

# Analysis of Drug Trafficking and Insurgency Correlation: Case Study of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Region

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## Abstract

ECO member states are among a big producer of opium and heroin in the world and all trafficking routes used for trafficking illicit drugs to the world pass through ECO countries. On the other hand many insurgent groups are actively involved in illicit drug trafficking. ECO's Main objective is economic development in its region and directly unproductive profit seeking activities such as drug trafficking and insurgency is tight barrier to reach this goal. The aim of this research is to investigate the correlation between drug trafficking and insurgency in ECO region and identify the reasons for this connection to cope with this problem. There are various theories, which attempt to explain the relationship between drug trafficking and insurgency. Generally speaking, it appears that it is not sensible to lump organized crime groups, who conduct drug trafficking, and terrorist groups together in ECO area. Although there are some links between them, they have essential motivational and operational discrepancies.

**Keywords:** drug trafficking, insurgency, ECO, economic development

## 1. Introduction

Drug trafficking as one of the most dangerous kind of transnational organized crime is a global problem, the consequences associated with drug abuse reach well beyond the realm of those involved in the production, trafficking and consumption of illegal narcotics. One of the reasons that, trafficking of drugs are illegal around the world is that, their legalization might result in development (Reuter et al., 2004, p. 4).

ECO member states are among a big producer of opium and heroin in the world and all trafficking routes used for trafficking illicit drugs to the world pass through ECO countries (UNODC, 2011). All members spend lots of money to fight against drug trafficking, as all of them suffer from drug addiction and drug related problems.

ECO's Main objective is economic development in its region and directly unproductive profit seeking activities such as drug trafficking is tight barrier to reach this goal (Barro, 1991). Economic costs for ECO governments to fight and control illicit drugs are important factor that slow the pace of development in ECO region (Lloyd-Ellis & Marceau, 2001). It is necessary for ECO organization to take measures and address this issue. To this end, the first step to cope with this problem is to identify the factors and incentives that make this region vulnerable for drug trafficking activities. The aim of this research is to investigate the correlation between drug trafficking and insurgency in ECO region and analyze the reasons for this connection.

## 2. Theoretical Analysis of Drug trafficking and Insurgency Correlation

In the last decade, drug trafficking organizations have gained an enormous amount of money. For example, the UNODC's Afghan Opium Survey (2014) shows that the total value of opium harvest, in Afghanistan's 2014, which accrued to Afghan traffickers, laboratory owners and farmers was around \$US0.85 billion (UNODC, 2014, p. 7). Now, a challenging question is: how much of this enormous amount of money is spent on carrying out crimes and acts of terrorism? It is argued that even a small proportion would be more than enough to plan, finance and perpetrate terrorist acts (UNODC).

There are various theories, which attempt to explain the relationship between drug trafficking and terrorists' organization. Some argue that there is connection based on ideology, while some believe that they interact out of convenience. Some studies point out that, linkage between terrorists and drug trafficking organizations is based on common goals. Ehrenfeld (1990, p. 67) stated that this theory is rooted in communism ideology. He believes

that Soviet terrorist organizations exploit this connection as a weapon to attack the western ideology and to diminish the west power.

McCarthy (2003) reported that sometimes drug trafficking can have a twofold goal for terrorists. First, it is lucrative and profitable. Second, it can weaken and challenge their enemies by overflowing the society with different types of addictive drugs. Consequently, some terrorists take advantage of that argument to rationalize their participation and engagement in illegal activities to their membership as well as supporters (Dandur & Chin, 2004, p. 12). In this vein, Phil Williams and Ernesto Savona (1995) stated that terrorist groups carry out terrorist attacks against some countries for five various reasons such as: first, to disrupt investigations; second, to discourage the introduction or/and resumption of forceful government policies; third, to eradicate efficacious and effectual law enforcement officials. Fourth, to force judges to change their decisions into more lenient and merciful sentencing policies, and finally, to build an environment in which they can perpetrate criminal activity effortlessly.

In 1983, Peruvian President, Belaunde Terry, for the first time, introduced the term “Narcoterrorism”, and it got very popular within a short period of time (Hartelius, 2008). According to Hartelius, the concept of Narcoterrorism has gradually obtained two major usages. One of its meanings is associated with drug squads, employing the methods of terrorism, to guard their own drug trafficking operations, for example, by assassinating judges or journalists. Another concept deals with Narcoterrorism as the engagement in drug trafficking by terrorist organizations to support financially their ideology-driven operations. To encompass both aspects, Davids (2002) put forth a twofold definition. For example, on one hand, he states that terrorism is aimed at protecting and supporting the activities of illicit drug traffickers. On the other hand, he claims that organization terrorism takes advantage of the money obtained by Narcotrafficking to hold up their political, religious and other purposes.

On the other hand, some studies show that, this linkage is based on self-interest. According to Damask and Miller (1996, p. 31), the relationship between drug traffickers and terrorist organizations is a myth that is supported by North American policy interests in order to help move forward their political agendas. They argue that the relation between drug trafficking and terrorism is both tangential and ephemeral and Norco-terrorism is ultimately a myth, as drug trafficking and terrorism do not intersect, and when they do, the relationship is short-lived and superficial. Wardlaw (1988) argues that there are many different ways in which drug trafficking organizations can be linked, and each linkage must be investigated based on a case by case issue in order to appropriately address the situation. To Wardlaw, the term Narco-terrorism implies that there are defined characteristics and potentially one general way to fight this type of terrorism. Brown (2011) believes Drug trafficking and terrorism remain in two separate spheres because drug trafficking is not terrorism. Members of drug trafficking organizations do not commit violence to instill fear.

Terrorist groups mainly do not have financial goals including political influence, political legitimacy, ideology dissemination, and publicity. However, while they do not consider pecuniary gain as a major goal, international terrorism requires fund to attract adherents as well as to retain them. Also, money is needed to promote their presence along with their activities locally and globally (Durnagöl, 2009).

At the U.S. Library of Congress, researchers studied groups of narcotics-funded terrorist and so-called “hospitable nations to organized terrorism” (Berry, Cortis, Hudson, & Kollar, 2002). Based on these reports, quite a few number of indigenous guerrilla squads who operate in drug producing areas, and sometimes terrorist groups as well, are seriously involved in drugs. These reviews claim that these insurgent squads and drug trafficking organizations have an advantageous correlation allowing some exchanges and swaps between them. Nevertheless, because they have different goals, there is a pragmatic and arm’s length relationship between them. Sometimes, the relationship between the groups is in a form of extortion and protection racket in which insurgents will support different aspects of producing drugs and operating trades within the realms they control (Berry et al., 2002). Likewise, Felbab-Brown (2006), stresses the evolution of insurgents’ participation in illegal economies due to its resulting benefits. As they move from merely imposing the manufacturer or peasants of the illegal substances, to protecting and safeguarding airstrips to the drug traffickers, to taxing forerunner agents and the final illicit commodities and goods, to controlling some segments of global trafficking routes to involving with the action of money exchange and money laundering. The obtained profits are spent on improving military capabilities through facilitating procurement, to raise emoluments given to soldiers, and upgrading logistics.

Criminal organizations as well as terrorist groups continuously develop global networks and set up alliances of convenience (Shahini & Landsman, 2007, p. 2). Globalization allows organizations of terror and crime to develop and expand their activities, by benefiting from the internationalization of banking systems and

communications, as well as the unclosing of borders in order to facilitate their activities (FATFTE, 2008). However, while the development of legal trade is normally regulated by adhering to the policies of border control, bureaucratic systems and customs officials, the international crime groups freely take advantage of the loopholes of legal systems of some countries to expand their reach. They travel to areas where they are not in danger of being extradited, and conduct their operations in states suffering from ineffective and corrupt law enforcement, and also do money laundering in countries which have bank secrecy or/and few effective controls (Shelley, 2015, March 29). Makarenko (2004) reports that terrorists are proficient at drug trafficking concerning operation and organization. The reason behind this achievement is rooted in the groups' structural similarities.

ECO member countries unveiled the links between illegal drugs trafficking and international terrorism. Accordingly, several key organized terrorist groups are active in ECO region accused for committing diverse terrorist activities globally. In this part, it is necessary to analyze terrorist activities in ECO region in order to find the ties between illegal drug-trafficking organizations or trafficking in general as well as terrorism or insurgent platoons in relation to financing operations, obtaining political amplification and subverting an existing government.

### **3. Insurgency and Linkage to Drug Production**

In the ECO region, Afghanistan is the hub of drug production and a large proportion of drugs trafficked in ECO region is fabricated in Afghanistan. A Survey by the Asia Foundation (2011) reveals that Afghans view insecurity as the main problem which faces their country. Some reports (Ionas & Ionas, 2015, April 1) have pointed out long-term relations between terrorists and illegal drug traffickers. Western intelligence agencies claimed that recent busts have shown evidence of al-Qaeda's links to the trade. Different seizures of narcotics like the one performed by American Navy in the Arabian Sea discovered several al-Qaeda militants sitting on a small fishing boat with a bale of drugs. In another case, in a raid on the house of a drug trafficker in Kabul, a dozen satellite phones, utilized to call numbers related to suspected terrorists in the Balkans, Turkey, and Western Europe, was uncovered. According to UNODC's estimation, Taliban requires between US90 to US160 million annually (Nijssen, 2011).

Insurgents benefit from drugs in various ways and also there is an intricate system to divide interests between the traffickers and loose alliance. The Taliban guerrillas, arrested in battle field, claim that poppy proceeds sponsor a huge amount of their operational funding such as fighters' salaries and money to purchase food, weapons, explosives and fuel (Peters, 2009, p. 23). The hub of opium cultivation is situated in the southern and eastern of Afghanistan where the cultivation is in the highest level and Taliban is very strong, and where a vast area is suffering from insecurities. According to The UNODC, 89 % of opium produced in Afghanistan in 2014 is grown in Taliban regions (Afghanistan Opium Survey, 2012).

The US Department of Defense (DOD) (Cecchia & Oskarsson, 2012, p. 2) reported on progress for Afghanistan's Security and Stability in April 2012 and signified that the challenges of counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency remain most prominent in south and south-western Afghanistan. The province of Hilmand was alone responsible for producing more than half of the opium crops in Afghanistan, which is also a center for the insurgency (UNODC, 2008). The cultivation raised in the majority of the chief opium poppy-growing provinces, such as Farah, Badghis, Nimroz and Nangarhar, while opium cultivation was stable in Uruzgan and even reduced by 11% in Kandahar, which was the second most significant poppy cultivation province between the years 2009 and 2011 (UNODC, 2012). They are the most insecure and unsafe provinces, where United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) classifies their security risk as "high" or "extreme", and also mostly it is difficult for the UN and NGOs to access them (UNODC, 2012). Anti-government elements (AGE) as well as drug traffickers are very active in provinces located in the Western region, for example, organized criminal networks have nested in Farah, Nimroz and Badghis provinces (UNODC, 2012).

According to Collins and Ali (2010, p. 4) local Taliban commanders usually lend farmers and cultivators the money to purchase seeds at the beginning of the planting seasons, and accordingly are paid back when farmers collect the poppies which are at the farm gate. Taliban also charge poppy cultivator a 10% tax on the crops, called an Ushr. Besides, Taliban gather payoffs from drug traffickers in support of transporting drugs via insurgent-controlled areas of the country while traveling to markets. They also charge for guarding the laboratories which process the opium to heroin. The farmers deem that Taliban leadership is very strict in allocating each commander's controlling zone, and also if farmers make complaint to the Taliban leaderships regarding overcharging they respond by punishing the sub-commanders (Perers, 2009).

Another way to collect money from farmers and cultivators is Zakat, that is, a 2.5 percent 'wealth tax' (Hammidov, 2004, p. 31). As per Hammidov taliban collect Zakat where they gain the rural communities'

support and open a novel source of income. In farmers' view, it can be assumed that Zakat is essentially voluntary, which depends on the trader's character and disposition. Like cultivation, the capability to apply Zakat provides incentives for insurgents to host and guard the trafficking networks (UNODC, 2009, p. 108). Moreover, Rohde (2007) reported that almost all drug refineries in areas are under the control of Taliban and insurgents. This is the reason why Taliban are trying to take more farming land under their control, and consequently in areas in which there are no obvious dominant forces, Taliban commanders, corrupt officials and criminal squads fight with each other, where all appear to be exploiting the farmers (Peters, 2009).

Another profitable form of earning money for insurgents is providing protection for the trade of opium in the south (Checchia & Oskarsson, 2012). Usually, in Afghanistan, a local power broker takes a cut of commodities which are moving through his area, or receives payments for protecting a shipment when it passes (Peters, 2009). At a lower level, Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Ministry's study showed that in the southern area insurgents and drug traffickers have established an alliance whereby the drug traffickers offer money, vehicles as well as subsistence to transport about 2 tons of opium (Islamic republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, 2013, p. 67). Insurgents in return provide guarding for them and also do not meddle with their activities (UNODC, 2009). But some platoon or leaders are directly involved in cooperative operations with traffickers, and transfer opium and heroin to main middleman on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and share the profit (Minutes of the UNODC/DEA seminar, 2003).

According to UNAMA report (2012), insurgents set up mobile or fixed checkpoints in the regions where they operate or/and control and enforce restrictions of movement. They stop vehicles, investigate passengers, confiscate their properties, impose taxes and seek for evidence of connections with the government or/and IMF at these checkpoints. But it is unclear how systematically they apply such fees. It appears that there is a blend of value-based taxation along with flat rates, however, in the southern area in 2008 UNODC collected numerous reports that opiate shipments were charged at 200 Afs. (i.e., \$4) per kilogram (UNODC, 2009). In addition, insurgents are supported in other ways related to drug dealing, for example, some insurgent's networks might be engaged in the level of precursor and forerunner procurement (Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 2012).

Another important link between drug trafficking and insurgents is having big financial support from powerful kingpins in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, like Pakistan, in which such large drug traffickers provide donations for the insurgents. This can show that there is mutual cooperation between drug traffickers and insurgents, in one hand and drug traffickers and insurgents traffic drugs out of country on the other hand, bringing arms inside (UNODC, 2009). In addition to abovementioned ways of financing, since 2005, insurgents also have directly been involved in smuggling of opiates to Afghanistan/Pakistan border in conjunction with drug traffickers. As such, insurgents and drug traffickers evidently shared the profit (UNODC, 2009). As stated earlier, these kinds of supporting by drug production along with trafficking provide insurgents with huge amount of money.

In summary, insurgents are active participants in the opiate value chain, running from farmer to large trader, overlapping mostly with the minor, middle and macro levels of opiate trafficking. They provide the safe space without government interference, in which other opiate traders and traffickers can function more profitably. The relationship between opium cultivation and insurgency is relatively easy to analyze: it is basically a matter of insurgents benefit from the economic profits gained from territorial control, whereas criminals take advantage of insurgents' interfering with law enforcement. Nevertheless, roles and relationships appear to blur further at the smuggling level of value chain of the opiate (UNODC, 2009).

#### **4. Insurgency in Routes of Trafficking**

The activity of insurgents and terrorist groups is not necessarily limited to Afghanistan as source of drug production in ECO region. There are lots of active insurgents in ECO region which have direct link to drug trafficking and are part of main players of illicit trafficking from/to ECO region. If you follow the main traffic routes in ECO area and also insurgent's operations and control area, it can be observed that the majority of insurgents activities are carried out along the pathways of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to the major drug consumptions including Russia and Europe. Most of these insurgents are active in those ECO countries which have recently obtained independency. The proximity of the "Golden Crescent" of Pakistan and Afghanistan, make Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan the intersections of trading the opiate to Europe and Russia, where consumption of narcotics is growing (Cilluffo, 2000). Therefore, in addition to Afghan insurgents who are actively involved in the trade of narcotic in ECO area, other insurgents, outside of Afghanistan are also interested in trading narcotic to finance their activities. UNODC (2012) reports a strong link

between insurgents inside of Afghanistan and neighboring countries.

An assessment of crime in Central Asia (2012) indicates that criminal organizations in the region have conducted operations that are increasingly regional rather than national in scope; for instance, Tajik organized crime is no longer confined to its own territory. According to CARICC analysts, the extensive counter-terrorist operations which ensued “negatively affected the amount of time and efforts that could have been spent on counter-narcotics activities in the third and, probably, fourth quarter of 2010”. In 2011, Tajikistan continued to fight with militancy, including suicide bombings. As said by a deputy Prosecutor-General of Tajikistan, 196 militants were detained, of which 168 were convicted in 2011 (UNODC, 2012). In 1997, Tajik authorities confiscated 8,000 kilograms of heroin allegedly possessed by prominent Iranian drug trafficker, who has financially supported warring Afghan groups for years (Olcott & Udalova, 2000). Kazakhstan’s authorities have also reportedly told UNODC that criminal organizations in Kazakhstan not only remain in contact with their criminal associates in other Central Asian countries, such as the Russian Federation and the Baltic States, but also they have criminal linkages in some European and Asian countries, including Turkey and China (Nijssen, & Salooja, 2012). Kazakh officials often single out Caucasian ethnicities, such as Chechens, as dominant in international heroin trafficking through Kazakhstan (UNODC, 2012). Other reports have also noted Chechen organized crime groups to be active in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan playing the role of drug transporters (UNODC, 2012).

According to UNAMA (2010) in Tajikistan, insurgents penetrate the country to control or influence over border districts, and also give the Taliban and other insurgents an opportunity to tap into the heroin pipeline travelling northward. It remains unclear precisely how this taxing is conducted, but an alliance was formed between insurgents and local drug smugglers to maintain control of the border. All in all, insurgents reportedly receive 30 percent of their financial support from the drug trade (UNODC, 2012). It is difficult to extrapolate any type of figure from this estimate but, given the importance of the regions under influence, the amounts are significant.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, it appears that it is not sensible to lump organized crime groups, who conduct drug trafficking, and terrorist groups together. Although there are some links between them, they have essential motivational and operational discrepancies. The main question is whether terrorism action and transnational organized crime of drug trafficking have the same point of origination or not. According to similarities that these two groups have, and also a need to raise funds, as mentioned, these two groups are close to each other especially in some regions which are hubs of drug production and drug trafficking routes like ECO region.

It can be seen that insurgents have no other way to finance their activity, except linking with drug trade and their linkage is just for self-interest. These should bring about more attention on fighting with drug trafficking than insurgents. International community in Afghanistan devotes a lot of energy to fight with insurgents, but these cannot be effective solutions. Despite strong linkage between drug trafficking and insurgents, these two groups are separated in nature and fighting with insurgents could not be appropriate drugs control strategy. In practice, it is proved that the main goal of insurgents is not drug trade. With taking power by Taliban in Afghanistan, drug production and trade decreased dramatically (Chossudovsky, 2006).

Military operations to bolster drug control effort are defeated. Military involvement works at expense of civilian, government and army intentions to focus on drug crop growers in rural areas as the easiest target in operations of counter narcotics (United Nations, 1994). This policy is considered to be against development programs and very costly for government without successful results. Furthermore, increased military involvement could not scrub down the drug trade; however, rather, it will bring about increased violence through prompting drug traffickers to fortify their own military capacities as well as creation of armed opposition groups (United Nations, 1994). For fighting with drug trafficking and terrorism, precisionist definition is essential for understanding terrorism and drug trafficking violence.

Operation of international conventions associated to these problems such as United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988, emphasizing on harmonizing policy and regional cooperation, can lead ECO members to tackle drug trafficking. Although the region has taken several steps forward, better plan is needed for the parameters defined by its obvious complementarities to be attained. ECO Member States will need to organize coordinated actions with effective regional strategies to fight against this security challenge through a uniform approach.

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