, p. 39

Badghis, which would later host the Spanish Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), was the one that registered a more significant increase in the price of opium resin, possibly due to its ease of export through the porous Turkmen border. This would give rise to strong demand in a divided and parcelled market in local or provincial areas. In 2002, the price of a kg of resin in the Badghis province would reach an increase of 248% over the previous year. This trend in

¹⁵ Trading Economics: *Afghanistan 2017 GDP per capita*, at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/gdp-per-capita>.



demand would never change, reaching in 2009 the record in the number of hectares of cultivated land, which was 822% over the previous year¹⁶, despite the presence of the Spanish PRT since 2005.

4. The Consolidation of Opium Cultivation as Part of Afghan Economic System

Before 1978, the Afghan population was self-sufficient in agricultural and livestock products and even managed to generate 30% of the country's exports¹⁷. This situation changed dramatically over more than two decades of war. During this period of nearly a quarter of a century, the opium business became an essential part of the war economy. Thanks to the Taliban regime, it became part of the official economic structure of the Emirate (farmers, intermediaries and government, as essential parts of this new financial system from which the three previous players made a profit).

The fundamental mistake made by the international community consisted of inappropriately evaluating the dimension of the opium economy within the context of the Afghan macroeconomics. As it will be explained, this cannot be attributed to the lack of academic studies which emphasized the need to reach a compromise in this matter, given that other solutions and policies could undermine the entire effort in the national reconstruction of the country, as unfortunately has happened.

4.1. Opium as Fundamental Part of Afghan GDP

In the last quarter century, Afghanistan's grain production fell by 45 %¹⁸; this produced a need to import food products, which in turn caused the need for cash for a rural population that was no longer able to produce food to meet their needs. This necessity for cash could only be met by a product of easy cultivation and very high yield as is the case of opium. Farming that was also protected and promoted by the first mujahedeen and Taliban afterwards, as a method of obtaining very high yields by taxes on their trade and traffic.

The cultivation of opium for the farmers who used it is, in fact, an "economic trap of indebtedness". In many cases, it starts from an initial situation of indebtedness with merchants, who provide them with the necessary credit (*salam*¹⁹) to undertake the cultivation, and the indebtedness with the owners of the cultivated plots to which they had to pay with part of the benefits of the harvest. This fact has been a constant until today, and as long as this chain does not break, it will continue to constitute a trap for the most impoverished layer of the rural population.

¹⁶ UNODC: *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009*, p. 2, at https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf.

¹⁷ Rubin, Barnett R. (2004): *Road to ruin: Afghanistan's booming opium industry*. Center on International Cooperation, p. 2, at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/kf/ROADTORUIN.PDF>.

¹⁸ Sloane, Peter (2001): *Food security strategy for Afghanistan*, Working Team on Food Security (Islamabad), p. 4, at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/kf/ROADTORUIN.PDF>.

¹⁹ *Salam* under Islamic law should not be considered as a credit within the meaning of the Western financial system but rather the advance payment of a good at a price already agreed upon and expected to be received later (Financial Islam - Islamic Finance, *Salam*, at <http://www.financialislam.com/salam.html>). The problem arises when the borrower is not able to deliver the item at the agreed time, then this becomes money to be returned, but at the market price at the time when it should have delivered, therefore the debt can become 500% of the initial value. For example, the agreed repayment price for kg of opium may be that of the beginning of the harvest, but if it is not satisfied at the agreed time, its value will depend on the market value when it is returned (if it is made at the end of the season the price could be up to 5 times higher than the initial one).



In 2002 the influx of large sums of money to meet the new needs arising from the presence of US troops in Afghanistan provided fresh money into the impoverished Afghan monetary system by enriching and empowering the mujahedeen of Northern Alliance who had become the allies of US in the war against the Taliban. It was precisely these mujahedeen who received the positions of governors and district police chiefs, thereby facilitating their integration into the economic system of opium by becoming the protectors and beneficiaries of the farmer-trafficker relationship, now farmer-trafficker-official²⁰. Finally, this trilateral association of common interests would foster the instantaneous regeneration of the opium economy, but with more force than in the Taliban era since the cooperation of US forces with the new power brokers²¹, although officially banned from January 2002.

In 2003, opium cultivation and trade generated cash income that was introduced into the Afghan legal, economic system and accounted for more than half of GDP and a third of the total of the Afghan economy. This represented a total of \$ 2.3 billion that was generated by 7% of the population, with only 1% of the land being cultivated. Following the trend that occurred in 2002 and 2003, in 2004 the established model was consolidated, so the opium production in that year accounted for 87% of world production and cultivation spread to the 34 Afghan provinces²². The population involved in this illicit economy increased by 12% and its turnover reached the figure of \$ 2800 million.

Table 3. Production and income in dollars per hectare and type of crop

Production and Income in dollars per hectare and type of crop				
	Opium	Irrigated wheat	Dry wheat	Rice
Production in kg / ha	39	2510	1,230	2.030
Average price in dollars / kg	136,59	0,23	0,23	0,47
Gross income in dollars / ha	5.385	575	282	947

Source: Compiled with data from Buddenberg, D., & Byrd, W. A. (2006): *Afghanistan's drug industry: Structure, functioning, dynamics, and implications for counter-narcotics policy*, The World Bank, p. 27

In 2005, the value of the opium produced and exported amounted to \$ 2.7 billion, which was a relative decline to the total amount of GDP, but because the latest had increased during the previous three years due to the arrival of aid for the national reconstruction. In absolute terms, opium production fell by about 100 MT (from 4200 MT in 2004 to 4100 MT in 2005²³). But if we talk about intermediaries, those who buy opium from the farmers and sell it to laboratories for refining and producing heroin, profits multiplied exponentially. According to estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the average annual income of an intermediary in the 1990s was estimated at \$ 200,000 annually²⁴, a real fortune in Afghanistan. If these estimates were updated to the sales prices of kg opium in 2002, the profits of Afghan traffickers in that year tripled, with an average per trafficker of \$ 600,000. This distinction must be fundamental to any set of effective measures to be implemented in the fight against opium

²⁰ General M.A.D., Brigade Chief and military authority in a northern province. Personal communication (Kabul, 20 July 2015).

²¹ Gopal, Anand (2017): *Rents, Patronage and Defection, State-building in Afghanistan*. New York: Columbia University, p. 108.

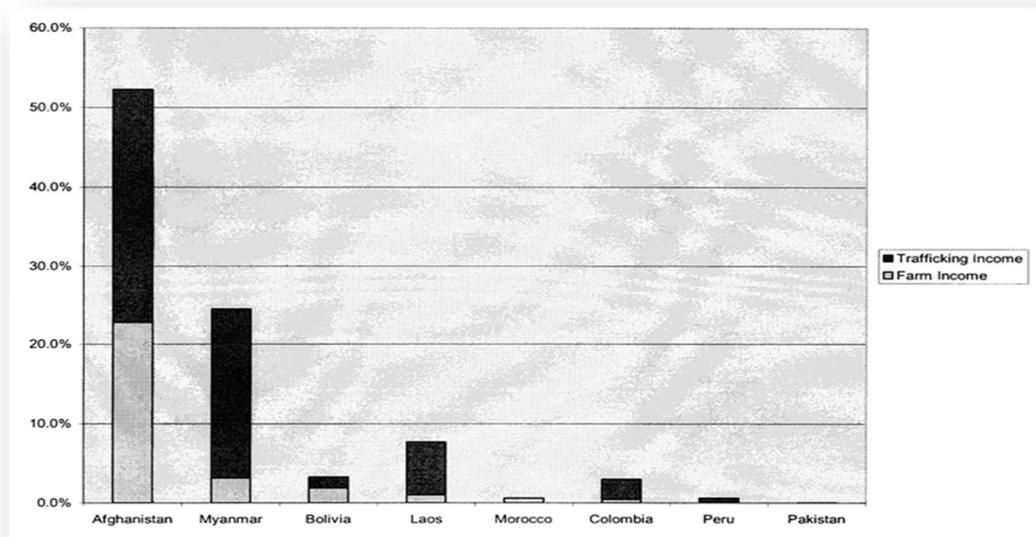
²² CARE Insights & Center for International Cooperation (2005): "Too early to declare success: Counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan", *Afghanistan Policy Brief, Care & Center of International Cooperation*, p. 1, at <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN022664.pdf>.

²³ Buddenberg, Doris & Byrd, William A. *op. cit.*, p. 27, at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afgh_drugindustry_Nov06.pdf.

²⁴ See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

cultivation and trafficking. Otherwise, the weakest link in the chain, the sharecropper, will be penalized for the benefit of the landowner who always will have the necessary networks of contacts to protect him, as well as sufficient economic resources to deal with temporary eradication measures.

Figure 3. Percentage of legal GDP from the opium economy (2004)



Source: Rubin, Barnett R. (2004): “Road to ruin: Afghanistan’s booming opium industry”, *Center on International Cooperation*, p. 7

4.2. The Different Economic Models of Cultivation

The analysis of the family economies of the opium growers²⁵ leads us to determine two fundamental types that show the significant difference of income existing for the landowning farmers²⁶ and for those who cultivate it under sharecropping²⁷:

- a. On the one hand, those owners of arable land, usually irrigated, combine the cultivation of opium poppy with other crops. In this case, the crop is used as the most effective way to increase profits and accumulate capital to be able to cope with the uncertainties affecting agriculture as a business, due to its dependence on the weather and its unpredictability. In this model, the owner who chooses to make the lease of the land ensures an income of between 50% and 60% of the gross income from the sale of the crop, however. The sharecropper will have to face up to 80% of the production costs incurred (most of the labor).

Also, the owner who has access to the proceeds of other types of crops does not need to sell the opium crop at the time of harvesting, when prices are lower. He prefers to wait until the end of the season to get \$ 7200 per hectare, or the corresponding part if the income comes from the lease. It is probable that if he decided to rent the land, he would also make a loan (*salam*) to the sharecropper for the purchase of seeds, his family's livelihood during the winter, and the payment of seasonal workers during the

²⁵ See Buddenberg, Doris & Byrd, William A., *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.

²⁶ The average number of hectares owned varies considerably by region. For example, we can find landowners in the province of Kandahar who can own up to 300 *jeribs* (traditional Afghan surface measure with an equivalence of one-fifth of the hectare). Its equivalent in the province of Nangarhar can get to possess no more than 30 *jeribs*.

²⁷ The most comprehensive survey conducted in Afghanistan to date, covering 11,757 households and 85,557 people, found that a quarter of the respondents exploited land under sharecropping (at Buddenberg & Byrd, *op. cit.*, p. 53).



harvest. In this manner, fifty or sixty percent will be increased with the benefits that it obtains for the realized credits (and that in some cases can reach the 500%).

- b. On the other hand, the sharecropper who will typically have had to go to opium cultivation seen as the only way to maintain a family that is on average is ten people. He will sell the harvest during the month of collection, precisely the month in which prices are lower because this farmer must face the payments of contracted seasonal workers, besides the amount of the loan for the lease of the plot²⁸ and the seeds. The result is an average income of \$ 900 per *jerib*, with which he will have to survive the whole year.

But if the farmer grows a parcel of rainfed that is his property, he runs the risk that, if the drought is intense, the *jerib* provides only three to five kilograms of opium resin, rather than the fifteen that are expected in a wet year or will not exceed \$ 300. With this small amount, he will not be able to cope with the credits he has acquired and faced the livelihood of his family, which means that his level of indebtedness will be even greater. If this situation arrives, his wife and children will probably have to work on the plot due to the lack of credit for the payment of temporary workers wages, or if not, to end up in jail for non-payment of debts.

5. From a System of Local Communities to Drug Trafficking Organizations

In the 1970s, Iran as the region's leading opium producer began to develop effective control and eradication policies, making Pakistan the largest producer in the Middle East. During the 1980s, Pakistan had become the world's largest heroin producer, with a market that accounted for seventy percent of the world's total. The interest of Western world led by the US was not to interrupt the war effort in support of resistance against the Soviets, so as a consequence the situation led to the failure for addressing this problem, scilicet facilitating the collusion between Pakistani institutions, mujahedeen resistance and drug traffickers²⁹. The same logistic service company (The National Logistics Cell), controlled by the financial network of the Pakistani Army, which carried weapons to the Islamist resistance, was the one that returned with the trucks loaded with opium to be converted into heroin in Pakistani territory³⁰. It would not be until the fall of the communist regime of Najibullah that the Pakistani Army began to implement active policies against the cultivation and traffic of opium when the situation had arrived at an unsustainable point because the Pakistani illegal economy had reached the figure of 8750 million dollars³¹.

This would coincide with the lack of governance in large areas of the Afghan state, which would lead to the emergence of opium cultivation and trade on a large scale, thus offsetting the strong demand brought about by the closure of Pakistani production. The situation of complete lack of governance in the provinces would lead farmers, many of them returnees from Pakistan and without the economic capacity to rebuild a life in Afghanistan. They focused on the cultivation of opium as the safest way to deal with expenditures incurred to set up small family farms that would allow them to cover their daily subsistence, without cultural or historical roots, but as the most immediate way out of the extreme poverty they faced³². This situation intensified in 1996 with the arrival of the Taliban, a year in which traffic and the

²⁸ In most provinces, the average area exploited by each farmer in sharecropping is from two to three *jeribs*.

²⁹ In 1983, the head of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had to remove the entire cell operating in Quetta because of its personal implications in the trafficking of heroin.

³⁰ Rashid, Ahmad (2002): *Taliban: Islam, oil and the new great game in Central Asia*, London: IB Tauris., p. 121.

³¹ Rashid, Ahmad: "Pakistan and the Taliban", *The Nation (Lahore-Pakistan)*, 11 April 1998.

³² CNN.com, *USAID says Afghan food efforts averts famine*, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/central/01/03/ret.afghan.aid/index.html>.



number of laboratories dedicated to the production of morphine and heroin increased. Although the profits were not going to the pockets of individuals, they were now part of an organized network of tax collectors of the Taliban government, with which they would face an essential part of the war effort. The cultivation would spread quickly to the north using the good relations between the Taliban regime and the Turkmen government that facilitated illegal traffic to the latter country, due to the conciliatory policy that maintained with the emirate. At the same time, Pakistan finally would get US economic support, and the opium cultivation was drastically reduced during the 1998-99 biennium, from 800 MT in 1997 to 24 MT in 1999³³.

By the end of 2002, the Americans stopped providing money directly to the local commanders who had aided them in the war, except in the southeast where the Taliban and Al Qaeda hunt would continue and therefore the delivery of large sums of money into its collaborators. In the face of this situation, these same local commanders opted for the cultivation of opium to continue ensuring the amount of income necessary to satisfy the salaries of their militias. An option that was safer from the economic point of view, since they knew the cultivation procedure and the networks of drug traffickers for commercialization, the same ones they had used it in the 1990s to self-finance their militias. It is through the local mujahedeen leaders that a new model is established in the Afghan macroeconomic system: that of drug trafficking organizations at the provincial and regional levels, complemented by the economic system of opium-based on the families and local communities what until that moment he had ruled.

At the end of 2002, the most important export routes for opiates were Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan. In that order, with lower prices for traffic in Tajikistan than in the other two countries³⁴ and with a large number of consumers in each of them (Iran with more than one million, Pakistan with more than 700,000, and Central Asia with more than 300,000). However, in 2009, Pakistan had once again taken the lead, but this time as an exporter, ahead of Iran and Central Asia.

³³ Rashid, Ahmad (2009): *Descent into chaos, The world's most unstable region and the threat to global security*, London: Penguin Books UK., p. 319.

³⁴ UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends 2002*, op. cit., p. 26.

Map 4. Heroin Trafficking Routes from Afghanistan (2008)

Source: UNODC: *Crime and Insurgency: The transnational threat of Afghan opium*, p. 48.

6. From Drug Trafficking to Clientelist Political Networks

In 2003, Governor of Helmand Mohammad Akhunzada made Lashkargah, the provincial capital, the nerve centre for opium cultivation in Afghanistan, so that while newly established civil servants in the city had between six months and a year without receiving wages of the Transition Authority, the opium farmers entered important benefits. Lashkargah would begin welcoming visitors from the northern provinces in search of seeds and opium cultivation techniques, a plant that perfectly matched the harsh Afghan climate. On the other hand, due to the level of corruption in the defence ministry, almost sixty percent of the international funds provided to pay the wages of the so-called Afghan Military Forces (AMF) remained in the pockets of high-ranking and highly corrupt officials³⁵. This meant the money did not reach the chiefs of Brigade and below³⁶ and they were compelled to take part in the corruption business due to the lack of salaries.

This situation would not improve with the implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process (DDR) at the end of 2003, a process that would last until the middle of 2006. To encourage the process, positions in the administration of the State were offered to those commanders of more dubious reputation among the principals, to prevent them from acting as blockers of the process³⁷. This measure produced an immediate false success due to the figure of heavy weapons and the number of AMF demobilised personnel.

³⁵ The first-level mujahedeen commanders would be granted the rank of division generals and lieutenant-generals of the so-called AMF, with the aggravation that according to their own statements they were considered with the right to collect, legally or illegally, the services provided to the State [Lieutenant General (Retired) G.H., personal communication (Kabul, February 15, 2014)].

³⁶ See Buddenberg, Doris & Byrd, William A.: *op. cit.*, p. 196.

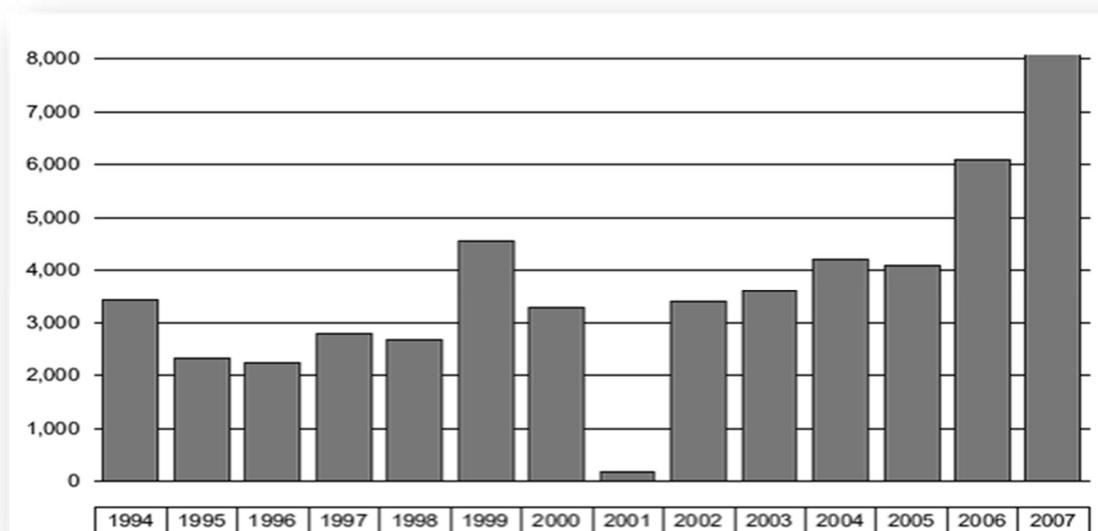
³⁷ Gossman, Patricia (2009): "Transitional justice and DDR, The case of Afghanistan". *International Center for Transitional Justice Research, Brief. June*, p. 2, at <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-DDR-Afghanistan-ResearchBrief-2009-English.pdf>.

Although the results were presented as such, the medium-term result was a blatant failure while the most powerful commanders and corrupt ones could infiltrate in the politics of State. In this way, they could do with positions in the new political and military structure from which they continued to exercise control of their clientelist networks through favours and political and police corruption.

An added problem in this DDR process is that it didn't touch those commanders South, Southeast and East, who were likely to collaborate with US forces in the hunt for Taliban and Al Qaeda elements. Therefore, they were allowed to keep their private militias, now reconverted into security companies; they were provided with substantial economic contracts for the provision of security and logistical transport services in the United States bases; and finally, they were paid in large cash amounts for the purchase of intelligence that would serve the operations. The intelligence that was misrepresented information of its tribal rivals, or competitors in business, whether legal or illegal, to be eliminated as alleged terrorists³⁸.

In 2004, opium cultivation had expanded into the thirty-four Afghan provinces and accounted for more than half of the country's GDP, reaching \$ 2.8 billion³⁹.

Figure 4. Evolution of opium production in MT and for years



Source: UNODC: *Afghanistan: Opium Survey 2007*, p. 12.

In the first parliamentary elections and provincial councils held in 2005, it became clear that many commanders did the delivery of arms voluntarily from their militias to allow them to enter politics. These new national deputies and members of provincial councils facilitated the appointment of police chiefs and governors, who in return did not pursue their involvement in criminal and drug trafficking networks and thus received a portion of the illegal fees that were generated. In short, these criminal networks became more hidden and to operate corrupted very easily the new provincial and national leaders, who were already coming from this underground economy, only had laissez-faire without having to be directly involved in the return of receiving

³⁸ See Gopal, Anand, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

³⁹ CARE Insights & Center for International Cooperation (2005): "Too early to declare success", *Afghanistan Policy Brief*, Care & Center of International Cooperation, at <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN022664.pdf>.



money⁴⁰. It was those years when clashes erupted between political leaders, former mujahedeen and real bosses in the provinces where they held official positions for control of this succulent business. (Between Abdul Rashid Dostum⁴¹ and Atta Muhammad Noor⁴² in the north; between Amanullah Khan⁴³ and Ismail Khan in Herat; and leaving Gul Agha Sherzai⁴⁴ as the only figure who had sufficient legal and de facto power to control this business in Kandahar province).

When the Local Afghan Police (ALP) was created in 2010, it offered the ideal solution for the accommodation of those mujahedeen commanders who had lost the opportunity to be integrated into the new power structures in previous years. The solution was none other than the designation of those mujahedeen for the command of the new ALP units in provinces and districts. Local Police soon became involved in cases of corruption to avoid the destruction of crops by those who paid the corresponding illegal rate⁴⁵.

In the following years, the continuous deterioration of the security situation, along with a lack of agreement among the US, United Kingdom, and Afghan government itself, about what kind of counter-narcotics strategy to follow, would lead to successive eradication plans not achieving visible results. However, the worst would be the direct involvement of people close to President Karzai in the heroin trade and the lack of cooperation of the President himself in facilitating investigations that clarify his family implications in criminal networks. To this extent that people who provided information to carry out huge seizures of heroin were later imprisoned and held in prison for years, even against judicial sentences ordering their release⁴⁶. And meanwhile, President Karzai scoffed at the international community by naming people from his tribe or extended family with a background in drug trafficking and sale as head of the national anti-corruption office or protecting his half-brother from any investigation, under the excuse that everything was bullied against them by political disputes⁴⁷.

7.The Opium Economy as part of the War Economy

7.1. The cultivation and trafficking of opium as a source of resources for the Taliban emirate in its war against the Northern Alliance

The cultivation and production of opium were transplanted from northern Pakistan to Afghanistan. In the 1980s, Pakistan was the world's largest producer with 70% of the total heroin. Cultivation methods were moved to the Afghan valleys in the early 1990s as the mujahedeen, who had become commanders of militias independent of the central power, needed quick and direct income.

⁴⁰ According to statements by senior police officers "most police chiefs are involved in the protection of criminal organizations" (see Buddenberg & Byrd, op. cit., p. 199).

⁴¹ Deputy Minister of Defense at that time.

⁴² Governor of the province of Balkh.

⁴³ Tribal Pashtun leader from the province of Herat who challenged Ismail Khan with his militias to seize power and illicit business in Herat (see GlobalSecurity.org, *Amanullah Khan*, at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/amanullah.htm>).

⁴⁴ Several times governor of Kandahar, special adviser to President Hamid Karzai and candidate for president in the 2014 elections (Afghan-bios.info, *Gul Agha Sherzai*, at http://afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=1714&task=view&total=2883&start=2470&Itemid=2).

⁴⁵ Mansfield, David & Fishstein, Paul (2013): "Eyes wide shut: Counter-narcotics in transition". *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series*, pp. 1-19, at http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1226_1382354119_opium-20bp.pdf.

⁴⁶ Risen, James: "Reports link Karzai's brother to Afghanistan heroin trade", *The New York Times*, 4 October 2008.

⁴⁷ Aikins, Mattheu: "Afghanistan: The making of a Narco State, *Rolling Stone*, 4 December 2014.



As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, in 1999 the government of the emirate decreed a reduction of a third of the cultivated area that got a reduction of 10% of the production. Not content with this, the following year managed to impose eradication almost zero of the area of cultivation. We believe that, contrary to what is known by different authors⁴⁸, this decision was not an approach to the international community to achieve international recognition in the United Nations. Instead, it was a decision to increase the amount of money collected by the regime through the rates that were a profitable trade⁴⁹. So, the crop reduction in 1998 and the 1999 ban would lead to a fall in production of 91%. This gave way to the existing stock of the previous two years in which the opium resin market had been flooded, as shown by the fact that heroin apprehensions in Europe were not significantly reduced⁵⁰. This was reflected in the fact that the price of opium resin that had dropped considerably went up to \$ 650 / kg (from \$ 30 / kg in 1999 to \$ 600 per kg of the average sales price on the same plantation in 2000). The purchasing and trafficking organizations were however still Pakistanis⁵¹.

The first government in Afghanistan to make the cultivation of opium a state business and to integrate it into the national economy was the Taliban regime. Taxes were imposed on the opium: the *ushr* charged to the farmer was 2.5% which implies that for each *jerib* two *khords*⁵² of opium resin were to be paid, and the *zakat* imposed on the merchant ranged from 10% to 20%. The Taliban used for this business the service of customs and even the state airline Ariana⁵³. We also know that money from drug trafficking would not only serve to finance the Taliban's military campaign in Afghanistan but also that of its partner Al-Qaeda as evidenced by intercepted documents in which the Jordanian terrorist Al Zaraqawi⁵⁴ claimed more money from Al Zawahiri⁵⁵, money for the most part from drug trafficking⁵⁶.

7.2. Opium cultivation and the Taliban revival

Although the Taliban movement was not the organiser of the network of illegal traffic of all sorts of articles that irregularly cross the Afghan borders, it did count with the decisive support of this mafia that facilitated in its origins the necessary economic support for the Taliban

⁴⁸ Mansfield, David; Batyrshin, Ilnur.; Gavrilis, George.; Ivanov, Vladimir; Kulakov, Oleg V.; Laruelle, Marlene; Long, Austin; Safranchuk, Ivan; Sorokin, Konstantin; Stepanova, Ekaterina; Tsarik, Yuri & Wankel H. Douglas (2016): *Afghan narcotrafficking: Finding an alternative to alternative development*, East West Institute (Ed.), New York, p. 15, at https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/AfghanNarco_AlternativeDevelopment.pdf. See Rashid: *Descent into chaos, op. cit.*, p. 320.

⁴⁹ The economic value of the resin exported that year amounted to \$ 1500 million, insofar as the annual average in the previous ten years had been \$ 150 million [Febrel Benloch, I. (2009): "El problema de las drogas en Afganistán" *Boletín Elcano*, (118), 8, p. 2; Jan, C.: "Interview: Karen Tandy, máxima responsable antidroga en EE. UU", *El País*, 15 septiembre 2016].

⁵⁰ UNODC: *Global illicit drug trends, op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁵¹ Rashid, A.: *Descent into chaos, op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵² Weight measure equivalent to sixty-one grams.

⁵³ Flyariana.com, *History of Ariana Afghan Airlines*, at <https://www.flyariana.com/Corp/history>.

⁵⁴ The taciturn Mujahedeen Jordanian who would begin his violent activities in his homeland as Ahmad Fadil Nazal Al Khalayleh, who would perfect his violent, cruel and excluding vision of Islam in Afghanistan under his new name Abu Musab Al Zaraqawi, and that he would become the founder of Al Qaeda in the land of the two rivers. He died in June 2006 in Iraq [Joffe, L. (2006): "Abu Musab Al-Zaraqawi obituary", *The Guardian*, 6 June 2006].

⁵⁵ Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, former leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, would end up joining Al Qaeda and becoming the second of its command structure. He currently leads Al Qaeda following the death of Osama Ben Laden (CNN Library: *Ayman al Zawahiri Fast Facts*, 12 June 2017, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/14/world/ayman-al-zawahiri---fast-facts/index.html>).

⁵⁶ Peters, Gretchen (2009b): *Seeds of terror: How heroin is bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 70.



guerrilla groups to continue operating⁵⁷. So Mullah Omar himself would support and facilitate the leaders of these transport and drug networks to become full members of the Kandahar Shura⁵⁸. This was a circle closer to Mullah Omar where the emirate's far-reaching decisions were taken⁵⁹ located in Kandahar and later displaced to Quetta on the occasion of its defeat before the forces of the Northern Alliance with the American air support.

We have already discussed in previous sections how the relations between the clientelist political networks were established and the mafia networks of drug traffickers. One of the most obvious examples of this type of parasitism was the case of the mafia leader Haji Juma Khan⁶⁰ and how his convoys were protected when they crossed through areas controlled by the insurgency, even provoking fun matches with the police and military units to facilitate the passage⁶¹. Taliban fighters on the other hand not only charge the corresponding *zakat* but also, they increased up to twenty percent as payment for the services rendered. In addition, to press the farmers to raise their poppy plantations and thereby enlarge the money collected through the illegal rate, in addition to helping the drug trafficker business by providing more raw material. But it is also that these traffickers, such as Haji Juma Khan, have become the necessary hinge to connect the insurgency and corrupt officials of the administration because he negotiated with them the passage of convoys through areas controlled by the government, as well as the permissiveness to the crop. These corrupt officials are the ones who receive bribes in exchange for calculated passivity, eventually allowing part of the money generated to end up costing weapons, wages, and ammunition from the insurgency.

Nowadays the system of collecting taxes on the cultivation and trade of opium (*ushr* and *zakat*) has reached a level of efficiency and sophistication that has caused each commander or sub-commandant to have an officer in charge of the exclusive management of economic affairs and especially of the collection of taxes. Among its tasks would be to bring to the *central shura* the corresponding part of the taxes collected, bearing in mind that many of these payments are made through payment in kind, that is the resin of opium⁶², and apparently operates with a level of corruption lower than the current Afghan government's own tax collection system. Although the estimates differ significantly according to the authors, they all believe that at least \$ 100 million comes into the hands of the Taliban every year out of a total of \$ 4 billion in the opium industry in Afghanistan⁶³. It is interesting to note that a large part of the Taliban fighters interviewed by journalist Graeme Smith in the Kandahar area said that they had joined the insurgency, among other reasons, because the international troops had destroyed their poppy

⁵⁷ For more details on how support from the mafia for illegal smugglers and road haulers was essential in the early Taliban movement see Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, oil and the new great game in Central Asia*, op. cit., p. 27. The same network of traffickers and carriers that using the free trade agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan allowed trucks transporting imported goods to Afghanistan not to be registered at the border and to take advantage of the return journey for transport of opium.

⁵⁸ Also known as *inner shura* for being the only one with whom Mullah Omar debated before making his decisions that were unappealable. By contrast, the shura of Kabul which was composed by the ministers of state and carried the daily affairs of the emirate was subject to the revision of its decisions by the Shura of Kandahar.

⁵⁹ Peters, Gretchen (2009c): "The Taliban and the opium trade" in Giustozzi, Antonio, *Decoding the New Taliban*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Risen, James: "Propping up a Drug Lord, then Arresting him", *The New York Times*, 11 December 2010.

⁶¹ McGirk, Tim: "Terrorism's harvest", *Time Magazine*, 2 august 2004.

⁶² After Musa Qala's recovery from the insurgents, NATO troops found warehouses where more than eleven tons of opium resin were deposited, a resin that was part of the payments collected from farmers as part of the protection offered (see Peters, "The Taliban and the opium trade" in *Decoding the New Taliban*, op. cit., p. 9).

⁶³ Peters, Gretchen (2009a): *How opium profits the Taliban*, United States Institute of Peace Washington, DC, pp. 46-51; Simon, Matilde: "The Drug Trade in Afghanistan: understanding motives behind farmers' decision to cultivate opium poppies", *Foreign Policy Journal*, 27 November 2015.



crops⁶⁴. Interesting to know that, as testimony on the different demands for implementation of eradication policies and depending on the membership of tribes that supported President Karzai and those who didn't, the latter being the ones who endorsed a greater demand for the eradication of opium cultivation by military and police units in charge⁶⁵.

Another aspect of learning is how the growing surface opium has a direct relationship with the areas controlled by the Taliban. In 2013, 89% of the opium cultivation area was located in the south and west regions, i.e. those classified by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) as high or extreme risk and practically inaccessible to its staff. If southern provinces those areas are characterized by the highest concentration of insurgents, the western ones are characterized by significant drug trafficking networks that facilitate the export of the product by the so-called northern route (Central Asia and Russia to Europe).

8. International and Afghan Permissibility on the Opium Traffic

During the years 2002 and 2003, the priority of US was the fight against Al Qaeda and its Taliban partners. They were not ready for the fight against drug trafficking to become an obstacle to the collaboration they received from its mujahedeen partners, who were helping it in the fight against terrorism but who were also the primary beneficiaries of opium crops and their illegal trade.

In 2004, the Deputy Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement insisted to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld on the need for US forces to engage in the eradication and fight against drug trafficking. With a vision that his superiors didn't share, he predicted the worsening of Afghan scenario with an increase in insurgency if this problem were not addressed. Finally, in 2005, and in the absence of support from his superiors he resigned from his post⁶⁶.

In those years, evidence gathered by UNODC and the international community against the governor of Helmand, Sherzai Akhunzada, was overwhelming but President Karzai would not let him resign because of the political debts he had with him following the 2004 presidential election. The situation only worsened when President Karzai gave the command of ALP within the province directly to him. From that year, it can be said that the ALP has been competing with the insurgency to collect illegal fees in those districts outside its jurisdiction to create greater tensions outside its areas of responsibility⁶⁷. In Kandahar province, it was Karzai's stepbrother, Wali Karzai, who took over the leadership of the provincial council, from which he controlled all tribal elites in the province and the drug business itself⁶⁸.

Actors of recognized prestige argue that the determining factor for the problem of opium cultivation and trafficking not to be tackled from the outset was the unwillingness and weakness that President Karzai showed to persecute the biggest traffickers⁶⁹. However, we estimate that President Karzai did what he did to play the trick of his patronage networks. Hamid Karzai is a

⁶⁴ Paikin, Steve: *Week of War: Graeme Smith, talking to the Taliban*, [Video/DVD], 30 October 2010.

⁶⁵ Siddique, Abubakar & Salih, Salih Muhammad: "Afghanistan: Poor Helmand Farmers find Themselves in Eye of Drug Storm", *Radio Free Europe*, 10 October 2007.

⁶⁶ See Rashid: *Descent into chaos, op. cit.*, p. 326.

⁶⁷ See Mansfield, David, & Fishstein, Paul (2013): "Eyes wide shut: Counter-narcotics in transition", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Tisdall, Simon: "Ahmed Wali Karzai: the corrupt and lawless face of modern Afghanistan", *The Guardian*, 12 July 2011.

⁶⁹ See Rashid: *Descent into chaos, op. cit.*, p. 328. In 2007, UNODC estimated that there were between twenty-five and thirty large Afghan traffickers (see Buddenberg & Byrd: *Afghanistan's drug industry, op. cit.*, p. 17).



second-tier politician who, although coming from a well-known Kandahar family, had not been able to build a future on the national political scene and was only supported by the US. In the absence of other consensus candidates, he was finally taken over as head of the Interim Authority, later the Transitional Authority, to subsequently be elected the first president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. With this dark past in the eyes of the Afghan public opinion and not having its network of followers, he had no choice but to agree with all those tribal leaders who allowed themselves to be convinced by personal favours or for their tribe (billionaires, placed in the central and provincial or local administration). The drug business played a significant role, knowing of the involvement of many of these leaders in traffic, President Karzai would get their loyalty in exchange for the protection of not being imprisoned while they continued enriching with this business.

About training and development of the Afghan security forces, a direct relationship has been established between the level of recruitment of volunteers for the Armed Forces of a given province and the pressure exerted by the security forces to eradicate the crop. This meant that when the lower the pressure higher is the number of volunteers being enlisted⁷⁰.

9. The Lack of an Integrated Antinarcotics Strategy

With the arrival of the international forces led by the US, a disagreement would be reached on a single policy which could have helped to eradicate crops and neutralize trafficking. The US was unwilling to see its number one priority during the years 2002 and 2003, the fight against Al Qaeda and its Taliban partners, be overshadowed by an anti-narcotics policy that would upset the mujahedeen commanders who were helping it in the fight against terrorism, and were the main beneficiaries of these crops and their illegal traffic.

In this scenario, the United Kingdom, which was responsible for the anti-narcotics fight since the commitment made at the 2002 Tokyo conference, considered the possibility of buying opium production. Finally, this option was not approved by the British government and would decide to buy the will of the Afghan farmers, so that they voluntarily eradicate their opium crops in exchange for receiving up to 1500 dollars per hectare eradicated. To this end, more than eighty million dollars were distributed among the governors and police chiefs in the provinces where the crops were located along 2002 by UNDOC. But this option showed only a naive vision of the British as the local Afghan authorities used this money to benefit and increase their clientele networks, without requiring anything in return.

Given the size of the problem, the US administration had no choice but to accept the state of play and decide to take action against the cultivation and trafficking of opium. At the Washington summit in April 2004, President Bush decided to get involved in the fight against the cultivation, as Prime Minister Tony Blair urged. But again, the remedy would be worse than the disease; President Bush would come to declare "I am a spray man," referring to the plan to destroy opium crops by aerial fumigation. The plan finally didn't go ahead with the insistent

⁷⁰ Mansfield, David (2013): *All bets are off! Prospects for reaching agreements and drug control in Helmand and Nangarhar in the run up to transition*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, p. 20. Conscriptio existed in Afghanistan until the overthrow of the Taliban regime, at which point the Armed Forces has become completely professional. Although conscription has always existed, it has varied in the number of conscripts required of each clan or sub-tribe, keeping in mind that it was the elders, who decided who were the ones designated to fill the required places. Only during the communist era did the recruit become forced and universal for a maximum of three years, expandable on a voluntary basis as a professional [M. A. Enayatullah, personal communication (Kabul, 15 November 2015)].



requests of Hamid Karzai, as president of the Transitional Authority, and the American ambassador, along with the opposition of the UK government⁷¹.

But more significant would be the disagreement within NATO that was unable to define a strategy against opium cultivation and trafficking, despite the overwhelming evidence linking it to sustaining the insurgency and international terrorism. At the meeting of NATO defence ministers, held in early October 2008 in Budapest⁷², a deep division of the allies was revealed in any possible common strategy to combat cultivation and trafficking of opium. The US advocated a direct involvement of troops in eradicating the cultivation and destruction of heroin laboratories, a position openly opposed by Germany, followed by other countries such as Spain⁷³. Finally, NATO, at the vehement request of Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, authorized the use of international troops in support of Afghan forces against persons and properties involved in drug trafficking and counterinsurgency support⁷⁴. This was a measure that seemed to be incomplete and very difficult to implement, since not only was it necessary for the person or organization to be dealing with drugs, but also to demonstrate that it was with insurgents or organizations linked to them, or for the benefits obtained for it. That is an opium resin wholesale trader who was not or could not prove his involvement with the insurgency could not be pursued⁷⁵.

The significant disagreements that have prevented the international community from agreeing on an anti-narcotics strategy have been motivated by the convoluted complexity of the problem⁷⁶. Such disparate factors as the cultivation of opium by the most disadvantaged families in society as the only way to survive in an economy of depredation where you are part of a clientele network, or you are subjected to the largest of the exploitations that a human being may have to face. Landowners are willing to share benefits that the sharecropping farmer will give them as part of the agreement to be able to cultivate the land. Benefits that can reach four-fifths of the harvest and receive in kind of opium resin; where these same proprietors are narcotraffickers because they trade with the resin that they have received like payment to the rent of the earth. The lenders who charge the loans made to the farmers in the form of opium resin with which they are involved in the business of drug trafficking. The local elites who, if not directly involved in the cultivation and trafficking business, will at least cover their tribe and clan with the police. Aware that otherwise they would be seen as collaborators from abroad and enemies of their local community. The policemen who do not destroy the crops and allow the drug traffic in exchange for bribes. The insurgency that protects the neediest farmers and the big drug traffickers who are eager for money and allow the farmers to grow illegal crops year after year, increasing the illegal rates they collect.

⁷¹ Rashid, *Descent into chaos*, op. cit., p. 325.

⁷² NATO: *Informal meeting of defense ministers, Budapest (Hungary)*, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/events_44179.htm.

⁷³ Dempsey, Judy & Burns, John F. (2008): "NATO agrees to take aim at Afghan drug trade", *New York Times*, and "La lucha contra el narcotráfico en Afganistán divide a los aliados", *El Periódico.com*, 10 octubre 2008.

⁷⁴ NATO: *NATO steps up counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan*, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_50120.htm?.

⁷⁵ The Spanish government never authorized its troops to be directly involved in this type of action, although Spanish units facilitated the work of the Afghan counter-narcotics units. See Roure Pujol, C. (2014): "Spanish Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Badguis (Afghanistan), 2005-2013", *ICIP Working Papers*, (6), pp. 1-68, p. 52.

⁷⁶ What we would call a wicked problem, very difficult to solve because of the incomplete information we have, the high number of sociological variables involved (people and cultures / sensitivities), their economic consequences and their interrelation with other problems. See Conklin, J. (2006): *Wicked problems & social complexity*, CogNexus Institute, p. 7.



But the truth has been that no Afghan authority, no country in the international community, has wished to assume this conscious problem with full responsibility, perhaps because, in the absence of an understanding of its real size but aware of the difficulties involved, it was not possible obtain immediate political returns to present before the respective governments and public opinions, before which they have preferred to be on the sidelines. In this situation, as it has happened in other areas, US has tended to intervene, but with the same negative consequences as in other areas: its tendency to work bilaterally and without taking into account the other actors present, in particular, those countries interested in these policies⁷⁷. This inevitably leads to the lack of an integrative strategy and to leave in the gutter very valid partners for their contribution of funds, as in the case of the World Bank and its agricultural renewal programs (2012), or for their necessary experience, as is the case of United Nations.

10. The Development of the Afghan Normative and Institutional System for the Fight against Narcotics

For its part, the Afghan administration with the aid and international support established as the first thing the Counter-narcotics Police Unit of Afghanistan (CNPA). The Central Poppy Eradication Force (CPEF) would be established in 2004, and later the same year, the Deputy Minister of Interior of Counter-Narcotics would be authorised with the responsibility of supervising and coordinating the different anti-narcotic activities being initiated.

In 2005, a specific Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF) would be established with a mission to pursue all types of offences related to the cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs, as well as related monetary offenses. That same year the new Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) was set up with the mission of coordinating in the government the different new policies produced for the fight against drugs. The different units and agencies previously created were subordinated to this ministry.

In 2006, the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) was established to provide funds for counter-narcotics policies at different levels (at the national, provincial and district level), thereby the policies and the means available to implement them. All this system of policies against drugs is part of the Counter-Narcotics Law approved at the end of 2005. It determined new crimes related to tenure, trade and trafficking, with penalties that come to life imprisonment, as well as special tribunals for such crimes⁷⁸. This new law was accompanied by others that regulated the crimes related to money laundering and the financing of terrorism. This new Counter-Narcotics Strategy, as reflected in the law passed in 2005 and its subsequent developments, was strengthened by being integrated as part of the Afghanistan Pact⁷⁹ and later in the National Strategy for Development of Afghanistan⁸⁰.

And as the UK was being shifted from the leadership of anti-drug policies, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) would become the first mentor and economic sponsor of the CNPA⁸¹. The CPEF would be abolished throughout 2010, and the CNPA would consist of three different types of units. The National Interdiction Unit (NIU); the research units

⁷⁷ See Mansfield et al.: *Afghan narcotrafficking: Finding an alternative to alternative development*, op. cit., p. 24.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan, 2005.

⁷⁹ NATO: *The Afghanistan compact: Building on Success, The London Conference*, pp. 4-5, at http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan: *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, p. 145, at <http://mfa.gov.af/en/page/6547/afghanistan-national-development-strategy/afghanistan-national-development-strategy-and>s.

⁸¹ At the end of the year 2014, the CNPA had 2850 troops distributed among the 34 Afghan provinces.



(Sensitive Investigate Unit, SIU) with powers on counter-narcotics, drug trafficking and related corruption; and finally, technical research units with appropriate means in telecommunications that support the previous ones (Technical Investigate Unit, TIU). From 2010 to 2012, two of the largest Afghan companies (the New Ansari Money Exchange and the Rahat LTD in charge of Islamic transfers of funds, the so-called *hawala* procedure that have been already explained in previous paragraphs), were prosecuted by the existing connections between this legal transfer system in Afghanistan, drug trafficking and the Taliban insurgency itself⁸². Despite all this, the average number of apprehensions made during those three years was disheartening, since it did not exceed 1.4% of the total estimated exported drug. What was achieved was that the Afghan anti-money laundering legislation improved so that the Afghan government escaped from being included in the country list of high risk and non-cooperative countries in the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing by the Financial Action Task Force⁸³.

11. The Failure of Eradication Policies

But it is at least shocking that, recognizing the importance of opium cultivation and trafficking for the financing of insurgency in Afghanistan. The US alone has spent \$ 7.8 billion⁸⁴ on policies to eradicate and support the change in the agricultural environment where opium cultivation has developed, and less than \$ 1 billion to eradication policies (which represents less than 7.5% of the total investment made in the country since 2002).

During the period 2004-2009 most of this money was channelled from the Afghan Ministry of Interior and through contracts paid and made by the US. That is why until 2009, the contractor who performed these eradication services was the US company DynCorp⁸⁵ through a specific unit created for it. The so-called Poppy Eradication Force (PEF), which would be the one that instructed and supported the Afghan police unit that had the ownership of this task (the so-called Central Poppy Eradication Force, CPEF). Company that was summarily dismissed by Richard Holbrooke, shortly after its appointments like Special Representative of US for Afghanistan and Pakistan⁸⁶. During the period in which DynCorp operated the PEF, 9946 hectares of the crop were eradicated at an average cost per hectare of \$ 73,608. This gives an idea of the absolute failure of the procedure that was only maintained by obscure economic interests before the disproportion existing between costs and effectiveness, as well as the fact that it lasted over five years.

Since 2010, funds dedicated to crop eradication were channeled exclusively through the provincial governors (Governor Led Eradication, GLE program).

⁸² US Department of State: *2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, at <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/238940.htm>; US Department of Treasury, *Treasury targets money exchange houses for supporting the Taliban*, at <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1627.aspx>.

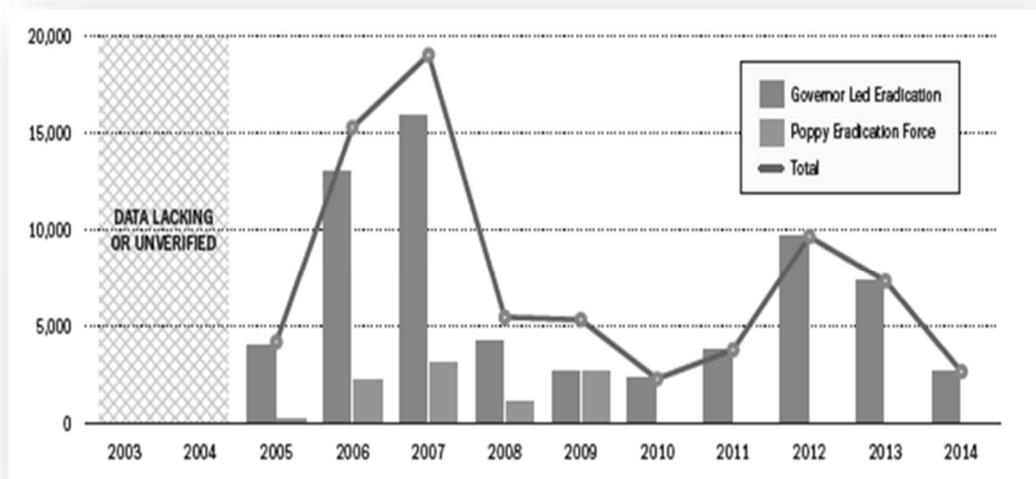
⁸³ Hodge, Nathan: "Afghanistan escapes blacklisting over standards to fight money laundering", *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 2014.

⁸⁴ Spoko, John F. (2014): *SIGAR for Afghanistan Reconstruction (quarterly report to the united states congress)*, United States of the Congress (ed.), p. 4.

⁸⁵ The sadly famous American service company that has participated in all the war scenarios in which the US military has intervened during the last 25 years, and has been involved in numerous cases of abuses and corruption (Isenberg, D.: "It's déjà vu for DynCorp all over again", *Huffingtonpost.com*, 12 June 2010, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-isenberg/its-dj-vu-for-dyncorp-all_b_792394.html).

⁸⁶ Holbrooke, Richard: "Still wrong in Afghanistan", *Washington Post*, 23 January 2008, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/22/AR2008012202617.html>.

Figure 5. Number of hectares eradicated by national or provincial programs



Source: Spoko, John F. (2014): *SIGAR for Afghanistan Reconstruction (quarterly report to the united states congress)*, United States of the Congress (Ed.), p. 10

More disturbingly, at the Tokyo conference in 2012, where the foundations for economic support of the international community during the next decade were laid, none mention to the drug problem was made and only demanded compliance by the Afghan government with a series of milestones in the s areas of: governance and rule of law; integrity and transparency in public and private finances; improvements in the budget appraisal and execution system; sustained economic development including the most disadvantaged classes; and finally, the commitment of the international community to improving procedures for aid effectiveness⁸⁷.

The UNODC estimates were that the area under opium cultivation in 2013 had increased by 36 percent over the previous one, which amounted to 209,000 hectares, a new record precisely the year when the security and governance transition to the Afghan government had begun. But what gives a clear idea of the effort made is that the deceased personnel due to clashes with the local communities in their eradication work were 143 (43% more than in the previous year), which means that the despair of the farmers was much larger, and the level of insecurity in the districts affected was much higher, contrary to the official information on the transfer of responsibility to the ANSF which was windy and well. Unfortunately for the image of the Spanish work in Badguis, this was the province in that year with the lowest area of opium cultivation reported as eradicated⁸⁸.

Significant was the case in Nangarhar province where opium production declined by 95% between 2008 and 2010. This resulted in a sharp decline in farmers' incomes because of growing wheat planted area increased from 36,000 to 51,000 ha. As the labour necessary for the cultivation of wheat is much smaller, this one decreased considerably. In turn, this decrease in economic flow led to a sharp reduction in activity in other sectors, particularly in construction. In response to lower demand for labour and goods, wages and prices declined

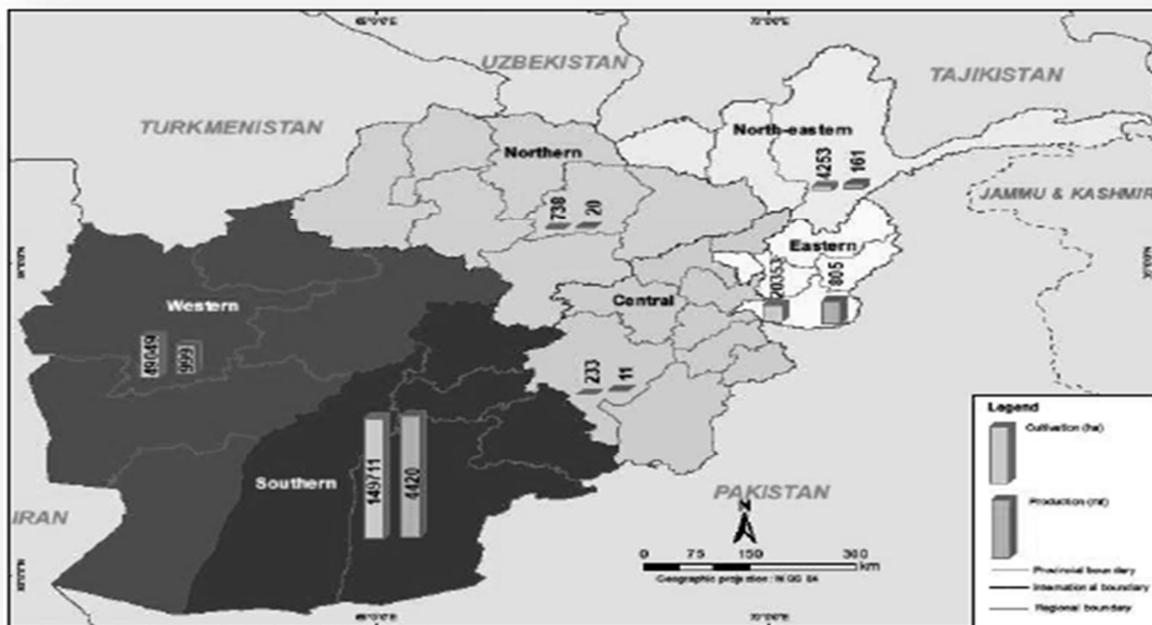
⁸⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: *Tokyo mutual accountability framework 2012*, at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/tokyo_conference_2012/tokyo_declaration_en2.html

⁸⁸ UNODC: *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014*, p. 19, at <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghan-opium-survey-2014.pdf>.

significantly, and some skilled workers moved to other provinces⁸⁹, in addition to a considerable increase of the level of violence⁹⁰. In summary, the system applied in Nangarhar and Kandahar, to obtain by means of incentives the reduction of cultivated hectares, was in the process of being decomposed from the moment that the farmers no longer respected their elders and the police, whom they considered to be responsible for the economic crisis in which they had entered and for the misappropriation of aid for the most disadvantaged classes. This produced, as an unwanted side effect, the loss of authority of governors who had initially achieved notable successes in reducing acreage.

In 2014, the year of the completion of the transfer of security to Afghan forces, the number of hectares where opium was eradicated fell to less than half of 2013 (2693 hectares compared to 7348 a year earlier). That year a new record was set, with a further increase in a cultivated area of 224,000 hectares, which was an increase of 7% cultivated area and 90% of world opium production. But what was significant again was the absolute failure of eradication policies with 63% less area where the crop was eradicated. In Badghis province no eradication was carried out, and the cultivated area increased by 59%, from 3596 hectares to 5721 hectares. The positive note was the fact that only thirteen people died because of eradication since they were minimal, as a result of the government's decision due to the high level of insecurity and the intense fighting that the ANSF conducted that year in most of the provinces.

Map 5. Number of hectares cultivated by regions (2014)



Source: UNODC: *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014*, p. 32

12. Alternative Strategies for Changing the Agricultural Model

The first interventions by the international community in the fight against opium cultivation in Afghanistan go back to the 1980s and were carried out by the US Embassy's narcotics section in Islamabad (Narcotics Affairs Section, NAS) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). However, lack of coherence and strategy, as well as funding to complete the

⁸⁹ See Mansfield & Fishstein, "Eyes wide shut: Counter-Narcotics in Transition", *op. cit.*, pp. 45-47.

⁹⁰ In 2012 and only in Nangarhar there were 45 deaths as consequence of the clashes with the police.



implementation over a long period, would lead to the failure of all of them. All these programs required dialogue and local agreements with the elders of the Afghan communities and authorities because they were subject to the “poppy clause⁹¹”, which in the years of the Taliban regime was not a welcome situation in many donor countries. What has remained clear in recent years, and especially with the Taliban regime, is that these eradication programs with conditional development aid benefited farmers with better economic conditions, property owners and renters. It hurt those who worked the land in a sharecropping regime that didn't have alternative resources, nor received the best aid precisely because they were outside the necessary clientele networks. If the aid is distributed, as is usual, to landowners, those who own the largest plots will always receive the greatest amount of aid, however sharecroppers will have to hand over most of the aid received to the owner since in the Afghan rural society the aid received by the land is considered part of the harvest⁹².

Following Paul Fishstein, we can affirm that the two main alternative strategies for the change of economic model and opium cultivation could be synthesized in those that seek to obtain rapid results through acting on the elites of local communities and the implementation of counter-narcotics policies that seek fast results with “stick and carrot strategies⁹³”, along with other strategies⁹⁴. The problem may have been that after three decades of implementation and experimentation of different programs for the eradication of opium cultivation by UN, these one has not wanted to take the lead in Afghanistan, possibly because of lack of adequate capacities, but in any case, this situation has caused the loss of all the experience accumulated over many years of good work developed in other countries, and in Afghanistan since the 1980s⁹⁵.

We have already seen that during the years 2002 to 2005 there was an intense debate between US and United Kingdom on the type of control and eradication policies to be applied. In any case, a point of agreement was reached between the countries of the international community interested in this area and that was the rejection of short-range programs based on the poppy clause, since it involved the use of force from the provincial and district political authorities, which would imply a loss of legitimacy (as it did when, despite lessons learned from experience, such projects were carried out in the province of Nangarhar).

We know that the two countries most committed to the fight against cultivation and drug trafficking have been: initially the United Kingdom that acquired this commitment at the Tokyo conference 2002 and it would carry out through its agency for the international development (Department for International Development, DFID); later on it happened to show the leadership with US which became more and more involved in the issue, and would do so through its corresponding agency for international development (US Aid for International Development, USAID) fundamentally because any counter-drug policy is a cross-cutting issue that directly

⁹¹ This conditionality clause obliges local communities to achieve certain milestones in crop reduction to receive some of the promised development aid. See Mansfield, D. (2001): “Alternative development in Afghanistan: The failure of quid pro quo”, *International Conference on Alternative Development in Drug Control and Cooperation, Feldafing*, 17-22, p. 3, at <http://scottshelmandvalleyarchives.org/docs/nar-01-03.pdf>.

⁹² Personal communication, General and ex-US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry (Kabul, 20 October 2016).

⁹³ This has been reflected in numerous projects against the cultivation of opium in what is known as the poppy clause.

⁹⁴ Fishstein, Paul (2014): *Despair or hope: Rural livelihoods and opium poppy dynamics in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (Kabul), pp. 58-60, at <https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/1421E-Despair-or-Hope-Web-Version.pdf>

⁹⁵ Mansfield, "Alternative development in Afghanistan: The failure of quid pro quo", *op. cit.*, p. 1.



affects security, governance and development. That is why the best results in opium control and eradication projects were obtained in the years 2012 and 2013 and were precisely under projects that were not specially designed for the fight against narcotics but within broader programs designated for the institutional development of the state, improved governance and socioeconomic and security conditions of local communities in the province of Helmand⁹⁶.

Similarly, it would be necessary to involve NGOs in any fight against drug cultivation and trafficking, since through them they can support the family economies that suffer eradication from being forced to commit crimes or join the insurgency, including them in special development programs in agricultural techniques and delivery of equipment that could significantly increase the production capacity of his piece of arable land (construction of wells and donation of energy generators for the extraction of water, solar panels and batteries to reduce its operation, ...).

13. Final Considerations and Conclusions

Moreover, the reality is that opium cultivation in Afghanistan has not only become an essential part of the country's economy, accounting for up to 27% of GDP, according to some sources. This figure represents an annual business of no less than 4 billion dollars⁹⁷, and, according to the World Bank, the volume of business would be reduced to 18%, an amount in any case not negligible since we speak of around 2,7 billion dollars⁹⁸. Hence, and following the less optimistic estimates, the annual amount of money the insurgency receives would amount to no less than \$ 200 million, making the drug business in Afghanistan a vital source of income for the economy. But drugs not only has corrupted the Afghan economy by making the state practically a narco-state, permeating all social strata, from senior management posts (judges, police chiefs, prosecutors, lawyers, etc.) to policemen who control check-points on the roads (when they ask for an illegal payment to pass through, even if you have all the documents in order and belonging to an official body, otherwise you will have to go to district police station where, in the best case, you will be held for several hours). Finally, and as a worse scenario, Afghanistan has become one of the countries with one of the highest per capita drug-related rates of addicts in the world⁹⁹.

The most worrying aspects are that once the opium economy has become part of the country's economy, the behaviour of the people, peasants and urban, has been profoundly changed. It is no longer a purely economic problem for the most disadvantaged classes. The lack of security in certain districts, due to the corruption of the political and police chiefs, has generated clientelist networks between farmers and drug traffickers who have aligned important sectors of the population, becoming another corrupt new class. They justify themselves after seeing the corruption existing in the upper social spheres, but, in many cases, these activities do not cover the basic needs of the family members. As a result, in 2014, Afghanistan ranked 172 out of 174 in the most corrupt countries index¹⁰⁰. Therefore, any eradication program has to deal not only with security, development and governance aspects but also with social aspects,

⁹⁶ Mansfield et al., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹⁷ Schweich, Thomas (2008): "Is Afghanistan a Narco State?", *The New York Times Magazine*.

⁹⁸ Lacouture, Mattheu (2008): "Narco-terrorism in Afghanistan: Counternarcotics and Counterinsurgency", *International Affairs Review*, Vol. 17, n°2, pp. 1-3

⁹⁹ 2.9 million, according to Chao, Steve & Nam, Lois (2015): "Afghanistan's floundering billion drug war", *Aljazeera*, 12 May 2015, and the highest in the child population according to the US Department of State (2015): *2015 international narcotics control strategy report (INCSR)*, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

¹⁰⁰ Transparency International, *Corruption perceptions index 2014*, at <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>



reintegrating the aligned groups (consumers, farmers and traffickers) in the traditional economy. All this makes the task much more complex. Trying to define a strategy that relates only to security, development and governance is not enough.

In summary, the most significant mistake in the fight against cultivation and drug trafficking was committed at the beginning of the 2000s, during the DDR process and the policies implemented for the integration of mujahedeen leaders, known for having links with the drug business, but whose integration into national and provincial politics was facilitated. The reason is crystal clear: the international community was eager to present good and rapid results to its governments and public opinion. This irresponsibility is still being paid today with lives and a lack of institutional stability, calling into question all the work done so far in the rest of the pillars of the country's national reconstruction.



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