



# Through a Broken Glass, Darkly; Drug Policy and the War in Afghanistan

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## Key Points:

- For more than fifteen years now, Washington has been pursuing a defined set of strategic objectives in Afghanistan. In doing so, it has created and supported a client State on the standard model and imposed a specific and familiar economic regimen. Combined with the years of armed conflict, these factors have generated insecurity and poverty, both of which are at the core of a poor farmer's decision to cultivate an illicit crop.
- These core policies that have contributed to the soaring rise in opium cultivation cannot be separated from so-called 'counter-narcotics' initiatives. Once relevant context is taken into account, there is little evidence a genuine counter-narcotics policy has been attempted in Afghanistan and the argument is only bolstered when the implications of the actual policies themselves are considered.
- A narrowness of focus and a willingness to accept the boundaries of debate handed-down by officials has impoverished analyses of the situation not just in Afghanistan but also across the many theatres of the so-called War on Drugs. Advocacy which might alleviate the problems with which counter-narcotics operations are ostensibly concerned, but which would require moving outside the traditional remit of drug policy analyses and confronting the strategic goals of the foreign forces in Afghanistan, has been off-limits by default.
- Yet only by widening the lens, by recognising not just in word but also in action that drug cultivation is a 'cross-cutting' issue, can we hope to advocate policies that will reduce illicit drug cultivation and the recourse to harmful drug use.

## INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of 2014, as NATO was preparing to cease formal combat operations in Afghanistan, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) announced Afghan farmers had cultivated a record 209,000 hectares of opium poppy over the course of the previous year. This level of production had occurred, a Reuters report commented, 'despite years of counter-narcotics efforts that have cost the United States \$7.6 billion'.<sup>1</sup> The US Department of Defense put the blame squarely on their local allies who, officials said, had not properly implemented the chosen policies. The drug

policy community generally considers technical problems to have undermined 'counter-narcotics' efforts, which are, it is commonly argued, poorly chosen, under-funded, and lacking in appreciation of local context. This conception of an occupying army committed to counter-narcotics but failing in its well-intentioned efforts has little basis in fact. It is sustained by a general tendency within the drug policy community to accept the boundaries of debate handed-down by policy-makers. Not just in Afghanistan but around the globe, investigating vitally important context such as

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the strategic and economic objectives of the occupying powers has been considered strictly off-limits. Taking these factors into account, and locating 'counter-narcotics' operations within the wider war effort, suggests the picture most commonly presented has little relation to what has actually been taking place in Afghanistan over the past 14 years.

## WAR AIMS

The war in Afghanistan began on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2001 with air strikes by US and British forces, launched in violation of international law and lacking a relevant UN Security Council resolution.<sup>2</sup> On September 20<sup>th</sup>, a little more than a week after the terrorist attacks in New York City, then US President George Bush had addressed a joint session of congress and announced his administration would be demanding the Taliban regime hand over Osama Bin Laden, then living in Afghanistan and, according to officials, the mastermind behind the attacks. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan responded by requesting evidence to support the extradition, following standard procedure. Washington refused to provide any such evidence and then dismissed an alternative Taliban offer to hand Bin Laden over to a third party so he could be tried in Islamic courts. The air strikes then began with the aim, US officials said, of pressurising the Taliban to hand-over Bin Laden. Washington thereafter maintained a strategy of no-negotiations. While George Bush claimed of Bin Laden, 'We know he's guilty,' no corroborating evidence was provided, nor could any be provided eight months later following a major FBI investigation. In response to the threat of bombing, aid agencies in Afghanistan had warned the strikes would disrupt vital aid supplies, running the risk of driving millions into starvation. The warnings were ignored. No reliable estimates exist of how many people perished over the course of the initial bombing campaign, but, in an auspicious opening to the invasion and occupation, those who bore the brunt of the suffering were ordinary Afghans.<sup>3</sup>

Offers by the Taliban to start negotiations if bombing raids were stopped were flatly rejected. Towards the end of October the *New York Times* reported: 'After proclaiming that American air strikes had 'eviscerated' Taliban forces, Pentagon briefers are now trying to prepare the American public for a long haul by describing the Taliban as battle-hardened survivors.' The US and British strategy called 'for constant bombing raids to wear down the Taliban.' 'It is starting to look as if they are bombing and bombing and bombing just because it is what they know how to do,' the chairman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies was quoted as saying. But in an illuminating comment, the Chief of the British Defence Staff, Admiral Boyce, suggested there was another target: 'The squeeze will carry on until the people of the country themselves recognize that this is going to go on until they get the leadership changed.'<sup>4</sup> One Afghan leader quoted in the press, a former US ally speaking from Pakistan, condemned the bombing as an attempt by Washington 'to show its muscle, score a victory and scare everyone in the world.'<sup>5</sup> The analysis seems reasonable, given the context. Declassified internal documents have since shed some light on the objectives. In late September, the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld had sent a memo to President Bush arguing that a new regime in Kabul should be the goal of the attacks - not a publicly stated goal at the time - and added, 'If the war does not significantly change the world's political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim.'<sup>6</sup>

With the Bush administration refusing to negotiate, a military occupation followed. On the ground, US officials moved quickly to ensure the obedience of the new regime. The requisite framework was developed in Bonn, Germany, at a meeting between Western officials and hand-picked Afghan powerbrokers and warlords; democratic groups were initially invited then excluded. After the signing of the Bonn Agreement in late 2001, a *New York Times* headline captured the

core outcome: 'Afghan Warlords and Bandits Are Back in Business.' The hopes held by many Afghans following the overthrow of the Taliban 'were crushed when they saw many of the most powerful positions in the new government handed over to representatives of the warring factions they held accountable for much of the tragedy of the last two decades', observed Andrew Wilder, Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.<sup>7</sup> Members of the Northern Alliance, the old US allies from the war against the Soviets, emerged with over half of the new government positions. 'The United States-led military campaign that began on Oct. 7 ... has returned to power nearly all of the same warlords who had misruled the country in the days before the Taliban,' the *Times* reported. All of the warlords had 'pledged loyalty to the interim government in Kabul.'<sup>8</sup> The interim government, a foreign creation, was designed from the first to be passive and easily controlled. The purpose-built state was to be led by a hand-picked local representative, Hamid Karzai, and Afghans suddenly found themselves citizens in one of the world's most 'centralised' political systems. Executive power was concentrated overwhelmingly with a President granted final say on all matters of any significance and given responsibility for assigning every position in the government. The parliament and judiciary were largely symbolic gestures, weak by design and ineffectual in practice. Subsequent elections, given the military occupation and the domestic distribution of power, as well as the well-documented fraud, violence, and intimidation, have largely served to rubber-stamp and provide a veil of legitimacy for this arrangement.<sup>9</sup>

With the new government in place, the US needed to ensure obedience among the general population. The chosen method was an old one: to hand pacification over to paramilitary forces. For tactical reasons stemming from strategic imperatives, the use of brutal, unaccountable warlords and paramilitaries has been standard

fare in the history of US occupations and counter-insurgency operations. In Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, the Philippines and Iraq, to name some of the more infamous cases, Washington has either tacitly supported or actively implemented the policy of outsourcing the dirty work of 'pacification' to local paramilitary forces. Afghan strongmen, many of whom the population wanted to see behind bars, were given funds and full US backing to run their respective territories as personal fiefdoms, to enforce their rule through whatever means they deemed fit. This low-cost option was reportedly described by President Bush as a 'bargain'. The policy was a success: confrontational political movements were stifled and Afghans, particularly in rural areas, were terrorised into passivity. International NGOs on the ground documented the widespread abuses against the civilian population. 'People are afraid to challenge the government,' reported Human Rights Watch at the time, 'or even to engage in activity that might lead to harassment.'<sup>10</sup> 'One of the main functions of the warlords seems to be to keep the population in line and quell independent political organising,' wrote Sonali Kolkhatar and James Ingalls in their book on the war, the only study so far to have looked into this period in sufficient detail.<sup>11</sup>

The argument is often made that policy makers undermined their own objectives when they decided to empower some of the most reactionary and repressive elements of Afghan society and to put in place a centralised political arrangement, unsuitable as it is in a decentralised society like Afghanistan; what is today sometimes called the 'governance crisis' is rightly understood to have its roots in this period. The support for warlords and strongmen 'at the expense of the central government, the rule of law, human rights, ordinary Afghans and ultimately democracy' was 'an absurd contradiction in policy,' argues one journalist and author in a common refrain. In reality, there is no contradiction, except to say that policies enacted on the ground undermine

statements designed for public consumption. The claim that Washington has made a ‘mistake’ is based on a deep misunderstanding of aims, and the tactics used to achieve those aims. The strongmen were not empowered at the expense of the central government: they were the *de facto* government. And a centralised system backed-up by paramilitary terror is appropriate if the aim is control; genuine democracy, uncontrollable and unpredictable, would be a strategic disaster. The assumption that legitimacy is a concern for US policy planners has no basis either in Afghanistan or in the history of US-backed counter-insurgency operations – a long repetitious story of bringing to power or stepping-in to assist groups desperately lacking in legitimacy, and then backing them up with financial, diplomatic and military support. Hence the installation of Nazi collaborators in Greece; wealthy landowners and Japanese collaborators in the Philippines; repressive, autocratic leaders in South Vietnam; murderous dictators in South America’s Southern Cone; the brutal regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala during the first War on Terror; the warlords in Afghanistan; and on and on.

Colombia is an example of a theatre of US operations where the paramilitary strategy has been used to devastating effect. There too, commentators criticise the impact on the State’s legitimacy. ‘The very paramilitary model that provided short-term control in important regions,’ writes one analyst, ‘at the same time served to undermine the institutional legitimacy of the State, due to repressiveness and human rights violations in those areas originally controlled by land-holding drug dealers, now in the process of legalizing their stakes.’<sup>12</sup> Similar comments can be picked at random from almost every US foreign policy adventure. Like post-war Italy for example, where the US stepped in to destroy the anti-fascist resistance and reinstate the mafia in an attempt to ensure a pro-US, pro-business regime, while commentators criticised policies that ‘tended to undermine

the legitimacy of the Italian state.’<sup>13</sup> Tactics are repeated because they work: violence and terror, while undermining legitimacy, can lead to a subdued populace, forced to accept the political dispensation favoured by Washington. The experience of Central America through the 1980s is perhaps the most prominent example of how US-backed terror can destroy opposition and resistance, regardless of the State’s perceived legitimacy, and it is indicative that by some commentators El Salvador has been held up as a model to be replicated.<sup>14</sup>

After three years of warlord and autocratic rule insurgent groups emerged in Afghanistan, driven in part by public contempt for the regime and the behaviour of the occupiers, as well as the US assassination campaign around Kandahar targeting demobilised Taliban.<sup>15</sup> Washington’s policy then switched to building up the police and the army - what is known in official parlance as ‘Nation Building’. As is generally the case, spending patterns provide a useful indicator of goals. Regardless of claims by analysts that objectives in the country are confused or ill-defined, US priorities in Afghanistan have been consistent. The aim has been to build a client state, then to militarise it against any resistance; again, nothing new in Washington’s foreign policy history. What is misleadingly called ‘aid’ or ‘reconstruction’ has largely been funding for the now enormous military and police forces. A 2014 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction noted that ‘The bulk of the U.S. aid effort—nearly \$62 billion of the \$104 billion appropriated since FY 2002—has gone to create and support the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).’<sup>16</sup> In 2012, when Washington began to talk of a drawdown, Afghanistan received \$12.9 billion in what was referred to as ‘aid’ from the US government, but fully \$9.95 billion of this ‘went towards spending on military and security assistance to arm and train Afghan military and police forces.’<sup>17</sup> Following the partial withdrawal that took place in 2014, US funding will remain concentrated almost entirely on the police and the army, who have

an atrocious record of human rights abuses and are set to receive billions more dollars in 'aid' in forthcoming years.

Writing in 2011, the editor of the London *Financial Times* commented that the aim of the war in Afghanistan was 'to establish a client state with a semblance of democracy'.<sup>18</sup> In more guarded language, two scholars writing in the journal of the British Royal Institute for International Affairs observe: 'The ideas developed through the Bonn Agreement (2001-5) and continued through the Afghanistan Compact (2006-10) have focused on building a centrally governed state (sometimes defined as democratic) that has a monopoly on the use of force.'<sup>19</sup> These comments are accurate, corresponding with the facts on the ground. In the years since Bonn, deliberate policy choices and billions of dollars in direct support have established a typical client regime. Today the Afghan government closely resembles a mafia-state: officials abuse their authority to enrich themselves; foreign-funded military and police forces commit grievous human rights abuses against the population; torture, practiced routinely by the occupiers, has been adopted systematically by their local allies; warlords and their personal militia, assisted by CIA-run paramilitaries, terrorise the rural population; and high-level positions within the regime are filled by US-allies on the CIA payroll whose backgrounds could sympathetically be described as sinister.<sup>20</sup>

The impact on the general population is also the usual one. An important and largely ignored 2010 UN study discussed the implications for poverty and human rights given the priorities of the occupiers and the Afghan regime. Poverty in Afghanistan, the UN argued, 'is neither accidental or inevitable ... it is both a cause and consequence of a massive human rights deficit including widespread impunity and inadequate investment in, and attention to, human rights.'<sup>21</sup> 'Abuse of power is a key driver of poverty in Afghanistan,' the report found, as 'vested interests frequently shape

the public agenda, whether in relation to the law, policy, or the allocation of resources.' 'The international community pursues military and political strategies,' while 'Afghan power-holders act largely in their personal interests.' Afghan officials, 'whether in Parliament or other elected body, rarely genuinely represent their constituents' opinion and decisions. Non-participation in, and exclusion from, decision-making that affects the lives of Afghans greatly inhibit the ability of the poor to make informed decisions and to expand their choices; this, in turn, negates or curtails opportunities to overcome poverty.' The report's authors observe that 'The twin evils of impunity and injustice affect the lives of Afghans in ways that have a direct bearing on their ability to expand choices and access opportunities to reduce deprivation as well as their marginalized and impoverished status.' The result: 'more than 90 per cent of jobs can be classified as vulnerable employment that does not secure stable and sufficient income,' which is a development 'due, in part, to the absence of Government policies to diversify economic opportunities that would broaden the choice available to Afghans, in terms of income-generating activities.' It is for these reasons, the authors write, that 'a growing number of Afghans are increasingly disillusioned and dispirited as the compact between the people, the Government, and its international partners is widely seen to have not delivered adequately on the most basic fundamentals including security, justice, food, shelter, health, jobs and the prospect of a better future.'

The continuation of military operations has been another factor at the root of poverty: 'The last three decades of armed conflict have exacerbated poverty and impeded efforts geared to its reduction. Armed conflict is one of many reasons why one-third of Afghans live in absolute poverty, with another 37 per cent of poor people hovering on the edge.' The report was written around the time of the surge, and the authors noted 'The intensification and

spread of the armed conflict in recent years has increased insecurity and exacerbated poverty.’ (That same year, a Red Cross official had warned the press: ‘The suffering of the Afghan population has reached levels that are frankly unbearable in many circumstances.’<sup>22</sup>) As for poverty reduction programmes, the UN found ‘All development indicators show that poverty reduction efforts have had little impact on the daily life of most Afghans.’ Afghans repeatedly identified ‘poverty and unemployment as the driving forces behind insecurity’, and called for these issues to be addressed as a priority.<sup>23</sup> It is by now well-established that the majority of aid initiatives have been focused on producing expensive showcases, ‘implemented through large for-profit private companies, linked to military and political priorities, and targeting geographical areas where the donors have a military presence or political interest,’ quoting one agency.<sup>24</sup> As a result, notes the UN, ‘The development and humanitarian needs of the Afghan people are not being met, despite significant donor funding to Afghanistan.’ In a rare, albeit mild criticism they conclude: ‘The pursuit of military or other strategies that ignore or exacerbate the plight of the poor are questionable from any perspective.’

Again, similar comments could be made when referring to the US-backed regimes in Iraq, in Central America through the 1980s, in South America through the 1960s and 1970s, in the Philippines and so on. Strategic objectives remain consistent across theatres, and it is not surprising that the results on the ground should repeat time after time. And there are further similarities. Afghanistan is not to be spared the economic restructuring applied with devastating results – particularly for domestic agriculture and the rural poor – around the world. The Afghan Compact (the 2006 international conference in London) contained a clause committing the government to divest heavily from state-owned enterprises over the next 3 years. By 2011, a *Foreign Policy In Focus* analysis reported, ‘a little-noted energy agenda is

moving rapidly forward that may not only deny Afghans the much needed economic benefits their energy resources could provide, but may also exacerbate insecurity and instability’. The contracts being signed ‘would not require foreign companies to invest earnings in the Afghan economy, partner with Afghan companies, or share new technologies.’ ‘It is an agenda remarkably similar to one well underway in Iraq,’ and includes the transformation of the oil and natural gas sectors ‘from fully state-owned to all but fully privatized.’<sup>25</sup> The contracts, as they do in Iraq, ‘include production-sharing agreements’ which are ‘the oil industry’s preferred model, but are roundly rejected by all the top oil-producing countries in the Middle East because they grant extremely long-term contracts (45 years or more, including the exploration phase, under Afghanistan’s law) and greater control, ownership, and profits to the companies than other models. They are used for only approximately 12 percent of the world’s oil. The Afghanistan contracts, moreover, would not require foreign companies to invest earnings in the Afghan economy, partner with Afghan companies, or share new technologies.’ A report on the topic by the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) points out that the Afghan people are almost entirely unaware of this economic agenda. Afghan economist Haji Hafiz Khan, quoted in the report, expresses a fear substantiated by the experience of every other country subject to US-sponsored economic liberalisation: ‘privatisation would merely increase the concentration of economic and political benefits for the existing economic elite’.<sup>26</sup> The AREU report found: ‘In Afghanistan, the promotion of privatisation has been a very top-down affair, supported by the President and by donor governments, but initially experiencing resistance from ministers and ministries.’ Moreover, ‘Public information has targeted international investors and government leaders; as a result, the Afghan public remains virtually unaware of the privatisation process.’ The standard



implications of these policies are already visible in Afghanistan: hyper concentration of wealth; an economy organised to export raw materials and import foreign luxury goods for the wealthy elite; the growth of urban slums; and prevalent poverty levels in rural areas. To give an example from a different part of the world, consider Colombia, the closest US ally in Latin America and a loyal follower of the 'neo-liberal' economic policies. A report by a coalition of British NGOs based in the country finds: 'A combination of military engagement with the guerrillas, negotiation with the paramilitaries and liberal economic policies has created two contradictory but interrelated realities in Colombia: security and economic growth for some, particularly in cities; but insecurity, poverty and exclusion for most, especially in rural areas.'<sup>27</sup> In Afghanistan, the policies of the occupying forces and their local representatives have created a specific kind of economy, defined by networks of patronage and dependence and the enrichment of allied warlords, power-brokers and political actors. Meanwhile, piecemeal projects for the poor are motivated by short-term public relations and counter-insurgency objectives, not actual needs.<sup>28</sup>

On the ground, the economic policies enacted by the Afghan government, which are really Washington's policies, have replicated the traditional US-World Bank-International Monetary Fund model. The effects were discussed in 2014 by Graciana del Castillo, former Associate Director of the Center of Capitalism and Society at Columbia University:

*'The restrictive monetary and fiscal framework – in conjunction with a dogmatic belief of the economic authorities and their foreign supporters in trade liberalization, privatization, and private sector-led development – severely restricted the role of the state in reactivating investment and employment. ... Moreover, donors channeled about 80 percent of their aid through NGOs or U.N. agencies rather than through the government budget and according*

*to government priorities. As an example, the Spinzar cotton company, by then a state-owned enterprise, could have been part of a government project to reactivate the cotton sector but was put up for privatization instead. ... Perhaps the most serious mistake was the neglect of the rural sector—on which roughly 75 to 80 percent of the Afghan population depends. Efforts to move the economy directly into higher productivity through commercial agriculture were misguided since it takes time to build infrastructure. Instead, the government should have used aid to provide subsidies and price support mechanisms to promote subsistence agriculture. Such measures would have improved the livelihoods of the large majority and given them a stake, however small, in the peace process. The neglect of the rural sector drove production away from licit agriculture to drugs. Without other viable options, farmers increasingly turned to growing poppies. They got support from traders who provided credit and technical advice for future production, bought the opium in situ, and shared the risks. Drug production took the best available land, replacing food crops and necessitating large food imports.'*<sup>29</sup>

Afghanistan has accumulated a huge trade deficit, Castillo adds, mostly financed by foreign donors. 'Misguided agricultural policies contributed to this deficit,' she writes. 'Fruit exports, for example, fell to less than half, whereas food imports almost doubled from 2008 to 2011. While the country imported wheat, the area under cultivation dropped. Afghanistan also imported chicken meat, beef, rice, vegetable oil, tea, and even spices, products that could be easily produced within the country.'<sup>30</sup> All of these direct implications of Washington's strategic objectives obviously bear heavily on the question of cultivation and 'counter-narcotics', as will be discussed later in the report.

To broaden understanding of US objectives, of which the economic reforms are one part,

it is worth considering the policies pursued in Central Asia since the 2001 invasion. Running parallel to the war in Afghanistan, US involvement in the surrounding countries has been unhindered by constant media attention and the possible restraints imposed by domestic public opinion. In October 2001, soon after the initial bombing, agreements signed by the Bush administration with the energy-rich regimes bordering the Caspian Sea, 'facilitated a US engagement in the region that, within a few years, was positioned far wider than the goal of countering Afghan-based terrorism would suggest,' quoting the first comprehensive academic study of US energy policy after 9/11.<sup>31</sup> The goal was the conventional one: to open these economies to foreign interests, to improve the 'investment climate', while at the same time militarising the regimes and aligning them politically with US objectives. Assisted by US financial and political support, local elites have entrenched their brutal, autocratic rule; civil society and political opposition have been severely weakened; economic reforms have concentrated wealth in the hands of an elite and 'had a largely negative impact upon much of the Caspian population'. Armed movements have grown as the space for legitimate political activity has shrunk. But the economies have been transformed, regional cooperation has been undermined, and Washington has an unprecedented level of involvement in what was long considered an exclusively Russian sphere of influence.

Returning to Afghanistan, a US-aligned elite has similarly prospered under the post-2001 political and economic arrangement. Antonio Giustuzzi, an Afghanistan scholar and former official with the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, points out that once the warlords participated in the first round of elections – 'a good way to demonstrate their political relevance, as well as their willingness to play by the rules set out in Bonn' – the foreign powers and the UN 'appear to have pushed Afghan political actors towards believing that their access to patronage

resources would be determined by their acceptance of the new rules of the game.'<sup>32</sup> Those who played by the rules set down in the early days of the occupation have been duly rewarded. Money and political support have rained down like mana from the heavens in a pay-off system designed to ensure fidelity to Washington's cause. Various policies – from foreign aid to counter-narcotics and general contracting – have served in part as conduits through which money could find its way into the hands of the preferred 'political actors'. In 2011, after a decade of occupation and when direct US assistance to the Afghan state had reached almost \$60 billion, a former International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) anti-corruption official described this investment as 'a shell game from which only Afghan warlords profit.'<sup>33</sup> The economic model also has its beneficiaries. An article in the journal *Small Wars and Insurgencies* remarks: 'International efforts to promote private enterprise and foreign investment, increased the political and economic strength of Afghan warlords, through joint ventures with international firms or security contracts to protect international investments.'<sup>34</sup> A new, younger US-aligned class has also emerged. After the parliamentary elections in 2010, the *Christian Science Monitor* found many of the winners 'belong to a new generation of Afghan warlords that has risen since 2001 and attained wealth and power through NATO security contracts and lucrative reconstruction deals.'<sup>35</sup> Revenues from the drug trade, which constitute a significant proportion of the economy, have been a particularly important element of the colonial-style patronage system; for certain individuals linked to the regime, the income has been indispensable: 'Without money from drugs, our friendly warlords can't pay their militias. It's as simple as that,' explained one Western diplomat prior to the emergence of any insurgency, when the militia were concerned with enforcing the authority of the new regime.<sup>36</sup>

The installation and support of the client regime has rested on three pillars: the creation of a compliant local elite willing to govern in the interests of the occupiers; the empowerment of warlords and their militia in order to pacify the countryside; and the building-up of security forces able to confront any resistance to the preferred political arrangement. The first has been successful: the regime-Washington-made is today dominated by a US-friendly 'neo-oligarchy' held in place by the force and funding of their external backers. This elite class of 'former Northern Alliance and some mujahedin leaders ... control the key political and military as well as important economic positions,' writes the director of the Afghan Analysts Network, Thomas Ruttig.<sup>37</sup> Immunised against local political challenge by massive foreign support, the neo-oligarchy are unsurprisingly in agreement with Washington's objectives. The 2014 elections provided a stark reminder: during the buildup the *New York Times* reported that the candidates 'represent a cross section of the political and economic elite that has risen in Afghanistan in the past dozen years with the support of the United States,' and that all the main candidates were in favour of a bilateral security agreement that would ensure a long term US military presence and impunity for US troops.<sup>38</sup> The other element of US policy, rarely discussed but an uncontroversial success, has been the construction of military bases – Washington's only such installations in the region.

While the ostensible aims of the war have shifted, the commitment to the three pillars and the development of bases have remained stable. After 14 years of work, the US has 'megabases' in Kandahar, Bagram, near Herat, and in Kabul, which also hosts a 'fortress' embassy. In 2012, amid talk of an impending drawdown, the US was busy upgrading the facilities and capabilities of a number of bases in the country: the bases at Bagram and Kandahar underwent extensive upgrades and development was also ongoing in Helmand and around Herat, on the border with Iran.<sup>39</sup> A Carnegie Endowment study published that same year pointed out any forthcoming

agreement with the Afghan government that ensured 'the indefinite presence of U.S. Bases,' would be vital in 'altering the regional strategic equation.'<sup>40</sup> The bilateral security agreement eventually signed in 2014 ensured the US would retain access 'to nine major land and airbases, to include the massive airfields at Bagram, Jalalabad and Kandahar,' as well as additional bases in 'Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Helmand, Gardez and Shindand,' quoting a *Guardian* report.<sup>41</sup> Officials initially said US forces would be housed at Bagram and Kabul for the foreseeable future, although this now appears to have been expanded to Kandahar and Jalalabad as well.<sup>42</sup> Yet while the empowerment of 'strongmen' has been successful and largely pacified the population, and while the military and police forces have been built up to unprecedented levels and Washington has achieved continued access to military installations in the country, the US and NATO have not been able to suppress the insurgency, which today is gaining ground in a number of regions of the country.

After 2014, US officials claimed troops and military bases were needed in Afghanistan to allow the ongoing pursuit of Al Qaeda forces, essentially to do 'counter-terrorism', although it was immediately clear from the relevant agreements that US forces would also be engaged in counter-insurgency operations. Among informed commentators the 'counter-terror' explanation was met with skepticism, and occasionally ridicule. When British officials parroted the US-line, the former head of counter-terrorism at the British Secret Intelligence Service dismissed the argument as 'complete rubbish.' 'I've never heard such nonsense,' said the former top spy in an interview with the *Financial Times*, before adding that in his opinion a long term military presence would have the opposite effect, driving radicalisation among British Muslims.<sup>43</sup> The *Washington Post* editorial writers more candidly commented that a long-term presence, including military bases, was 'the best way to sustain a pro-Western Afghan

government past 2014.’ The Center for a New American Security, an influential Washington D.C. think-tank, observed that a permanent presence would provide be a means to ‘buttress allies and sustain U.S. Influence.’<sup>44</sup> Prior to the invasion, a US government report had noted that ‘Afghanistan’s significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from central Asia to the Arabian Sea.’<sup>45</sup> And influencing pipeline routes, particularly undermining Iranian supply to South Asia, has been a long-held concern for policy makers, one that will be aided by a presence on the ground and a malleable regime in Kabul.<sup>46</sup>

Needless to say, US and NATO officials have not been so candid in their public discussions of official objectives. The Afghan War, the ‘Good War’ as it was once known, has been swathed in claims of benevolence and good intentions. According to spokespeople for the occupying forces, the US and its partners have been concerned at various times with terrorism, women’s rights, democracy, corruption, illicit drug production, regional stability, and the threat of nuclear war.<sup>47</sup> Counter-terrorism, the primary justification for the war, has never had much legitimacy. The US government is well aware that serious counter-terrorism – that is, efforts to prevent terrorist acts against citizens at home – would require the rectification of the issues outlined in a 2004 Defense Science Board Task Force report directed by Donald Rumsfeld: Washington’s ‘one sided support’ for Israel; its support for repressive regimes in the middle east; and the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Washington and London continue to adopt policies that increase the terrorist threat to the home population, even by their own admission.<sup>49</sup> As mentioned, informed analysts responded with shock when the US tried to justify the maintenance of bases after 2014 on grounds of ‘counter-terrorism’. Pakistan expert and Senior Research Fellow at the New America Foundation Anatol Leiven, for example, wrote:

*To my astonishment, I find that some US officials are now arguing that a principal reason why the US must retain bases in Afghanistan—even at the price of making a settlement with the Taliban impossible—is in order to continue striking at al-Qaeda and other extremist targets in Pakistan’s border areas. More than ten years after September 11, it is simply appalling that supposedly well-informed people are still treating the terrorist threat in such a crude and mechanistic fashion. Have they not realized that the membership of al-Qaeda and its allies is not fixed, but depends on al-Qaeda’s ability to recruit among Muslims infuriated by US actions? Or that a terrorist attack on the US is as likely—more likely—to be planned in Karachi, Lahore, the English town of Bradford, or New York as in Pakistan’s frontier areas?*<sup>50</sup>

US policy planners are no doubt well aware of these facts, just as they are well aware of the way military installations will ‘buttress allies and sustain U.S. Influence.’

## **DRUGS AND ‘COUNTER-NARCOTICS’ IN AFGHANISTAN**

The framework of Washington’s objectives in Afghanistan, and the policies used to achieve those objectives, just outlined, should be kept in mind when the focus narrows to a discussion of one element of the war effort, in this case what are called ‘counter-narcotics’ operations. Before the policies themselves are considered, it is evident that Washington and NATO cannot be engaged in any genuine attempt to reduce opium production in Afghanistan or to decrease the use of heroin at home. Poverty and insecurity, the very causes at the core of illicit cultivation, are prevalent as a result of Washington’s pursuit of strategic objectives. It is an argument that is only reinforced once the actual ‘counter-narcotics’ policies themselves are considered.<sup>51</sup>

In the early days of the occupation, US and British officials spoke publicly of their desire to reduce opium cultivation in Afghanistan. Dedicated ‘counter-narcotics’ funding was, however, marginal until 2004/2005 when the insurgency emerged in earnest. In light of how the chosen policies played out, it is worth considering a World Bank report published just prior to the appearance of the insurgency in 2004 and entitled ‘Drugs and Development in Afghanistan’.<sup>52</sup> The report noted that revenue from drug trafficking was at the time accruing to better-off farmers, poor farmers (who often used the income to service high interest debts), wage labourers (often mired in debt), small opium traders, and wholesalers and refiners. Revenue was also being collected by local warlords and commanders ‘who receive “protection payments” and in turn employ substantial numbers of militia fighters, and may “sponsor” processing facilities,’ and also to ‘Government officials, at various levels, who receive bribes from the drug industry in return for favors in law enforcement or other aspects.’ ‘It appears that many officials at all levels in government are benefiting from or involved in drugs,’ the report’s authors commented. It was recognised that while opium poppy cultivation ‘has enabled some people, not necessarily poor in the first place, to grow rich ... for many more people the opium economy has become an important source of income to help cope with the poverty and reduce the vulnerability they face.’ Recommending suitable policy responses, the authors’ concern was largely with the government officials and the ‘many warlords and local commanders [who] directly sponsor or are otherwise involved in the drug industry’. Among the report’s final recommendations, which were relatively narrow, was included the following: ‘Counter-narcotics efforts should focus on the parts of the drug industry that impact most directly on security and state building—drug trafficking and processing, and their sponsors/beneficiaries both within and outside government. Interdiction would be a primary instrument in this regard, along with

broader actions against drug industry sponsors and beneficiaries, including not least removal of them from government positions. Such a focus would also make inroads against drug-related corruption.’ Given that ‘the opium economy has in some respects alleviated poverty and has provided a coping mechanism for the poor to help them make ends meet,’ they warned that eradication and bans could have disastrous effects: ‘Abrupt shrinkage of the opium economy or falling opium farm-gate prices without new means of livelihood would significantly worsen rural poverty.’ Moreover:

*At the production level, a key lesson is that eradication of illicit narcotics in the fields alone will not work and is likely to be counterproductive, resulting in perverse incentives for farmers to grow more drugs (e.g., in Colombia), displacement of production to more remote areas, and fueling of violence and insecurity (e.g., Peru, Bolivia, Colombia), which in several cases forced the eradication policy to be reversed and led to adverse political outcomes. Neither does the approach of making eradication a condition for development assistance work – without alternative livelihoods already in place, premature eradication can alienate the affected population and damage the environment for rural development.*

Eradication operations were already underway. The authors questioned the ‘fairness and consistency of recent eradication campaigns in Afghanistan’ that had disproportionately affected the poorest farmers; ‘The Government wants to win over the rural poor through inclusive development processes,’ they argued, ‘not aggressive destruction of their livelihoods.’ They warned against ‘short-term actions to “show results on the ground”’ which are no more than ‘symbolic or compensatory measures’. ‘What is really needed is generalized economic growth and rural development—alternative livelihoods for Afghanistan as a whole’—which can only be accomplished through reforms, policies,

and substantial programs implemented nationwide,' they concluded. As we have seen, no such reforms were forthcoming.

By this point, the general contours of US policy were already emerging. The focus would be on eradication operations and interdiction, with minor accompanying alternative development programmes; which is to say – forgetting for the moment the US role in supporting traffickers and exacerbating the causes at the core of opium cultivation – the decision was made to adopt the policies recognised to be the least effective and least cost-efficient in reducing drug use and production, but also the most visible and high-profile.<sup>53</sup> Washington's chosen policies were, to paraphrase the World Bank, directed at short-term, symbolic actions designed to show results on the ground – a preference demonstrated around the world. Unsurprisingly over the course of the war a now familiar pattern has emerged: media attention focuses on the massive growth in poppy cultivation, the US announces eradication drives and opium bans, a reduction in production is registered in the relevant area (along with the suffering of the local population), media attention fades, cultivation returns. The pattern was acknowledged by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, John Sopko, when in 2014 he wrote: 'In past years, surges in opium poppy cultivation have been met by a coordinated response from the US government and coalition partners, which has led to a temporary decline in levels of opium production,' adding further that 'the recent record-high level of poppy cultivation calls into question the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of those prior efforts.'<sup>54</sup>

Analyst Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, discussing the use of forced eradication around the world, observes the policy 'most often increases poverty and therefore reinforces the main driver of opium production without addressing its causes.'<sup>55</sup> Afghanistan has been no exception. The poorest farmers, the most vulnerable and visible links in the trafficking chain, who take

the smallest share of the profits, have been the targets of eradication operations and opium poppy bans. (Worth noting is that for the majority of analysts, the concern has been tactical: the relevant question is not 'Are these genuine counter-narcotics policies?' but 'Will these counter-narcotics policies work?') When Afghan farmers revolted, responding violently to eradication efforts, there was particular concern surrounding the farmers' 'perception' that the US was hypocritically supporting allied traffickers while going after the poor. There was little, if any opposition among commentators on the grounds that eradication was simply the destruction of livelihoods-of-last-resort, a showpiece policy designed to placate public opinion, and one that relied on impoverishing the poorest and weakest. Washington's intrinsic right to carry out such operations was meanwhile taken as axiomatic, as it is elsewhere.

The policy was not only deeply cynical because of its impact, but also because it was being carried at the behest of forces directly responsible for the conditions in which opium cultivation had become a coping mechanism for the rural poor in Afghanistan. Cynthia Maas, in a study of the development of the Afghan economy, traces the genesis of the commercial production of drugs in the country back to 'the anti-Soviet jihad launched by mujahedeen groups in 1979 with the financial and logistical support of the CIA, the United States and other Western states.'<sup>56</sup> Undertaken with tacit and sometimes direct US support, drug trafficking provided a supplemental income for the mujahedeen forces. Within a few years, their base of operations in the border area with Pakistan had become a regional hub for the heroin trade, while Pakistan developed a significant heroin-use problem as a consequence. Soviet aerial bombardment meanwhile had decimated much of Afghanistan's agricultural economy and the range of ways for Afghans to make a living shrank drastically. Under conditions of widespread insecurity and poverty, and

the emergence of traffickers willing to pay for a product, opium cultivation became a viable means of survival for the rural poor. When the Soviets withdrew, the various mujahadeen groups turned on one another in a battle for control, wreaking havoc in a civil war considered one of the darkest periods in Afghanistan's anguished history. Opium cultivation increased still further. Between 1989 and 1996, 'the commercially-driven drug industry advanced to become the most significant illicit source of revenue in the war economy.' But it was only during the NATO occupation, writes Maas, that the 'war economy' became a 'drug economy':

*During the early phase of state-building, the transformation into a drug economy took place. Under the protection of legal institutions, drug profits functioned as the engine of the shadow economy and served as a source of income for former war entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs transformed themselves into a new class of 'warlord politicians': by assuming public offices they became the political 'patrons' of the informal sector.*

The consolidation of political power among those involved in the drug trade, as well as the impunity for those who have used their new power to profit from the trade, have created a major production stimulus; although the political patrons did not merit a 'War on Drugs' in Afghanistan. Among the international community, Maas points out, there has been 'selective political blindness ... toward large-scale traders and narco-politicians who hold high posts in the Karzai government'. Maas quotes the dispirited comments of one Afghan judge: 'The top drug dealers are beyond the law - no one can touch them. Small-scale traffickers and smugglers are sometimes brought to the court - it gives me shame to sentence them as none of the big traffickers are arrested - they cannot be stopped, their hand is law.' When high-profile arrests have been made, the motivation has often been to gain political leverage for local allies or to

placate public opinion.<sup>57</sup> A good example is the case of Hajji Juma Khan. A 2010 article in the *New York Times*, entitled 'Propping up a Drug Lord, Then Arresting Him', discussed the capture of the drug trafficker and US ally:

*When Hajji Juma Khan was arrested and transported to New York to face charges under a new American narco-terrorism law in 2008, federal prosecutors described him as perhaps the biggest and most dangerous drug lord in Afghanistan, a shadowy figure who had helped keep the Taliban in business with a steady stream of money and weapons. But what the government did not say was that Mr. Juma Khan was also a longtime American informer, who provided information about the Taliban, Afghan corruption and other drug traffickers. Central Intelligence Agency officers and Drug Enforcement Administration agents relied on him as a valued source for years, even as he was building one of Afghanistan's biggest drug operations after the United States-led invasion of the country, according to current and former American officials. Along the way, he was also paid a large amount of cash by the United States.<sup>58</sup>*

Khan, reported the *Times*, had been 'a provincial drug smuggler in southwestern Afghanistan in the 1990s, when the Taliban governed the country. But it was not until after the Taliban's ouster that he rose to national prominence, taking advantage of a record surge in opium production in Afghanistan after the invasion.' His downfall came, it was speculated, when he refused to offer intelligence information or 'became so big that he was hard to ignore'. The justification given for his capture, and its legal basis, was that he had been paying protection money to the Taliban; something the US had known for years, the article points out.

After the official pronouncements of concern with cultivation that had accompanied the occupation, the issue of opium production returned to public discourse in earnest only

around 2005, in unison with the resurgence of the Taliban and amid an explosion in cultivation – driven by poverty, insecurity caused by the ongoing conflict, and the foreign empowerment of major traffickers and beneficiaries – which was starting to look embarrassing for occupying armies supposedly preoccupied with illicit drug production. The chance to link the insurgency with drug trafficking arrived at an opportune moment for an occupation beginning to appear rudderless in the public mind – a constant problem for officials in the years since. Drug production was a new, welcome justification and the issue could be used, as it has been elsewhere, to obscure the political origin of the rising insurgency. Almost overnight the Taliban were classified ‘narcoterrorists’. Opium could be scapegoated: it was the fuel behind the conflict, the source of government corruption, the explanation for the Taliban’s rise. The UN followed in lock-step, contradicting their own findings, which had suggested money from opium made up a small percentage of the insurgency’s funding, and exaggerating the Taliban-drug connection while refusing outright to investigate the far greater involvement of US allies. (Committed to US and NATO goals, the UN has been a vocal cheerleader for a militarised approach and the one-sided narrative that claims that attack the Taliban is to attack the drug trade, and has openly advocated the merging of counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency. Responding to record annual opium production figures in 2006, then head of the UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, called for ‘robust military action by NATO forces to destroy the opium industry in southern Afghanistan.’ He recommended that counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics operations ‘reinforce each other so as to stop the vicious circle of drugs funding terrorists and terrorists protecting drug traffickers.’<sup>59</sup>)

The Taliban-drug connection itself is worth considering. The insurgency are based in rural areas and given the scale of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan their involvement was

inevitable. But the nature of this relationship is qualitatively different to those operating under foreign protection. David Mansfield is the leading researcher and writer on opium cultivation in Afghanistan, and his work on the topic is worth quoting at length:

*Conventional wisdom has it that the primary relationship between opium poppy cultivation and AGEs [Anti-Government Elements] is a financial one. The image is of a rural population encouraged, perhaps even coerced, to grow opium so that the Taliban can increase its revenue from rural taxes. We are presented with ushr: a taxation system where ten percent of the crop is collected by representatives of the Taliban across most of the southern provinces, as well as parts of the east. In this scenario the Taliban provides protection of the crop against government forces looking to destroy it. The inference is that opium poppy cultivation causes insecurity because it funds the insurgency, at least in part. [However]...it is clear that the financial relationship at the farmgate level is not as intimate as argued and that rural ‘taxation’ by AGEs is far less systematised than conventional wisdom would have us believe. AGEs are, after all, not an entity independent of the population. While some may be external actors who have come into a rural area from a neighbouring country or province, many are local: relatives of the farmers who are cultivating opium poppy or farmers themselves. This is not to deny that AGEs generate revenues from opium production – or indeed from the trade – but it is to say that their interests in cultivation may lie less in the financial returns and more in soliciting the support of the rural population. When these farmers have returned to poppy cultivation, it is often not a case of AGEs imposing themselves and encouraging or coercing a population to grow opium. Rather the farmers perceive it as an act driven by the need for economic security, and if they have to engage in acts of violence directly or look to the support of others to repel government forces from the area, then so be it.<sup>60</sup>*



Perhaps it is because of this that the Taliban have shown greater sensitivity to local opposition to cultivation than the occupying powers and their local representatives; a fact that has open implications for claims of US concern with the government's legitimacy among the rural poor. As noted, when farmers began to react violently to the destruction of their livelihoods, the counter-insurgency implications became a problem. The efficacy of the drug issue had started to run its course, and the US then performed what has aptly been termed 'a policy pirouette'.<sup>61</sup> Now the truth was useful. The Taliban were not, officials said, as reliant on drug money as had been claimed. The UN's statistics had long shown this to be the case, finding that foreign donations comprised the main income source and that attacking the Taliban's access to drug revenue would have 'minimal impact on the insurgency's strategic threat'; the UNODC had likewise shown the majority of revenue from illicit drugs was being absorbed by US allies in the government.<sup>62</sup> But the facts had been twisted by the US, the UN itself, and sectors of the drug policy community to fit neatly with US counter-insurgency goals.<sup>63</sup>

By 2008 there was no need to hide the already overt superficiality and hypocrisy of the War on Drugs in Afghanistan: in violation of the laws of war, Washington announced it would be targeting drug traffickers for assassination – traffickers associated with the insurgency. 'A strategy that prioritises the 'kill or capture' of traffickers with links to the insurgency,' noted David Mansfield, 'is most likely to eliminate competition and increase the market power of those government officials involved in the trade.'<sup>64</sup> Vanda Felbab Brown of the Brookings Institution observed that the interdiction policy 'has the negative side-effect of signaling to Afghan powerbrokers that the best way to conduct the drug business in Afghanistan is to be a member of the Karzai government, further undermining the domestic legitimacy of the Afghan government and rule of law in the country'.<sup>65</sup> Mansfield had preceded his comment with the following observations:

*The issue that needs much more attention, both in terms of analysis and policy response, is the question of how much the insurgency has become 'demand led,' driven in part by the rural populations perception of unparalleled levels of corruption within the Afghan administration, including their involvement in the drugs trade. If this is the case, surely the highest priority should be to improve the quality of governance in Afghanistan and tackle corruption (including government involvement in the drugs trade) rather than prioritise the targeting of traffickers with links to the Taliban?*

He adds that the targeting of traffickers linked to the Taliban is unlikely to 'achieve much with regard to reducing the flow of opiates out of Afghanistan if those in government were not also pursued.'

The conventional image is that of an occupying army that is just getting things wrong all the time, because their operations do not align with their public pronouncements. Similar criticisms applied here to counter-narcotics can, incidentally, be applied to other justifications used over the course of the war. Talk of protecting women does not correspond with the support for misogynistic warlords. Democracy promotion is incongruous with the creation of an autocratic state. Concerns over regional stability do not make sense when considered alongside the escalation of the war and the resultant and predictable destabilisation of Pakistan. And counter-terror claims are undermined by massive US terror and the adoption of policies understood to increase the terrorist threat to the population at home - support for Arab dictatorships, drone strikes on the Pakistan border and the invasion of Iraq being the most prominent, according to the government's own findings. US officials are acutely aware of the impact a policy seen as failing or counter-productive can have at home, and as the conflict dragged on, talk of counter-narcotics largely disappeared from official discourse. With opium production soaring,

the War on Drugs in Afghanistan has gradually lost its serviceability. And the other public justifications for the continuation of the war have faced a similar fate, for similar reasons.<sup>66</sup>

Two news stories published within a few weeks of each other encapsulate neatly the seriousness, and the uses, of the occupying armies' approach to illicit drug production. In the *Wall Street Journal*, a report described the findings of a leaked US military internal review concerned with an Afghan governor, a major US-ally and local power broker. The review found 'systemic corruption by the governor and members of his administration, including extortion, illegal land grabbing and narcotics trafficking.' A US Defense Department spokesman told the *Journal* that while the allegations were being taken seriously, 'It's also important to remember that we are not in a position to select the country's leaders—that is a matter for the Afghan people.' 'It was the U.S. that installed the former warlord as governor of Kandahar after ousting the Taliban in 2001,' the article adds later. An unnamed senior coalition official gets to the heart of the matter: 'He's been on our side. We know he's corrupt. But we have to ask ourselves: Has he crossed a sufficient number of red lines that we've got to deal with? So far, it doesn't appear to be.'<sup>67</sup> A fortnight later the International Security Assistance Force put out a press release announcing that US Forces-Afghanistan and the US Department of the Treasury had designated the Taliban's shadow governor in Helmand province 'a significant foreign narcotics trafficker.' 'This clearly shows that the anti-drug rhetoric of the Taliban is a lie,' an ISAF Major General was quoted as saying.<sup>68</sup>

## 'COUNTER-NARCOTICS' AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The argument that counter-narcotics operations have failed in Afghanistan is, given the context, hard to maintain: no genuine counter-narcotics policies have been pursued. Regardless, the general conception among most analysts and the media is that the US has been trying to reduce opium cultivation, but has been getting it wrong; under-funding initiatives, using the wrong tactics, getting undone by local intransigence and corruption. In 2006, the US Government Accountability Office claimed: 'The worsening security situation and the lack of Afghan capacity are tremendous challenges to the success of U.S. counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan.'<sup>69</sup> Operating under a similar conception, one drug policy analyst contends that 'the prevailing strategy to prevent Afghanistan from becoming irretrievably addicted to its narcoeconomy has been to intensify counternarcotics efforts.'<sup>70</sup> This common framework of understanding has more or less held over the course of the war. But such presentations of the issue are misleading at best. They are only intelligible if we accept a certain definition of counter-narcotics, one that presupposes that efforts to reduce opium cultivation can still be genuine while Washington directly supports drug traffickers, manages a patronage system that encourages allied-traffickers, perpetuates a war that generates insecurity, poverty and drug production in turn, and while it denies Afghans a chance at meaningful independent economic development, cultivates and supports allies committed to self-enrichment and with no interest in long-term poverty reduction, and focuses exclusively on the methods deemed least effective in addressing illicit drug production, all the while underfunding effective demand-focused methods at home and abroad.

The question of what counter-narcotics operations in Afghanistan might have achieved for the occupying forces is a matter of conjecture, and one requiring an analysis of where 'counter-narcotics' policies fit within

the larger war effort. It has been mentioned already that one obvious use of eradication has been as a means to placate public opinion, a ‘symbolic’ measure – using the World Bank’s phrase – an effort to be seen to achieve at least something for which the poorest and most vulnerable pay the price with their meagre livelihoods. It seems evident, uncontroversially, that this drive to show any kind of results is a factor; David Mansfield, for example, has observed that among officials, ‘the drive to be seen to be reducing the metric of cultivation can still pervade thinking, almost regardless of consequence.’<sup>71</sup> Once the goals of the forces occupying Afghanistan are considered there appear to be other benefits. ‘Counter-narcotics’ operations have had their own important role to play in the patronage system. Mansfield has pointed out: ‘Opium poppy bans have often served to consolidate economic and political power in the hands of the relatively resource wealthy, some of whom are involved in the drug trade’.<sup>72</sup> The way interdiction operations were designed have likewise concentrated the trade among those who play by the rules. They have also changed the nature of the trade. Notes one study: ‘As small and vulnerable traders, operating largely at the village or district level, were removed by interdiction, large traffickers with substantial political control consolidated their control over the drug industry, thus giving rise to a significant vertical integration of the trade.’<sup>73</sup> And even Alternative Development initiatives have served as means of funnelling money to the powerful. ‘There is a danger that the relatively wealthy, both in terms of assets and households who are least dependent on opium poppy, have gained preferential access to the benefits of project assistance – which seems to satisfy neither pro-poor nor counter narcotics objectives’ observes an AREU briefing paper on the topic.<sup>74</sup> All of this has occurred alongside US support for allied ‘political actors’ involved in the drugs trade. (Incidentally, it would be a difficult task to find a US policy in Afghanistan that has worked against the patronage system.)

Opium bans have had another well-documented effect: in many provinces where they have been enacted the destruction of poppies has meant a worsening of the already desperate plight of the poorest people, often forcing them to relocate. Forced eradication operations also often contribute to a deterioration of the local security situation.<sup>75</sup> An AREU paper describes the outcomes of an opium ban in Helmand in 2008: ‘migration to former desert areas, reduced access to land and increased homelessness among the land-poor, distress sales of livestock, and mono-cropping of opium poppy in the former desert areas.’<sup>76</sup> The policy, in an area of Taliban influence in rural Helmand, drove people to destitution and they began to leave. Drug production was consequently pushed to more arid areas where there are no viable alternatives to poppy cultivation. The outcomes were to be expected given the decades of experience. Consistent with historic experience, the World Bank study cited earlier had warned that ‘the opium economy has in some respects alleviated poverty and has provided a coping mechanism for the poor to help them make ends meet’ and any ‘abrupt shrinkage of the opium economy or falling opium farm-gate prices without new means of livelihood would significantly worsen rural poverty.’ The displacement of the local population has, around the world, been a consistent outcome of crop destruction.<sup>77</sup> Fully aware of the likely outcomes, the US tried to adopt aerial fumigation in Afghanistan, but the policy was never enacted, reportedly because of resistance from the Afghan government and counter-insurgency concerns. It is worth noting that, according to the US government, if fumigation had been used in Afghanistan it would have been conditional on the Afghan president requesting the policy for ‘counternarcotics or counterterrorism purposes’ (emphasis added).<sup>78</sup>

A ban enacted in Nangahar in 2008 provided a paradigm example of the propaganda uses of opium bans. This ‘successful’ ban in the province, reports one analysis, was achieved

‘through the physical eradication of poppy, the co-option of tribal elites by the provincial authorities with promises of alternative livelihoods and personal payoffs, and threats that NATO would bomb the houses of those who failed to comply.’ US officials and the UNODC praised the policy, which, compounded by a decline in world food prices, led to ‘dire economic conditions’ for the local people.<sup>79</sup> The fact that the threat of violence by the occupiers in such circumstances - which appears to be common<sup>80</sup> – happens to be a violation of the Geneva conventions is not raised in the analysis just quoted. Instead, in the typical approach of the drug policy literature, the author laments the decision to enact the ban on tactical grounds: it alienated the population from the government and the occupying forces and allowed the Taliban to capitalise on local grievances.<sup>81</sup> Poppy returned to Nangahar soon enough: the region ‘saw a fourfold increase in opium poppy cultivation between 2012 and 2013.’<sup>82</sup> But not before plaudits had been won for the ‘success’, for the demonstration of a commitment to counter-narcotics in Afghanistan, although perhaps, critics pointed out, using misguided tactics.

What role do such policies and their expected outcomes play within the wider military strategy? The ways in which eradication and interdiction operations have quite openly constituted funding-focused counter-insurgency operations was discussed above. But the other known outcomes should also be investigated further. Un-embedded reporting from remote areas where the fighting takes place in Afghanistan is rare, but we have some indication of the kinds of tactics used. In areas where the Taliban are active, methods have been adopted by the occupying forces that are known to lead to displacement, to terrorise and traumatise, to destroy homes, infrastructure and livelihoods. During the surge, for example, drone attacks were ramped-up, as was the use of local militia; both unaccountable means of applying violence and terror. It seems unlikely that such tactics were chosen in ignorance of

the likely results and civilian deaths and rising numbers of people leaving the countryside for the cities were the inevitable outcome.<sup>83</sup> There have again been criticisms that such tactics undermined the legitimacy of the state and are therefore undermining Washington’s goals. Yet the US-backed militia, to give one example, have been used since the invasion to terrorise people into subservience, and it is unlikely to be a coincidence that these groups have played an increasing role as the war has gone on, as disdain for the government has grown, when it is recognised that their operating methods make it ‘extremely difficult for civilians who want to stay away from either side to do so and for third political forces to grow’, quoting Thomas Ruttig.<sup>84</sup> Over the course of the war, homes and farms have been destroyed, drone attacks and airstrikes have been used indiscriminately, allied warlords have been given free reign to abuse and terrorise the population, communities have been threatened with retribution unless they cooperate with NATO and their allied militia, and entire villages have been blown-up for failing to do so. Doors are routinely smashed down late at night and people stolen from their homes in operations designed to garner information from the population; ‘Current patterns of detention,’ observed an Open Society Foundation study in 2011, ‘suggest many night raids may be heavily (if not primarily) motivated by intelligence gathering.’<sup>85</sup> In keeping with previous counter-insurgency wars, the US has regularly relied on tactics that drive people away from the countryside towards the more easily-controlled urban centres, and has been able to rely on commentators not only not to point this out, but to praise the results.<sup>86</sup> Non-government organisations (NGOs) have been vital in documenting the kinds of tactics being used. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, for example, has condemned ‘operations and force protection measures carried out by international military forces in which disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force has resulted in civilian casualties. Such operations have frequently been by carried out by forces or agencies outside NATO command,

often American forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, and sometimes in conjunction with Afghan forces.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, airstrikes had caused four times more casualties than any other strategy of the occupying forces, and were only reigned in when public awareness became too great. Responding, the head of the US military operations in Afghanistan acknowledged, 'It was probably a decision I could have made long before that and none of our forces were put at risk, or at greater risk because of this.'<sup>88</sup> Journalist Anand Gopal reported on US raids launched in Band-i-Timor in the early days of the occupation, where the US was using raids to target 'those who were not part of the Sherzai and Karzai networks', that is, those who were not explicit allies. The attacks generated animosity towards the occupiers:

*Villagers began fighting back, and that meant some people were caught in the middle. Soon, for many there was no choice but to leave. Whole villages decamped to Pakistan, deserting their fields, returning to refugee camps. It was a development that officials in Kandahar city could not ignore, but they insisted that it was a necessary evil in the fight against terror. "Sometimes, the best way to catch a fish is to drain the pond," said Khan Muhammad, a high-ranking security official.<sup>89</sup>*

The opaqueness of combat operations cleared somewhat with the surge in 2010. 'More ordinary Afghans were killed and injured in 2010 than a year before,' recorded the Afghanistan Rights Monitor in their annual report. 'Almost everything related to the war surged in 2010,' they note, 'the combined numbers of Afghan and foreign forces surpassed 350,000; security incidents mounted to over 100 per week; more fighters from all warring side were killed; and the number of civilian people killed, wounded and displaced hit record levels.'<sup>90</sup> The surge also included a 3,000 troop increase in the Taliban's historic stronghold of Kandahar and a 'loosening of the reins' and 'ramping up' of the air war and drone attacks, along with an increase

in the despised raids by Special Operations Forces - the likely outcomes of which were not a mystery.<sup>91</sup> The surge involved 'a sharp rise in bombing and missile raids, more relaxed rules on the destruction of civilian property and the deployment of heavily armoured M1 Abrams tanks to Afghanistan for the first time'.<sup>92</sup> By 2011, Refugees International found 'International air strikes and night raids by U.S. Special Forces are destroying homes, crops, and basic infrastructure, traumatizing civilians, and displacing tens of thousands of people.'<sup>93</sup> 'At the end of January 2011,' the International Displacement Monitoring Centre reported that '309,000 people remained internally displaced due to armed conflict, human rights abuses and other generalised violence,' the highest number since 2005.<sup>94</sup> Also in 2011, a report by the Center found:

*Most mass displacements documented have been caused by offensives by international forces. While US and ISAF forces made successful efforts in 2010 to minimise civilian casualties and loss of life, they have not made equivalent efforts to reduce the scale of forced internal displacement, despite its scale and the demonstrated impact of displacement on support for international forces.<sup>95</sup>*

Afghan NGO, The Liaison Office, reached similar conclusions. 'It is certainly the case that the IMF/ISAF/ANSF military surge over the past year has been a major contributing factor to conflict escalation and renewed displacement waves,' they wrote, reporting also:

*New operating procedures for military planners such as the current ISAF country-insurgency model of shape/clear/hold/build, are possibly exacerbating the protracted nature of displacement for many conflict-affected IDPs as growing numbers of Afghans are unable or unwilling to return to their pre-conflict place of origin following military incursions. The increasing use of air-strikes and night raids by U.S. Special Forces add additional threats and push*

factors for thousands of Afghans who view the escalation in the military campaign to be a longer-term threat and who are unwilling to return home when the conflict environment remains so fluid. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) initiative (by US Special Forces), now a year into implementation and premised around the notion of supporting local village defence efforts, is also increasingly recognized as a growing driver of displacement in many rural areas.<sup>96</sup>

The operations around Kandahar in late 2010 brought such issues to the fore. The indiscriminate violence and destruction of homes, particularly using aerial bombing, suggested the aim was simply to raise the cost of people remaining in areas where the Taliban has historically been influential. Reporting from Zhari district at the time, a journalist with the *Washington Post* wrote: 'U.S. soldiers fired more than a dozen mine-clearing line charges in a day. Each one creates a clear path that is 100 yards long and wide enough for a truck. Anything that is in the way—trees, crops, huts—is demolished.' According to interviews conducted by journalist Sandy Gall, before the operations began the people in the region feared two things more than any other: more foreign troops and the empowerment of the current administration and its leadership.<sup>97</sup> Rejecting the complaints of local elders, who did not want the operation in the area, the US went ahead. A *Reuters* article described the impact after operations had ended:

*Afghan and foreign forces have caused more than \$100 million damage to fruit crops and homes during security operations in southern Kandahar province, a government delegation said. In November, the Afghan Rights Monitor (ARM), a human rights group, reported widespread damage to hundreds of houses in the same three districts, home to about 300,000 of the province's more than one million inhabitants. It said foreign forces had used aerial bombing to strike Taliban strongholds and to set off mines and*

*homemade bombs sometimes hidden as booby traps in private homes.*<sup>98</sup>

The effort to remove people from areas of insurgency influence has a long history in US counter-insurgency operations. The purpose was explicitly outlined by a US spokesperson during the Vietnam war:

*'There have been three options open to the peasantry. One, to stay where they are; two, to move into the areas controlled by us; three, to move off into the interior towards the Vietcong ... Our operations have been designed to make the first choice impossible, the second attractive, and to reduce the likelihood of anyone choosing the third to zero.'*<sup>99</sup>

Are these facts relevant to the study of 'counter-narcotics' operations in Afghanistan? For most analysts the answer is a resounding 'no': crop destruction (forced eradication) exists alone, isolated from the wider war, and it only touches on the war effort when it is considered to generate local animosity and hence undermine the legitimacy of the state and the occupiers – viewpoints based on an entirely normative understanding that legitimacy is a US aim. Exceptions are rare. In an article on the 'unintended consequences' that result from drug policy, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy writes that some of the 'beneficial unintended consequences' of the prevalent approach include: 'price hikes benefiting some farmers, the unlikely development of alternative crops, the even more unlikely lowering of corruption, and targeted poppy cultivators and seasonal workers joining the military (as in Afghanistan).' The final point is an uncommon admission in the drug policy literature: that so-called counter-narcotics policies can have benefits that lie outside of not only drug-related issues but of publicly stated US objectives. It is well-established that opium bans in Afghanistan have increased poverty in certain areas to the point where inscription in the military or the police forces becomes a necessary means of survival. Research by David

Mansfield has shown that people living in areas where there are few other means of survival after their livelihoods were destroyed have been compelled to join the Afghan National Army. In Nangarhar, an area of insurgent influence, ‘in-depth fieldwork ... suggests the vast majority of Nangarharis joining the ANA are from the southern districts bordering Pakistan, and that enlistment was in direct response to the economic hardships resulting from bans on opium production.’<sup>100</sup> Where people can diversify their income, Mansfield found they prefer not to join the army, suggesting it is purely a means of survival and a decision brought about by the actions of the occupying forces. In two districts where other possibilities were available, the researchers did not find a single household with a family member who had joined either the army or the police.

The relative importance of such factors for policy makers can only be guessed at. My own opinion is that the facts suggest ‘counter-narcotics’ operations have been symbolic, designed to placate opinion at home, while serving both as a funding-focused counter-insurgency strategy as well as a useful element of the patronage system. The policies have also been enacted and continued under the full knowledge that they would lead to impoverishment and displacement – thereby replicating certain elements of the military effort. Whether this is a result of a simple lack of concern with the fate of the victims, or a concerted effort to remove people from certain areas, it is difficult to say. But eradication operations have been used too many times and for too long around the world for the outcomes to be unknown, for these policies to be dismissed simply as wrong-headed decision making. Actions continued when the outcomes are expected implies intention. These arguments can be debated, but what seems to me to be unacceptable is the prevalent approach which dismisses such issues off-hand on the presupposition that a counter-narcotics policy is a counter-narcotics policy because officials say it is, and there

ends any debate; the analytical task is simply to determine if it is a good policy or a bad one. Acting on this understanding, seldom do drug policy analysts frame their discussion of these policies within a conception of the war that is not entirely congruent with the official version. The vital economic elements outlined above are largely ignored, a pattern repeated in analyses of cultivation in the Andean region. When any doubt does arise regarding objectives, officials are always on hand to explain. To take a recent example of how this works in practice, consider a recent comprehensive study by the AREU overviewing drug policy in the country. The author notes that eradication has been the cause of ‘insecurity’ in certain areas of Afghanistan, and he comments: ‘Interviews for this research confirmed that increased insecurity is an obvious unintended (although not completely unforeseen) consequence of coercive approaches,’ presumably referring to interviews with officials involved in the planning of the policy.<sup>101</sup> From an analytical standpoint, this is not acceptable; and one wonders whether the same allowances would be made for, say, Russian or North Korean officials who likewise ‘confirmed’ the official aims. Instead of an attitude of healthy skepticism, official statements have framed the debate for analysts. And, crucially, advocacy takes place within this framework. As such, it is deemed acceptable to call for Alternative Development programmes, for increases in interdiction efforts, for greater sensitivity to local dynamics, and so on, but not to recommend that the US abide by international law and seek a negotiated end to the conflict – something the International Crisis Group points out is the only way to avoid a prolonged civil war<sup>102</sup>; that it halt all military operations; that it end support for the destructive economic regimen of the past 10 years; that it retract the permanent basing agreement that, it was widely recognised, will condemn the country to continued warfare and insecurity. All of these steps would have positive counter-narcotics outcomes, and all are off-limits by default.

## CONCLUSION

In an editorial published in 2014, the *New York Times* looked back on the years of counter-narcotics operations in Afghanistan with the following observations:

*The narcotics program embraced multiple strategies, including interdicting drug traffickers, eradicating poppy fields, strengthening the Afghan legal system to prosecute drug dealers, persuading farmers to grow alternative crops and establishing treatment programs for addicts. The Pentagon, one of the lead agencies in the effort, has pinned the failure to reduce cultivation largely on a lack of support from the Afghan government. It must also be said, however, that American, European, Afghan and United Nations officials at times sabotaged their own mission by bickering over how the money should be spent and where best to focus resources.*<sup>103</sup>

This summary might be lightly criticised as a superficial presentation of the issue; one which happens to coincide with the version of events offered by the US Department of Defense. Another rather typical media comment on Afghanistan's history of cultivation summarises the situation in the following way, with a neat evisceration of any responsibility among the US and its allies: 'More than three decades of instability have fuelled drug production. The mujahideen used opium farming as a weapon against the Soviets, hoping to get the occupiers addicted. Now the Taliban is heavily involved in the trade, using the proceeds to buy artillery.'<sup>104</sup> We also have policy analysts writing: 'Opium cultivation is at the heart of the Afghan security problem. It is intertwined with issues of governance, corruption, warlordism and the Taliban-led insurgency.'<sup>105</sup> This rhetoric, with opium portrayed as a malevolent actor, is typical of the drug policy community. A more accurate portrayal would recognise that Afghanistan has an unaccountable government and abusive security forces supported by warlords and their militia, backed-up by

foreign powers determined to ensure the population accept the political system of their making. A violent insurgency is battling these groups. Both the fighting elements are funded by illicit drug production; which is to say they feed off poverty. These are security problems for Afghans. To claim cultivation is at the heart of the problem is to confuse the outcome with the cause.

Conceptions such as those just quoted are the result of an analytical approach that discounts wider context as largely irrelevant. This is curious, considering it is drug policy analysts who admonish the development community for their lack of appreciation of the drugs issue – a so-called "cross-cutting" issue. In reality, it is the drug policy community that is too narrowly focused, that refuses to move beyond its designated remit of specific policies to try to understand the core of the problem. Examples abound. It is rare to read an analysis of Afghanistan that recounts the vital economic reforms discussed here. The same goes for the Andean region, where counter-narcotics is assessed separately from the neoliberal economic reforms of the past three decades. Analysts do not feel it their place to criticise economic policies as pro-narcotics policies, as they so often are. The fact is that to speak of drug policy analysis on the production side is largely a misnomer: it is development work that most urgently needs to be done, not a tweaking of interdiction or eradication methods.

To give an example of the dangers of the prevalent approach, consider the 2012 free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia, which was the most important pro-narcotics policy in recent memory. It passed with barely a mention by the drug policy community. A year before it was enacted, over 400 NGOs from the United States and Colombia sent a petition to the US congress calling on them not to sign, warning 'Colombian small-scale farmers would be devastated by the implementation of the FTA,' which will 'force



Colombian agricultural products to compete without any protection against U.S. subsidized commodities.’ The result, it was estimated, would be substantial losses in income for nearly 400,000 agricultural workers, ‘pushing small farmers to cultivate coca,’ which is ‘a far more lucrative crop’ with a stable market, immune to the commodity price fluctuations that result from economic liberalisation. As a corollary, they warned, displacement was likely to rise and ‘armed groups are also likely to benefit from increased recruitment from an impoverished peasantry with few economic opportunities’. To write that the policy was ignored by analysts is not completely true. Vanda Felbab-Brown, resident counter-narcotics expert at the Brookings Institution, wrote an article on the agreement in which she argued it should be passed, on the grounds that matter: “The FTA is likely to reduce Colombia’s determination to diversify its alliances and focus away from the United States, such as on China.”<sup>106</sup>

The FTA came into effect in 2012 and, as NGOs had warned, the effect has been to further undermine domestic agricultural production, to exacerbate the country’s long standing agricultural crisis. ‘As was entirely predictable,’ the local press reported within a year, ‘the initial damage is occurring in agriculture, where the country’s tariffs have been relinquished and U.S. subsidised goods accepted.’ Local studies report that displacement is higher in regions effected by the flood of foreign agricultural products. And yet, when the announcement was made last year that coca cultivation had spiked in Colombia during 2014, not one drug policy analyst who was asked for comments by the international press thought it relevant to mention the devastating effects of the Free Trade Agreement.

This narrowness of viewpoint is a serious, widespread problem. As has been shown, beyond misleading analyses it can lead to dangerous advocacy. Something of the

sort is occurring now in Afghanistan, where analysts have been calling on the US to remain ‘committed’ to the country in order to build on counter-narcotics work done so far. But advocacy for one element of a war cannot be separated from the core strategic objective. When we discuss the behaviour of official enemies this is self-evident. During the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, a development economist who observed the rejuvenation of the market economy around Herat – one outcome of the Soviet invasion – and subsequently called for continued engagement from Moscow in order to defend these gains, would be considered imprudent at best and reprehensible at worst, given the criminality of the invasion and occupation, the behaviour of the military forces occupying the country, and the reasons the war was launched in the first place. But if we have a normative idea of what occupiers are doing and base comments from there, then it is not surprising that so many aspects of the war will appear confusing or contradictory and that better policies will be advocated in the hope that, this time, we will get it right.

The purpose of this report has been to draw attention to the analytical blindspots and institutionalised biases which impede understanding. And in concluding, it is worth pointing out the most glaring oversight of all: Afghanistan’s drug abuse and addiction crisis. No strategic goals are to be gained by alleviating the country’s dire levels of drug use, its concentrated HIV epidemic, or the lack of sufficient treatment facilities described by the head of the UNODC as ‘a silent and creeping tragedy’<sup>107</sup> And so, by officials and analysts alike, the issue has been ignored.

While Washington spent \$2 billion on eradication and interdiction initiatives in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2009, by comparison only \$18 million was spent on programmes aimed at demand-reduction and, of these, the focus appears to reject the most well recognised means of dealing with problematic drug use,

including harm reduction interventions. In line with spending priorities, drug policy analysts who, one might have thought, would instinctively put a severe domestic drug use crisis at the heart of their discussion, have instead almost entirely ignored the issue. 'It is well-documented that Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's supply of opium,' began a rare report on the passive effects of drug use published in 2010, 'but there is little known about the opium and other drugs being abused by the Afghan population.'<sup>108</sup> The study found shocking levels of contamination in homes where opium is regularly used. Levels of opium in the air were described as 'significant': 'Preliminary results show consistently that in more than 90 percent of study homes, indoor air, surfaces and residents' hair contained opium and opium products.' The authors argued that 'Such exposure puts children at risk of abnormal development, including failure of the brain and lungs to grow properly,' and can lead to 'developmental delays' which 'make it hard for children to pay attention and learn.' 'Afghanistan is confronted by one of the highest levels of addiction in the world,' said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, the UNODC's Representative in Afghanistan, in 2013. Only ten percent of drug users, the UN estimated, have ever received treatment. The US has meanwhile backed what is known as the Colombo plan, which supports treatment centres but not evidence-based approaches to resolving drug abuse with the minimum amount of harm.

It is not surprising that after decades of war and the persistence of widespread poverty, drug use is rising. In 2010, a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics said the number of drug users in the country had risen more than 60 per cent in the past 5 years; from 920,000 in 2005 to more than 1.5 million. The figures are estimates, but the prevalence of drug use in Afghanistan among 15-64 year olds is considered, perhaps conservatively, to be around twice the global average. Three decades of unabated warfare have taken their toll – on bodies and minds. By the time the Soviets left

the country in 1989, the UN estimated nearly 1.5 million people had been driven clinically insane by war. The last time a comprehensive mental health study was taken was 2002. The nationwide survey conducted by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention found 42% of the population to be displaying symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and 68% showed signs of major depression.<sup>109</sup> More than 14 years of unending warfare later, we can safely assume the numbers would be more severe were the study repeated.

The continued armed conflict, the economic reforms, the support for a client regime on the standard model, the decision to maintain military bases in-country: all of these elements of the Afghan War in some way effect the poor farmer and their decision to grow illicit crops and bear also on the individual's recourse to harmful substances. No greater indictment can be levelled at the drug policy community than the fact that such factors have not been at the forefront of discussions surrounding drugs and counter-narcotics in Afghanistan.

## ENDNOTES

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'The direct victims of American bombs and missiles have commanded most political and media attention, though no one is certain how many even of these there were. A *Guardian* report in February estimated these casualties at between 1,300 and 8,000 deaths. A *Guardian* investigation into the "indirect victims" now confirms the belief of many aid agencies that they exceeded the number who died of direct hits. As many as 20,000 Afghans may have lost their lives as an indirect consequence of the US intervention. They too belong in any tally of the dead. The bombing had three main effects on the humanitarian situation. It caused massive dislocation by prompting hundreds of thousands of Afghans to flee from their homes. It stopped aid supplies to drought victims who depended on emergency relief. It provoked an upsurge in fighting and turned a military stalemate into one of chaotic fluidity, leading yet more people to flee.' J. Steele (2002), 'Forgotten victims', *The Guardian*, 20 May <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/may/20/afghanistan.comment>
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The 2004 Constitutional Loya Jirga was marred by threats and intimidation, a display of overt power politics by the warlords and vote buying. An International Crisis Group Analysis of the constitution that emerged from this process, after 48% of delegates boycotted the vote and it passed only after "backroom dealing" between the UN and US, found it 'would fail to provide meaningful democratic governance, including power-sharing, a system of checks and balances, or mechanisms for increasing the representation of ethnic, regional and other minority groups.'  
'The charter' the *Associated Press* reported 'makes the president commander in chief of the armed forces, charges him with determining the nation's fundamental policies and gives him considerable power to press legislation.' The 2004 presidential election saw similar intimidation by US backed warlords and electoral fraud, trends that have continued in subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections.  
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- 'competition' again need to be considered in their real world forms. Foreign airlines rely on subsidies and perks from their host governments, and from the advantages of size, and are moreover able to purchase fuel in Dubai at cheaper prices than Afghan airlines. What is supposedly a market-led policy is a pro-foreign investment policy. Protection for domestic air providers could change this, and would mean that profits remained in the country, but that would not be in the spirit of the free market or 'healthy competition' - a competition in which the game is rigged. Meanwhile, since the changes were made, 'travellers say they have not noticed any improvements in the level of service or the timeliness of scheduled flights,' but foreign airlines are no doubt delighted. M.Habib (2013), 'Afghan Air Industry in Trouble', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 13 May <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-air-industry-trouble>
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- the rural elite—made it difficult for the land-poor to obtain any benefits. Given this scenario, what options did the land-poor really have but to draw on tribal and familial relationships and look for land elsewhere?’ D. Mansfield (2014); See also M. Jelsma, T.Kramer, C. Rivier (2006)
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## About the Global Drug Policy Observatory

The Global Drug Policy Observatory aims to promote evidence and human rights based drug policy through the comprehensive and rigorous reporting, monitoring and analysis of policy developments at national and international levels. Acting as a platform from which to reach out to and engage with broad and diverse audiences, the initiative aims to help improve the sophistication and horizons of the current policy debate among the media and elite opinion formers as well as within law enforcement and policy making communities. The Observatory engages in a range of research activities that explore not only the dynamics and implications of existing and emerging policy issues, but also the processes behind policy shifts at various levels of governance.

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