

2014

Afghanistan, Opium, and NATO Afghanistan's Opium Trade: The Consequences of NATO's Withdrawal

Jeremiah Pariag

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/all_reports

Citation of this paper:

Pariag, Jeremiah, "Afghanistan, Opium, and NATO Afghanistan's Opium Trade: The Consequences of NATO's Withdrawal" (2014).
All Reports. 3.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/all_reports/3

Afghanistan, Opium, and NATO

Afghanistan's Opium Trade: The Consequences of NATO's Withdrawal

This article has been produced by the efforts of the following members:

Jeremiah Pariag – Team Member for the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region

Ashley Audette – Team Member for the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region

With the combination of the 2001 economic collapse and resource scarcity in the region, many farmers in Afghanistan reverted to growing opium for export, mainly due to the ease of production and trade.[i] Opium is durable, easy to store, and highly profitable. Due to this, poppy production has taken the best available land in the region, leading to farmers actually favoring the production of opium over food.[ii] Previously, the issue of opium production and trade in Afghanistan was mitigated by the presence of NATO forces; however, with the imminent withdrawal of NATO approaching, the opium trade is expected to reach new highs in post-Taliban Afghanistan, which is drawing a great deal of international attention and concern.

NATO was initially sent to the region to support the transition of government power and support a sovereign democracy after the Taliban government was ousted in 2001, and are scheduled to leave the region by the end of this year[iii]. As of February 2013, there was approximately 50 000 NATO troops serving in Afghanistan from 49 contributing countries, according to ISAF, with many being from the United States. Since NATO's deployment after the 9/11 attacks, the conflict has resulted in the deaths of 3466 coalition troops including 2201 Americans and 453 from the United Kingdom.[iv]

The areas used primarily in the cultivation of opium are also those with a significant Taliban presence, according to a report made by the UN, and are heavily involved with both the cultivation and distribution of Afghanistan's opium supplies.[v] It has been reported that in 2014 alone, production has increased by a whopping 17%, with the areas under poppy cultivation reaching over 224000 hectares of land[vi]. The active cultivation of the plant has been rising steadily since 2010, putting Afghanistan in the top spot of producing more than 80% of the world's opium[vii]. This is especially concerning for the United States because the money from this drug production predominately finances the Taliban, effectively contributing to the increasing rates of organized crime and corruption in the region.[viii] To date, the US government watchdog has estimated that the United States has spent \$7.6 billion over 13 years trying to eradicate the growth and cultivation of poppies in the region; however, the production figures continue to soar[ix].

In regards to the local economy, the trade and production of opium is quite substantial. The crop currently accounts for nearly one billion dollars, which is over 4% of Afghanistan's GDP[x], and this will likely continue to increase with the departure of NATO. Much to the detriment of counter narcotics efforts, farmers receive incentives, including fertilizer and cash advances, from the Taliban in exchange for poppy cultivation[xi]. The opium market has also had several major social and health effects on neighboring countries, especially Pakistan[xii]. Due to the long-term of exposure of heroin in Pakistan, there has been a large spike in the number of HIV/AIDS cases. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), it is

estimated that, in Pakistan, there are up to 160000 cases of HIV, resulting in up to 6,000 deaths in 2013 alone[xiii]. With NATO leaving the region, all of these figures should be expected to rise.