

THE PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING

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The illegal drug trade is a global black market dedicated to the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs that are subjected to drug prohibition laws. Most jurisdictions prohibit trade, except under license of many types of drugs through the use of drug prohibition laws. Today, drug trafficking is a very profitable business and at the same time it requires great ingenuity during its transit.

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A UN report has stated that “the global drug trade generated an estimated US\$321.6 billion in 2014. With a world GDP of US\$36 trillion in the same year, the illegal drug trade may be estimated as nearly 1% of total global trade. Consumption of illegal drugs is widespread globally”. Chinese edicts against opium smoking were made in 1729, 1796 and 1800. Addictive drugs were prohibited in the west in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the early 19th century, an illegal drug trade in China emerged. The Chinese government retaliated by enforcing a ban on the import of opium that led to the First Opium War (1839–1842) between Great Britain and Qing dynasty of China. Chinese authorities had banned opium, but the United Kingdom forced China to allow British merchants to trade opium. Trading of opium was lucrative, and smoking of opium had become common in the 19th Century, so British merchants increased trade with the Chinese. As a result of this illegal trade, by 1838 the number of Chinese opium addicts had grown between four and twelve million. The Second Opium War broke out in 1856, with the British joined this time by the French. After the two opium wars, the British Crown, by virtue of the treaties of Nanking and Tianjin, took large sums of money from the Chinese government through this illegal trade (clarification needed), which were referred to as “reparations”.

In 1868, as a result of the increased use of opium, the UK restricted the sale of opium in Britain by implementing the 1868 Pharmacy Act. In the United States, control of opium was a state responsibility until the introduction of the Harrison Act in 1914, following the passing of the International Opium Convention in 1912. Between 1920 and 1933, alcohol was banned in the United States. This law was considered to be very difficult to enforce and it resulted in the growth of many criminal organizations, including the modern American Mafia. The Australian Crime Commission's illicit drug data report for 2011–2012 was released in Western Sydney on 20 of May 2013, and revealed that the seizures of illegal substances in Australia during the reporting period were the largest in a decade, due to record interceptions of amphetamines, cocaine and steroids.

The beginning of the 21st century saw a drug use increase in North America and Europe, with a particularly increased demand for marijuana and cocaine. As a result, international organized crime syndicates such as the Sinaloa Cartel and Ndrangheta have increased cooperation among each other in order to facilitate trans-Atlantic drug trafficking. Another illicit drug with increased demand in Europe is hashish, which is generally smuggled from Morocco to Spain, where it is later exported to its final markets (mostly France and Western Europe).

The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the chief drug policymaking body of the United Nations, held its annual meeting in Vienna, Austria in mid-March 2014, following a period of historic drug policy reforms throughout the world—such as the decision of the Uruguay government to become the first national jurisdiction in the world to legalize cannabis. The International Drug Policy Consortium stated in the lead-up to the meeting that “the meeting itself is likely to feature standoffs between reform-oriented countries and governments that favour failed criminal justice models, which have resulted in mass incarceration and rampant human rights abuses such as the death penalty for non-violent drug offences”. The support of drug policy reform by Joanne Csete,

deputy director of the Open Society Global Drug Policy Program, was also published in the consortium's media release that “there will be no shortage of governments that seek to bury their heads in the sand and pretend these drug policy reforms aren't happening. But try as they might, the movement for drug law reform is unstoppable”.

Drug trafficking is widely regarded by lawmakers as a serious offense around the world. Penalties often depend on the type of drug (and its classification in the country into which it is being trafficked), the quantity trafficked, where the drugs are sold and how they are distributed. If the drugs are sold to underage people, then the penalties for trafficking may be harsher than in other circumstances. Drug smuggling carries severe penalties in many countries. Sentencing may include lengthy periods of incarceration, flogging and even the death penalty (in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere). In December 2005, Van Tuong Nguyen, a 25 year old Australian drug smuggler, was hanged in Singapore after being convicted in March 2004. In 2010, two people were sentenced to death in Malaysia for trafficking 1 kilogram (2.2 lb.) of cannabis into the country. Execution is mostly used as a deterrent, and many have called upon much more effective measures to be taken by countries to tackle drug trafficking, such as for example targeting specific criminal organizations (which are often also active in the smuggling of other goods (i.e. wildlife) and even people. In some cases, even links between politicians and the criminal organizations have been proven to exist.

The countries of drug production and transit are some of the most affected by the drug trade, though countries receiving the illegally imported substances are also adversely affected. For example, Ecuador has absorbed up to 300,000 refugees from Colombia who are running from guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug lords. While some applied for asylum, others are still illegal immigrants. The drugs that pass from Colombia through Ecuador to other parts of South America create economic and social problems.

Honduras, through which an estimated 79% of cocaine passes on its way to the United States, has the highest murder rate in the world. According to the International Crisis Group, the most violent regions in Central America, particularly along the Guatemala–Honduras border, are highly correlated with an abundance of drug trafficking activity. Jamaican drug lord Christopher Coke being escorted by DEA agents. In many countries worldwide, the illegal drug trade is thought to be directly linked to violent crimes such as murder. This is especially true in developing countries, such as Honduras, but is also an issue for many developed countries worldwide. In the late 1990s in the United States the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimated that 5% of murders were drug-related.

After a crackdown by US and Mexican authorities in the first decade of the 21st century as part of tightened border security in the wake of the September 11 attacks, border violence inside Mexico surged. The Mexican government estimates that 90% of the killings are drug-related. A report by the UK government's Drug Strategy Unit that was leaked to the press, stated that due to the expensive price of highly addictive drugs heroin and cocaine, drug use was responsible for the great majority of crime, including 85% of shoplifting, 70-80% of burglaries and 54% of robberies. It concluded that “the cost of crime committed to support illegal cocaine and heroin habits amounts to £16 billion a year in the UK”.

The global drugs trade is evolving faster than authorities can cope with and as it spreads to new frontiers, the consensus on how to tackle global drugs trafficking, production and use is increasingly split. “The drug trade is becoming truly more global”, Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, said. “New countries have emerged as crucial new demand places. For example Brazil and Argentina arguably now have per capita drug consumption on a par with the US”. Russia is still in the midst of “major heroin epidemic” that has lasted many years, she said, and China too was “robustly back” as a drug-consuming country. Meanwhile, West and East Africa had become the new crossroads in drug trafficking as entry points to the European market and beyond, she said. Felbab-Brown added that it is increasingly difficult to achieve a co-ordinated international drug policy. “It's going to be very difficult to imagine how that will be achieved. In 2016, the United Nations will once again go through its periodic reviews of drug policy”, she said. “But beyond

that how one deals with supply side and trafficking - there is really not any consensus at all". In fact increasingly, the opposite appears to be the case, she said.

According to data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and European crime-fighting agency Europol, the annual global drugs trade is worth around \$435 billion a year, with the annual cocaine trade worth \$84 billion. Globally, organized crime accounts for 1.5 percent of global gross domestic product and is worth around \$870 billion and of that, drugs account for 50 percent of international organized crime income. It is problematically for global authorities, drug markets are extremely fluid and flexible and able to regroup easily elsewhere when the authorities interrupt their networks, Felbab-Brown said.

More worryingly, there is little global consensus on dealing with the drugs supply. In Latin American countries such as Uruguay, Guatemala and even Mexico, which struggles with drug- and gang-related crime, governments are considering to relax their legislation on drugs. "Drug flows are going across the world while increasingly the political realities are changing, particularly in Latin America where very different regimes are breaking with the existing global counter-narcotic regimes" she said. Ann Fordham, executive director of the International Drug Policy Consortium, said that two major shifts had occurred in the drugs trade.

A Colombian anti-drugs police officer arranges packages of cocaine. Drug trade routes have shifted due to interdiction by certain authorities, while uncontrolled synthetic drugs that can be created in labs anywhere are on the rise. "The policy response tried to reduce and stop the supply, but all it did was shift trade or production elsewhere", she told CNBC.

Examples of such shifts are traditional bastions of opium-growing territories shifting from South East Asia to Afghanistan. Elsewhere, cocaine traffickers are now using West Africa to get their drugs to European markets, earning countries like Guinea-Bissau the ignominious title of a "narco-state". At the 2016 UN convention on international drug policy Fordham expected to see a further divergence by global governments over drug policies. "I expect we're going to see a further breaking of the consensus over drugs with more governments shifting direction to the stance taking by some Latin American governments to decriminalize drug use. Other governments, however, such as Russia and China, will continue with their hard-line, zero-tolerance policies". Fordham said the consensus on how to control drugs focused on punitive measures for years while the harm to health caused by drug use was increasing. "What we've seen is that has translated into harsh regimes that don't see drug use as a health issue and are purely focused on reducing supply and demand", she noted. "For instance, a quarter of all prisoners in the US are in jail for non-violent drug offences and the drugs trade is as strong as ever – that shows punitive measures are not working. We need a different approach by governments to take the trade out of the hands of organized criminals and the illicit market".

Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws. UNODC is continuously monitoring and researching global illicit drug markets in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their dynamics. Drug trafficking is a key part of this research. Further information can be found in the yearly World Drug Report.

At current levels, world heroin consumption (340 tons) and seizures represent an annual flow of 430-450 tons of heroin into the global heroin market. Of that total, opium from Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic yields some 50 tons, while the rest, some 380 tons of heroin and morphine, is produced exclusively from Afghan opium. While approximately 5 tons are consumed and seized in Afghanistan, the remaining bulk of 375 tons is trafficked worldwide via routes flowing into and through the countries neighboring Afghanistan.

The Balkan and northern routes are the main heroin trafficking corridors linking Afghanistan to the huge markets of the Russian Federation and Western Europe. The Balkan route traverses the Islamic Republic of Iran (often via Pakistan), Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria across South-East Europe to the Western European market, with an annual market value of some \$20 billion. The northern route runs mainly through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (or Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) to Ka-

zakhstan and the Russian Federation. The size of that market is estimated to total \$13 billion per year.

In 2014, global heroin seizures reached a record level of 73.7 metric tons. Most of the heroin was seized in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia (39 per cent of the global total), South-East Europe (24 per cent) and Western and Central Europe (10 per cent). The global increase in heroin seizures over the period 2012-2014 was driven mainly by continued burgeoning seizures in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. In 2014, those two countries accounted for more than half of global heroin seizures and registered, for the third consecutive year, the highest and second highest seizures worldwide, respectively.

In 2013 and 2014, cocaine was used by some 16 to 17 million people worldwide, similar to the number of global opiate users. North America accounted for more than 40 per cent of global cocaine consumption (the total was estimated at around 470 tons), while the 27 European Union and four European Free Trade Association countries accounted for more than a quarter of total consumption. These two regions account for more than 80 per cent of the total value of the global cocaine market, which was estimated at \$88 billion in 2014.

For the North American market, cocaine is typically transported from Colombia to Mexico or Central America by sea and then onwards by land to the United States and Canada. Cocaine is trafficked to Europe mostly by sea, often in container shipments. Colombia remains the main source of the cocaine found in Europe, but direct shipments from Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are far more common than in the United States market.

Following a significant increase over the period 2011 - 2012, global cocaine seizure totals have recently followed a stable trend, amounting to 712 tons in 2013 and 711 tons in 2014. Seizures continued to be concentrated in the Americas and Europe. However, the transition from 2013 to 2014 brought about a geographical shift in seizures towards the source countries for cocaine. Seizures in South America accounted for 59 per cent of the global total for 2014, compared with 45 per cent in 2013.

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