

**INSS Roundtable Series on  
Post-conflict Stabilization and Crisis Management**

**Workshop Proceedings:  
*Facing the Counter Narcotics Challenge in Afghanistan:  
Lessons Learned and Applications for the Future***

**10 September 2004**

**Executive Summary**

The magnitude of Afghanistan's narcotics problem is such that there is no quick solution. However, at a workshop chaired by INSS fellows Amb. Robert Oakley and Dr. Kimberly Thachuk, a number of senior experts were invited to discuss how best to combat the narcotics problem in Afghanistan, and specifically what steps can be taken to reverse the momentum and prevent the country from turning into a full-fledged narco-state.

Counter-drug success can only be achieved together with enhanced security and by integrating eradication and development efforts with interdiction, DDR, strategic communication, and public diplomacy. Eradication efforts aimed at destroying crops and finding "alternative livelihoods" should not be the main focus of US efforts. More resources should be devoted to police and infrastructure needed to capture and prosecute drug traffickers. Statistics show that eradication alone will increase the so-called "farm gate" price of drugs, making them that much more lucrative for traffickers.

There needs to be a clear distinction between military operations and law enforcement (police) operations. Warlords known to be participating in the drug trade should be denied governmental (and US) support for any counter-narcotics program to be truly successful. An important step would be to start prosecuting some of the big traffickers, no matter what position they hold in the government or how much power they have as warlords. International support for such an endeavor is important. Crop substitution and alternative development cannot be the only long-term solutions because the counter drug effort is a subsidiary of efforts to address larger problems.

A summary of participants' recommendations for the US Government:

- ❖ Increase intelligence gathering and coordination efforts; establish an intelligence fusion cell.
- ❖ Integrate interdiction as part of the overall security strategy.
- ❖ Ensure that a viable alternate livelihood plan is in place before taking eradication action (including visible prospects for economic reconstruction efforts).
- ❖ Build-up counter narcotics cooperation among various US government agencies, specifically by more robust funding and personnel resources to the Embassy's Interagency Planning Group (EIPG) in order to enable it to assist the Ambassador, the Embassy Counter Narcotics (CN) Coordinator and Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan Commanding General (CFC-A CG) in the operational planning necessary to manage, monitor, and refine combined CN efforts across Afghanistan.
- ❖ Continue to focus on increasing overall security, including stepping up police training, equipping, communications and mentoring and the use of the Afghan National Army (ANA), while also encouraging a specific allocation of Afghan resources for CN activities.
- ❖ Consider US military support – through Veterinary Corps and Guard/Reserve personnel detailed

to the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) and other means – to the process of introducing alternative crops and farming practices nearby the PRTs, in areas where poppy cultivation is high. Funding and personnel support of such activities can greatly enhance the weak US interagency efforts in these areas that presently exist, and will bring along a positive perception by the Afghan people.

- ❖ There should be more funding and manning of the Embassy Military Intelligence Support Team (MIST), while continuing and expanding the MIST's work in support of key CN campaign objectives so that it becomes a true interagency information team rather than a MIST.
- ❖ Help CFC-A develop and assure Department of Defense/Joint Chiefs of Staff (DoD/JCS) support of a prudent and limited set of authorities and limitations that will allow the US Ambassador (CFC-A Coordinator) to determine, on a case-by-case basis, when US military lift may be used for in-extremis MEDEVAC and force extraction during Minister of Interior (MOI) - led interdiction efforts. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) for any US military participation in these events should be made extremely clear.

## The Program

Afghanistan's counter-narcotics challenge was the subject of an INSS roundtable hosted by Ambassador Robert Oakley and Dr. Kimberly Thachuk on 10 September 2004. The roundtable featured presentations by five experts – Robert Brown, Barnett Rubin, Ayesha Siddiq, Nancy Lubin and Jon

Wiant<sup>\*</sup> - on various dimensions of the narcotics problem in Afghanistan and optimal methods for combating it. They were joined by a larger interagency group of 20 or so participants, which included experts not only on Afghanistan but also on other regions of the world, most notably Latin America (Colombia) and Southeast Asia (Burma). The discussion sought to identify lessons to be learned from other attempts – successful or not – to stop drug production and trafficking as well as new insights into the intricacies of a counter narcotics program for Afghanistan.

## Introduction

Reconstructing Afghanistan still poses many challenges for the international community, but one of the most prevalent issues in recent months has been the growing opium production and trafficking problem. Afghanistan has not had a long history of poppy cultivation, but it did not take long for it to become one of the world's largest opium producers, growing 70% of the world's opium by the mid-1990s. The Taliban leadership was able to effectively halt opium production for a short period in the 1990s, drastically reducing the supply of opium, while exponentially increasing the price of their stockpiles. After the Taliban regime was toppled in October 2001, poppy cultivation resumed, largely uncontrolled by the international community. An alarming UNODC *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003* shows just how uncontrolled poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has become, reporting that Afghanistan produced three quarters of the world's opium in 2003.

The cultivation of poppies and the production of opium and other by-products are greatly affecting security and stability in all parts of the country, and the drug money has corrupted many levels of the Afghan bureaucracy. In addition to this, drug money is also funding terrorist groups, including al Qaeda and the Taliban and dissident groups (e.g. warlords and Islamists). Recognizing the growing problem, the US government has offered to substantially assist the Afghan Government, UK (lead nation for counter narcotics in Afghanistan) and other international efforts (e.g. UN) with counter drug measures, with the objective of increasing security and stability and blocking funding for terrorist organizations as well as reducing narcotics production and trafficking. Afghan narcotics have a powerful regional reach, with deep-rooted connections extending into and through Pakistan and Central Asia, into the Gulf and

Russia proper. The greatest effort to disrupt the regional connections is being made by Iran. The US plan of increased assistance comes at a good time since it reinforces the visibility of the overall US long-term commitment to build a secure, democratic Afghanistan.

### **Interdiction vs. Eradication**

In his presentation, Dr. Barnett Rubin elaborated on the pros and cons of drug interdiction versus eradication. Dr. Rubin emphasized that no drug reduction program should start with eradication, unless there is a viable program for alternative livelihood in place. Beginning with eradication would simply raise the farmgate price of the drugs and give growers an incentive to move to other geographic areas. It also constrains many farmers who have already received pay advances for their crops and therefore, without a full alternative livelihood in place, the farmers must replant in order to pay back their debts. Interdiction of trafficking and processing lowers the farmgate price by lowering demand, while also targeting those at the top of the drug chain. Interdiction could, however, be manipulated by factional politics among the elite or create a backlash of armed men in positions of power.

One roundtable participant with operational experience in Colombia stated that eradication is a necessary component to any effective drug reduction program, provided it is used in combination with other measures. Along with eradication, there need to be development alternatives in place for eradication to have any hope of being successful. In the discussion, a few participants made the distinction between eradication done in the absence of other measures, which could be counterproductive, and eradication as a supporting element in a larger program or as a means to impose penalties on noncompliance by individual growers, once the local community has accepted counter narcotic and crop substitution programs.

This echoes Dr. Rubin's point that while the enforcement aspect of counter-narcotics activities should be focused on traffickers, law enforcement efforts must be combined with alternative livelihood programs for rural communities and alternative exports for the economy as a whole. Along with building infrastructure (and related security instruments) needed to capture and prosecute drug traffickers there is a need for infrastructure for access to markets for alternative cash crops (essential oils, fruit concentrates, etc., but not wheat) and processing.

Other roundtable participants argued that the US military, specifically, should not get directly involved in eradication (especially since the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs – INL – has a budget specifically for this purpose) that the worst thing the military could do is to lead with crop eradication; and that the military should make every effort not to be identified as supporting eradication indirectly unless it is part of a program that provides positive, invaluable incentives to farmers whose crops are eradicated. Dr. Rubin reiterated his point that it makes no difference who performs eradication (military or not) but that there should not be any crop eradication in Afghanistan this year. He feels that the priority is to establish alternative livelihoods and start focusing on the big traffickers.

### **Promoting Security**

Security is still lacking in many parts of Afghanistan, including the capital city of Kabul, where much of the more than 6,000-person international security force is stationed. Many of the participants felt that without basic security in place, it would be very difficult to implement any effective counter narcotics measures. Therefore, present efforts by CFC-A and ISAF to expand security need to be increased and Afghan security institutions need to be improved. Once the Presidential elections are over, there should be a period to refocus Afghan and international security forces for this purpose, rather than protecting elections – at least until the time comes to prepare for Parliamentary elections. This can include a greater

effort at narcotics interdiction.

Along with this idea, Dr. Rubin expressed the need to integrate counter narcotics policy with the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) effort because counter-narcotics is a political issue, connected to DDR and security provision. He also discussed the need to decouple the struggle against al Qaeda from the struggle against the Taliban. In his view, the people in southern Afghanistan are more inclined to join the Taliban because of the impression that the US is arming the local warlords and militias who exploit the local populations, thereby decreasing local security.

Other participants felt that the same was true for securing the borders and that one way to increase security was by significantly strengthening the Afghan National Police (ANP), including a large number of monitors and mentors who stay with units after training. The idea is to build up the Afghan capabilities as efficiently and thoroughly as possible so that they can be responsible for their own security. In response to some of the security concerns, one participant suggested incorporating some warlords into the counter narcotics process by dividing them against each other.

One participant with experience in both Colombia and Afghanistan, discussed some of the lessons that could be learned from Colombia. The approach used in Colombia was a multi-pronged approach – combining eradication and development with interdiction, strategic communication and public diplomacy – yet it was still unable to penetrate all parts of the country. In Colombia, security forces work as a facilitators and therefore need to be well-integrated at the local level. This is an element that has been missing from Afghanistan. In the beginning, general purpose forces in Afghanistan were not doing much to establish a long-term security presence in countryside (only the US Special Forces were able to establish a real security presence). This has hurt the country in terms of building stability in the countryside where it is most lacking. Other participants pointed out that the current US military approach is classical counterinsurgency utilizing regular forces as well as special forces, a major change from the recent past.

### **USG Efforts – An Interagency Role**

The Drug Enforcement Agency, the US State Department Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and the US military are working to achieve better interagency cooperation, particularly in Kabul where the US Ambassador and his interagency coordinator are taking a very active role. One government representative, while recognizing that it would be difficult for the Country Team to provide operational coordination for all parts of the proposed US counter drug strategy, said that the US Administration has put in place a very capable management structure and team that seems up to the task. The structure follows that of Colombia, with a strong coordinator in-country with ties to the National Security Council and the White House.

A few of the participants felt that a true interagency effort was still missing. Some participants believed and there was a need to build upon and adopt the Military Information Support Team for counter narcotics purposes ideally creating well-coordinated interagency information support teams with a cross-section of agencies. One US government participant cited the specific need to increase strategic communication between all the different government agencies as well as put US government communication experts and intelligence officers on the ground in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Colombia and Southeast Asia were suggested as models for interagency coordination and planning.

According to Mr. Jon Wiant, a Burma expert, the US State Department funded an intelligence gathering and fusion effort in Burma (and Thailand), during the 1970s which proved to be very useful. This involved the CIA, DEA and the US military as well as the State Department. The US was able to

identify traffickers and make a distinction between those who had political objectives and those who were simply interested in making money. Unfortunately, once other agencies got involved, control over the program was somewhat decentralized. However, better intelligence increased our ability to understand all the elements on the ground. (For example, instead of just targeting drug labs, we were able to interdict caravans of mules packed with drugs.) Overall, the counter drug effort in Burma was successful in decreasing production over a 3-4 year period, largely thanks to good intelligence. This should be a priority for Afghanistan.

### **Countering Narcotics in a Development Context**

Narcotics production, trafficking and specifically consumption create larger development problems for countries, especially those which are still developing. Dr. Ayesha Siddiqa elaborated on the connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the realm of narcotics. Dr. Siddiqa proposed a more development-focused approach to dealing with the narcotics problem as opposed to military only solutions, stating that there is an urgent need to develop the areas where the Pakistani military has recently gone in search of al Qaeda remnants. Other development could be focused on judicial and legal reform because much of the financing for Afghan narcotics activities sits in Pakistan and there are few functional controls or legal measures to capture or prosecute drug traffickers. Bringing transparency to the Pakistani legal and justice system is fundamental to combating narcotics trafficking in both countries. Another participant agreed with Dr. Siddiqa's focus on development, stating that drug production and trafficking are not primarily military problems but development problems and combating production and trafficking needs to be integrated into the whole development effort.

### **Shoring up Existing Programs**

According to a UN special web report, "Bitter-Sweet Harvest: Afghanistan's New War," there are six main programs within the Afghan Ministry of Interior's Central Eradication Planning Cell that focus on counter narcotics activity. These include the Central Poppy Eradication Force, the Counter-Narcotics Police, Task Force 333 and other specialized units, Governor-led Programs, the Counter-Narcotics Directorate, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These various agencies have all been constructed with outside help, just as many of the standing agencies in Afghanistan's neighbors such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Nonetheless, as Dr. Nancy Lubin pointed out, we should not assume these institutions function effectively merely because they have been created. All of these programs require far more oversight and follow up. Based on her experience in Central Asia, she stated that various foreign governments may inadvertently exacerbate problems when they try to stand up institutions (including special law enforcement, judicial review and others) that subsequently may become corrupt while claiming the legitimacy that comes with US or other foreign government endorsement. In addition, Dr. Lubin stressed that the institutions we are trying to create are not necessarily context appropriate since many of these countries do not have the democratic basics in place to exert critical oversight themselves, and we often do not have the capability to evaluate their immediate impacts and whether they are ameliorating or exacerbating the drug trade overall.

Finally, Dr. Lubin stated that many of the programs that are being tried in Afghanistan have been tried in neighboring Central Asian countries with often limited success, and studying the Central Asian example would be helpful to avoid making the same mistakes again. She suggested that instead of devising new programs, it would be equally helpful to monitor and improve upon the programs already underway. Dr. Lubin phrased this by saying we should look as much at *how* we are doing what we are doing, not only what more we can do. One participant confirmed that this is also what the Afghan government wants, reporting that Afghan officials told US representatives that promoting what we are already doing well

would be helpful.

## On the Demand Side

One participant brought up the critical point that watching the increase of HIV/AIDS in certain areas is an important part of determining where drug trading routes are. The incidence of opium addiction has also increased in South and Southwest Asia, indicating that new markets are opening up and that there will be a future increase in addiction-related social problems in these countries. Dr. Siddiqia believes that the Pakistani government is actually in a state of denial about how many of its citizens are, or are becoming addicted to opium or heroine. However, the main demand still stems from Western society and Dr. Rubin raised the idea that the US policy should focus its efforts on demand as well as supply reduction.

## Do's and Don'ts – US Military

Throughout the roundtable, the participants were asked to volunteer their opinion on actions the US military should and should not take. The following is a summary list of major *do's* and *don'ts* expressed throughout the afternoon or generated as afterthoughts to the September 10 discussion.

### *Do's*

- ❖ Increase intelligence gathering and coordination efforts; establish an intelligence fusion cell.
- ❖ Integrate interdiction as part of the overall security strategy, making it an important component.
- ❖ Ensure that a viable alternate livelihood plan is in place before taking eradication action (including an visible prospects for an increase in the infrastructure and economic reconstruction effort).
- ❖ Build-up counter narcotics cooperation among various US government agencies, making all an integrated part of the solution. This would include more robust funding and priority manning of the Embassy Interagency Planning Group (EIPG) in order to enable it to assist the Ambassador, the Embassy CN Coordinator and CFC-A CG in the operational planning necessary to manage, monitor, and refine combined CN efforts across Afghanistan.
- ❖ Continue focus on increasing overall security, including stepping up police training, equipping, communications and mentoring and the use of the Afghan National Army (ANA), and including a specific allocation of Afghan resources for CN activities.
- ❖ Consider US military support – through Veternary Corps and Guard/Reserve personnel detailed to the PRTs and other means – to the process of introducing alternative crops and farming practices nearby the PRTs, in areas where poppy cultivation is high. Funding and personnel support of such activities can greatly enhance the weak US Interagency efforts in these areas that presently exist, and will bring along a positive perception by the Afghan people.
- ❖ There should be more funding and personnel support for the Embassy Military Intelligence Support Team (MIST), while continuing and expanding the MIST's work in support of key CN campaign objectives so that it becomes a true interagency information team rather than a MIST.
- ❖ Help CFC-A develop and assure DoD/JCS support of a prudent and limited set of authorities and limitations that will allow the US Ambassador (CFC-A Coordinator) to determine, on a case-by-case basis, when US military lift may be used for in-extremis MEDEVAC and force extraction during IC/MOI - led interdiction efforts. The ROE for any US military participation in these events should be made extremely clear.

### *Don'ts*

- ❖ Destroying drug labs shouldn't be the main focus or game plan of the military because that is not

the most critical action right now. It has very limited and temporary effect and can generate bad will which the US and Karzai Government opponents will exploit.

- ❖ Do not put up a program or spend money without a definite plan in place (i.e. eradication) which is itself part of overall, integrated security and reconstruction planning.
- ❖ While eradication may need to be part of the strategy, do not get directly involved in eradication. Above all, avoid chemical or spray eradication.
- ❖ Supporting anti-militia forces (AMF) working with drug traffickers is not a good strategy.

## Conclusion

There is no quick solution to Afghanistan's narcotics problem. Yet, effective steps can be taken to reverse the momentum and avoid Afghanistan turning into a full narco-state with very serious repercussions. These steps need to be carefully thought through and be part of an overall plan for security and reconstruction. A long-term counter narcotics strategy must be incorporated into all the reconstruction and security efforts if it to be successful. There are dangerous pitfalls to be avoided, which have the appearance of a quick fix.

Success in the counter-drug effort can only happen together with security and if the approach is multi-pronged, combining, as noted earlier, eradication and development with interdiction, strategic communication and public diplomacy. There also needs to be a clear distinction between military operations and law enforcement (police) operations, and warlords known to be participating in the drug trade should be denied governmental (and US) support for any counter narcotics program to be truly successful. An important step would be to start prosecuting some of the big traffickers, no matter what position they hold in the government or how much power they have as warlords. International support for such an endeavor is important.

Finally, as one senior participant observed, crop substitution and alternative development cannot be the only long-term solutions because the counter drug effort is a subsidiary effort to other, larger problems that exist, including security, stability and economic prosperity. In order to combat these problems long-term, there needs to be, as Robert Brown pointed out, sustained political will of the in-country leadership as well as a long-term commitment by external actors (the US, UK, UN and others). The effort must be national, regional and international.

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### **The INSS Roundtable Series on Post-Conflict Stabilization and Crisis Management**

#### **The INSS Roundtable Series on Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Stabilization (PCS/CM)**

explores challenges to the effective utilization of U.S. diplomacy, security assistance and military power, often in concert with allies and partners, for the purposes suppressing or mitigating conflicts and achieving post-conflict stabilization and associated humanitarian objectives in war-torn countries.

#### **Previous PCS/CM Roundtables:**

**“Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Security Institutions” by General Abdul Rahim Wardak, Deputy Minister of Defense, Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (July 22, 2004).** General Abdul Rahim Wardak has been First Deputy Minister of Defense of Afghanistan since September 2003. He is responsible for the implementation of reform of the defense sector. He is a professional military Officer and former Chief of the General Staff of the Afghan Army. He also served as a Commander of

Mujahedeen forces in the war of against the Soviet Union. He spoke about the current challenges facing the Afghan National Army.

**“Stability Operations – Preparing Leaders for Tomorrow’s Operational Challenges” by Major General Tim Cross, CBE, British Army, Former Deputy Director for Coalition Operations, Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance and the Coalition Provisional Authority (June 7, 2004).** At this roundtable, Major General Cross spoke about a topic often over-looked in today’s discussions about policies and strategies -- leadership. Leadership, manifested as the synthesis of several components, is the indispensable factor in influencing others to achieve a goal. Through his own experiences and studies, Major General Cross related his views about the components of leadership that are imperative for success in today’s stability operations.

**“Afghanistan Roundtable with Minister of Internal Affairs Ali Jalali” by Mr. Ali Jalali, Minister of Interior, Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (June 4, 2004).** Mr. Jalali, a former Afghan Army officer, Mujaheddin leader, security expert, radio personality and author, was made the Interior Minister of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan in 2002. He addressed Afghanistan’s general security situation, the ongoing development of its national police, security challenges for elections and Afghanistan’s war on drugs.

**“Afghanistan: An Assessment of Current Challenges” by Mr. Ali Jalali, Minister of the Interior, Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (February 6, 2004).** Mr. Jalali, a former Afghan Army officer, Mujaheddin leader, security expert, radio personality and author, was made the Interior Minister of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan in 2002. He addressed Afghanistan’s general security situation, the ongoing development of its national police, security challenges for elections and Afghanistan’s war on drugs.

**“Meeting Iraq’s Security Requirements: Where do we go from here?” by Mr. Walter Slocombe, Former Senior Advisor for National Security & Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority (Monday, 15 December 2003).** Mr. Walter Slocombe, formerly Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from 1995-2001, served as the Coalition Provisional Authority’s Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense from May to November, 2003. In this capacity, he was CPA’s senior official responsible for assessing Iraq’s future defense needs and directing the process of creating the New Iraq Army. He also was closely involved in synchronizing these efforts with on-going U.S.-led operations aimed at stabilizing the country and defeating threats to Iraq’s post-Saddam recovery. For a public version of his presentation, please visit [http://www.csis.org/features/040209\\_slocombe.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/040209_slocombe.pdf).

**“Bringing Congo Back from the Brink: A Report from the Field” by Dr. William Durch, Senior Fellow, Henry L. Stimson Center and Paul Simo, Director for Africa at the International Human Rights Law Group (Friday, 24 October 2003).** Dr. William J. Durch of the Stimson Center, together with colleague Paul Simo of the International Human Rights Law Group, discussed their recent trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DROC), where they observed on-going stabilization operations being conducted by the United Nations and the European Union. In particular, the EU’s effort, *Operation Artemis*, has focused on security stabilization with the goal of handing the operation over to an expanded UN mission in the near future. For more information, please visit [http://www.hrlawgroup.org/country\\_programs/drc/default.asp](http://www.hrlawgroup.org/country_programs/drc/default.asp).

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