

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ORGANIZED CRIME AND STATE FAILURE: THE NEXUS OF GREED, NEED AND GRIEVANCE

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Abstract - State failure has emerged as a new security threat, however its dynamics are poorly understood as evidenced by our limited insight of its relationship to proximate causes such as organized crime. Most theories of conflict and state failure that incorporate organized crime focus on its ability to finance war and provide economic incentives to sustain instability; however, they ignore the political elements that are present in theories of organized crime. Moreover, it is difficult to discern the difference between crime as a symptom of state failure and crime as an agent of it. The central question posed in this paper concerns how organized crime interacts with the causes of state failure. Applying a political economy analysis to the drug trade in Afghanistan and Tajikistan as case studies, the purpose of the study is to determine whether or not organized crime is a neutral symptom of state failure or if it contributes to the process of disintegration. The findings reveal that organized crime serves as a proximate cause of state failure by feeding off of and reinforcing other causes in a manner that propels weak states towards failure and provides obstacles to the re-establishment of a functional state. This suggests that policy-makers should also approach the problem from a political economy perspective, taking care to isolate the greed aspect of organized crime without exacerbating the legitimate need and grievances of citizens that it exploits and seeks to reinforce. To do so requires an expansion of the traditional toolbox for conflict management beyond traditional military and development instruments to include intelligence and law-enforcement agencies.

Introduction: State Failure and Organized Crime

In the National Security Strategy, George W. Bush draws attention to failed states as a new security threat, and yet the dynamics of such failure are poorly understood. States fail when they lose control over the political and economic life of the country; they can no longer provide basic human security to their citizens and become instruments of personal malignant interests. The image of a failed state is familiar: it is the image of Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. The dangers of failed states are also familiar: they can be hotbeds of conflict, providing sanctuary to terrorist and insurgency groups whose presence can have long reaching security effects into neighbouring countries and beyond. Less familiar is the distinction of the causes of such failure from the symptoms. Although there are many structural or root causes of weak and failing states, from the perspective of prevention in the short-term, it is necessary to focus on the proximate causes that trigger and intensify the process of disintegration.¹ The focus of this study is on one such cause: organized crime. The drug trade in Afghanistan and Tajikistan is

¹ This point has been made in regards to conflict prevention by Bruce W. Jentleson, “The Realism of Preventive Statecraft” in *Conflict Prevention: Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?* eds. David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel (New York: UN University Press, 2003), 27.

exemplary of the way in which organized crime actively feeds off of and reinforces the inability of a state to govern. Literature treats the emergence of organized crime as an indicator of a weak and failing state.² While this may be so, if it actively partakes in further dismantling the ability of the state to govern then it must be treated as a proximate cause of state failure against which action can be taken to help prevent its ultimate collapse. The following analysis is thus guided by the question of how organized crime interacts with other causes state failure, and whether or not it acts neutrally or contributes to the process of disintegration.

Theoretical Framework

Charles Cater has identified the need to fill both the theoretical and policy gaps between economic and political perspectives of conflict and state failure.³ He argues it must be addressed through a proper *political* economy approach that integrates the two approaches, which this paper aims to do with regards to the relationship between organized crime and state failure. Consideration is given to the economic elements that drive and sustain conflicts, which are most notably detailed in Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's study of the incidence of civil wars in Africa. The authors highlight the importance of 'greed', or economic incentives in both motivating and providing a means for conflict.⁴ They argue that the key determinant of conflict is the availability of exploitable resources to finance it. Similarly, Neil Cooper analyzes the rise of conflict trade following the end of the Cold War, which is defined as non-military goods that finance war. He argues that it has particular salience in facilitating both contemporary conflict and the process of state collapse by providing economic incentives to maintain the comparative advantage of conflict trade, expressed by chaos.⁵ Thus, in theories of conflict and state collapse, both legal and illegal goods are considered important for the role that they play in financing wars and providing economic incentives to maintain conflict. Moreover, both approaches suggest that organized crime or conflict economies have a political as well as an economic consequence.

Political perspectives of organized crime focus on causes such as state weakness, illegitimacy, and security vacuums.⁶ They argue that organized crime emerges in response to opportunities presented by dysfunction within the state. Such causation theories are complemented by Thomas Schelling's analysis of the operational rationale behind organized crime in which he emphasizes extortion, protection, consolidation of power and the need for protection of and control over territory.⁷ His analysis views organized crime not only as a response to political opportunities, but as a process that continually seeks to undermine the political life of the state. Consideration of both the economic and political functions of organized crime has generated the argument that organized crime is a proximate cause of state

² Robert I. Rotberg, "The New Nation State Failure," *The Washington Quarterly* 25 (Summer 2002): 87.

³ Charles Cater in Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, "Beyond Greed And Grievance: Policy Lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict," *Program on Economic Agendas in Civil War* (International Peace Academy, October 2003), 3.

⁴ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (2002): 13-28.

⁵ Neil Cooper, "State Collapse as Business: The Role of Conflict Trade and the Emerging Control Agenda," *Development and Change* 33 (2002): 935-955.

⁶ Phil Williams and Roy Godson, "Anticipating organized and transnational crime," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 37 (2002): 317-318.

⁷ Thomas Schelling in Monica Serrano, "Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?" in *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security*, eds. Monica Serrano and Mats Berdal (Boulder: Lynne-Rienner Pub., 2002), 18.

failure that feeds off of and reinforces the inability of a state to govern by creating incentives of ‘greed,’ conditions of ‘grievance,’ and exploiting ‘need.’

Methodology

The merits of this argument will be explored by examining the dynamics of the relationship between the drug trade and state failure in Afghanistan and Tajikistan for the purpose of contributing to further theoretical development and for making relevant and generalized policy recommendations. These two cases have been selected because while they form part of a single drug economy, they represent different stages: Afghanistan is plagued with the cultivation of opium while Tajikistan is the most important transit site en route to Europe. More importantly, however, both countries are examples of failed states, differing only in degree. While Afghanistan continues to be one of the most well-known cases of state failure, Tajikistan remains on the brink of failure and demonstrates the difficulty states face when attempting to re-build and the forces that work against the consolidation of state power. For the purposes of this study, the role of organized crime in Afghanistan will be examined primarily in terms of the process of state failure during conflict while Tajikistan will be used to analyze the obstacles that organized crime provides to re-building states. Finally, these cases serve to fill a knowledge and policy gap that pertains to the region’s drug trade.⁸

State failure has a variety of both long-term and immediate causes that interact with one another to undermine the capacity of the state to govern, and this analysis does not purport to claim that organized crime is the most important cause nor that eliminating it will prevent state failure. Rather, the intent is to determine the ways in which it contributes to state failure by interacting with other causes in order to guide appropriate policy responses. The ensuing analysis will thus examine the role of the drug economy in relation to state failure, focusing on the following characteristics: endemic violence; lack of control over territory; ill provision of public goods; and corruption and illegitimacy.⁹

Financing Conflict: The Taliban, the Northern Alliance and the IMU

Economic models of conflict emphasize the role that illicit trade plays in both financing armed groups and sustaining conflict based on motivations of greed. In this sense it is the profits from organized crime that feed into state collapse by providing economic resources for non-state actors to challenge the state and to maintain an enduring violence that is characteristic of state failure.¹⁰ To identify a proximate role played by the drug economy in financing conflict and state failure in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, there should be evidence of armed groups receiving substantial financing from the drug trade and possibly re-orienting their activities to include economic goals. An examination of the Taliban and Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and the

⁸ This gap has been identified by Martha Brill Olcott in “Drugs, Terrorism and Regional Security: The Risks from Afghanistan,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace – News* [<http://www.ceip.org/files/news/OlcottTestimony031302.asp?from=newsnews>], March 13, 2002. In her testimony before the U. S. Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee of Technology, Terrorism and Government Operations, Olcott argues that the drug problem in Afghanistan and Central Asia has been largely ignored by American policy-makers because heroin from the region only constitutes 10% of all that consumed in the United States. Moreover, despite the link between drugs and terrorism, the problem continues to receive little attention during the reconstruction phase because of its perceived status as a ‘secondary’ concern to largely security issues.

⁹ These elements of state failure are based on Rotberg, 85-97.

¹⁰ Rotberg, 85.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which operates out of Tajikistan, indicates that both processes have taken place.

The use of drugs to finance conflict in Afghanistan first emerged in 1980.¹¹ Initially the emergence of opium cultivation was an indicator of the weakness of the Afghan State. Opium is not a traditional crop in Afghanistan as it is in Pakistan; significant cultivation emerged only during the chaos and anarchy of the Soviet-Afghan war both as a means of survival for peasants and as a viable source of income for warring factions.¹² The growth of the opium economy in Afghanistan can thus be viewed as an effect of state failure whereby various actors took advantage of the economic and political turmoil, which provides a comparative advantage for illicit trade, to profit from the drug economy. This simplistic perspective ignores the dynamics created by the criminal economy that served to sustain conflict and contributed to the continued failure of the state long after the Soviet withdrawal.

The drug trade was an important ingredient in the continuation of factionalized warfare following the end of the Soviet conflict. The availability of drug money to localized warlords in part prevented the Mujahideen, the Western backed faction against the Soviets, from exercising control over the country. As predicted by economic models of intra-state war, military commanders who were able to operate independently of the government and Islamic parties actively sustained chaos to maintain their control over the predatory drug economy. The rise of the Taliban and its exertion of military control over most of the country in the 1990s seemed to signify the end of warlord politics and the creation of a proper state; however this is a false conception. The emergence of the Taliban ended neither the political nor the economic power of the drug-based warlords. Indeed, opium production under Taliban-controlled territory doubled due to the tacit agreement between warlords and traders with the Taliban: peace in exchange for security and growth of the opium economy.¹³ The rise of the Taliban to power created the necessary stability and security for expanding the drug trade – warlords continued to exert power over their local regions and were able to focus their energies on economic activity rather than having to fight one another. Thus, while predatory, warlord economic and military competition ended, the outcome was merely the transformation to a rentier state based on a criminalized, open drug economy.¹⁴ The Taliban did not and could not exercise control over the established warlords who continued to base both economic and political power on the expanding drug trade. Rather than ending the drug economy, the Taliban formalized it in order to maintain the support of local warlords and to finance its own expansion throughout the country.

The successful ban on opium production by the Taliban in 1999 is often cited as evidence of the control that the regime was able to exert over the drug economy, however it has been suggested that the ban reflects merely the veneer of authority rather than the substance. Writing about the crime-terror nexus in Central Asia, Tamara Makarenko argues that the ban is best perceived as a result of the Taliban taking advantage of decisions by drug mafias and traffickers to address a glut in the market and force the price of opiates up.¹⁵ This claim is supported by the

¹¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 119. The Mujahideen used drug money to help finance their resistance to the Soviet Union's invasion.

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Opium Economy in Afghanistan: An International Problem* (New York: United Nations, 2003), 82-90.

¹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 93.

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 128.

¹⁵ Tamara Makarenko, "Crime, Terror and the Central Asian Drug Trade," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 6 (Summer 2002): 11.

fact that the Taliban did not destroy stockpiles of opium or ever ban trading in opium.¹⁶ The Taliban did not control the drug trade and it would be incorrect to label it a narco-guerrilla group dedicated primarily to continuing the drug trade as some scholars have done.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the opium trade was vital to sustaining the Taliban's quasi control over the country and in fuelling its final war with the Northern Alliance.

As part of an immunity agreement with local warlords, the Taliban received a twenty-percent *zakat* or tax on the opium trade, which amounted to an income of roughly \$20 million per year.¹⁸ Thus the expanding drug economy during the years of Taliban rule also served to expand the organization's resource base, which was needed to wage war against opposition political factions, notably the Northern Alliance. Similarly, the Northern Alliance initially financed its war-making abilities by controlling the emerald trade, however it came to rely increasingly on income from a *zakat* on opium, which increased in production drastically in Northern Alliance territory.¹⁹ Thus both parties relied heavily on income from the opium economy to finance the war, however neither one of them controlled the drug trade. Consequently, the weakening of the Taliban and the integration of the Northern Alliance into the interim government has not stemmed the flow of drugs leaving Afghanistan or ended the ability of local warlords to use it as a means of self-finance.

Two decades of war in Afghanistan demonstrates the devastating effect that criminalized economies play in the process and sustenance of state failure. While the opium economy may first have emerged as a result of state collapse and the ensuing chaos, it generated its own momentum. The drug trade created both a new logic for continuing the conflict and preventing the creation of a functioning state as well as a means of financing political groups such as the Taliban and Northern Alliance in their war-making efforts.

Similar to Afghanistan, the drug economy was used during the Tajikistan civil war from 1992 to 1997 to fund both sides on the conflict: the government and the United Opposition led by the Islamic Renaissance Party. For the purposes of this analysis, however, it is the role that drugs have continued to play in destabilizing the Tajik State that is most interesting. The declaration of peace in Tajikistan ended neither the armed conflict nor the opium war economy. Parts of the country have remained under the control of warlords and criminal gangs, who have been able to sustain their independence from the State through participating in drug trafficking.²⁰ This availability of financing to warlords and military commanders has resulted in the fragmentation of political power into zones of influence, with armed formations competing over economic resources, and has prevented the government from exercising control over parts of the country.²¹ The greatest military challenge to the state, however, has come from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Although the IMU's official goal is to topple the Uzbek

¹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 32, 54.

¹⁷ Chris Dishman includes the Taliban in his examples of terrorist/guerrilla groups that have transformed themselves into criminal organized with a mix of motivations including both profit and politics in his paper "Terrorism, Crime and Transformation," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24 (Summer 2001): 49.

¹⁸ Rashid, 119.

¹⁹ Peter Dale Scott, *Drugs, Oil and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia and Indochina* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 33. Bakaskhshan, the northern region of Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan, was the heartland of Northern Alliance support. The region once supplied only three percent of all Afghan opium, however during the Taliban ban it increased to eighty-three percent.

²⁰ International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace," *ICG Asia Report* No. 30 (December 2001): 16.

²¹ Bobi Pirseyedi, *The Small Arms Problem in Central Asia: Features and Implications* (Geneva: United Nations Institution for Disarmament, 2000), 61.

government and eventually create a caliphate in all of Central Asia, it has operated primarily from Tajik territory since the end of the war and has been involved in destabilizing the entire region, financed predominantly by drugs.

In 2001, the IMU controlled seventy percent of the drug trade through Central Asia, with the majority of it travelling through Tajikistan.²² The IMU is the only terrorist group in the region that is significantly involved in the drug trade.²³ Consequently, both its military and political aims, which feed into one another, are threatening the peace and security of Tajikistan and the surrounding region. In 1999 armed units were able to launch attacks from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan and take control of several villages, ostensibly with the goal of reaching the Uzbek section of the Fergana Valley and igniting rebellion against the government.²⁴ Again in 2000 the IMU was able to launch an attack from Tajikistan, this time directly against Uzbek territory.²⁵ These attacks were seemingly an attempt to destabilize the region for political purposes, however there is much suspicion that they were actually carried out to destabilize the border regions in order to maintain and secure important transport routes for drugs.²⁶ Not only did these attacks threaten the security of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but they also resulted in the violation of Tajik sovereignty due to Uzbek counter-attacks, which were justified on the grounds that Tajikistan cannot control its borders or territory. The drug economy emanating out of Afghanistan, although it created a foothold in Tajikistan during the civil war, has been instrumental in preventing the emergence of a functional state and abetted the presence of a terrorist organization that is able to maintain an enduring violence typical of failed states.

The presence of an illicit drug trade in Afghanistan and Tajikistan has followed expectations set out by economic theories of conflict, whereby drug money has both funded warring factions and has also created new economic incentives to maintain instability. For the purpose of analyzing the relationship of organized crime to state failure, the drug trade has been instrumental for sustaining the most salient feature of failed states: enduring violence. Although in each case the emergence of an illegal economy has coincided with the weakening of the state, it is overly simplistic to view this purely as an effect of state failure. Instead, organized crime is best perceived as a vicious cycle that is first attracted to instability and state weakness but then creates its own momentum, feeding off of and reinforcing further chaos. In this sense, illicit economies can be viewed as a proximate cause of state failure. It does not create armed opposition to the state, however it contributes to the intensity and duration of fighting, often long after political motivations have vanished.

Although most analyses that focus on organized crime from the perspective of conflict and state failure emphasize its ability to finance violence, it has many other insidious effects that serve to propel states towards failure, mainly by feeding off of root causes and grievances such as poverty and poor governance. The rest of the analysis will focus on the political effects of organized crime as they pertain to state failure, which are often overlooked due to an

²² Martha Brill Olcott and Natalia Udalova, "Drug Trafficking on the Great Silk Road: The Security Environment in Central Asia," Working Paper of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (March 2000): 11. Three out of six routes through Central Asia flow through Tajikistan, and these are the most well-used. These are the most recent numbers available.

²³ Makarenko, 12.

²⁴ Sultan Akimbekov, "The Conflict in Afghanistan" in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* ed. Boris Rumer (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 93.

²⁵ Akimbekov, 93.

²⁶ Makranko, 12.

overemphasis on the economic motivations behind it.²⁷ Although the motivation of organized crime may solely be profit, the means often have very significant political consequences that erode the power of the state.

The Politics of Organized Crime: Control of Territory

One of the key necessities of organized crime, particularly the drug trade, is the need for protection from law enforcement authorities, which often means exerting control over territory.²⁸ This control of territory is an inherently political act and one that degrades the power of the state. Indeed, the loss of control over pieces of territory is one of the hallmarks of state failure. The drug economy as it exists in Afghanistan and Tajikistan demonstrate the territorial ambitions of organized crime as it feeds into the further weakening of those respective states.

A functioning central state that exerts control over all of Afghan territory has rarely existed in the past, which makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of the organized drug trade on the territorial integrity of the state. Nonetheless, the Taliban's need to exchange peace for drug production and its unwillingness if not inability to bring warlords fully under its control suggests an ability of drug barons and traders to independently control pieces of territory. This observation is reinforced by the current post-war experience in Afghanistan. Thus far the international community and the transitional Afghan authority have had difficulty extending the reach of the state beyond Kabul. Local warlords who continue to finance themselves through the once again thriving opium economy are able to resist efforts to build a central state, as evidenced by the government's inability to enforce the poppy ban that was declared successful in 1999.²⁹ Drug organizations have not been deterred by the international military presence, because it has been unwilling to extend itself into the territory controlled by drug warlords.³⁰ The economic incentives for individuals to continue the drug trade combined with the need to exert control over territory has provided a severe obstacle to securing the state's territorial integrity.

Similarly in Tajikistan, the trafficking of drugs and increasingly the processing of opium into heroin has relied on a continuation of ineffective state control over parcels of territory, thus maintaining the failed nature of the Tajik state. The regions beyond government control, Gharm, Tavildara and the Karategin Valley and the Pamir region of Gorno Badakhshan are central to the drug trade. Not only do many trafficking routes run through these areas, but it is also suspected that heroin-producing labs have been established in Gharm and Tavildara.³¹ While the lawlessness of these regions is a remnant of the civil war, during which the Islamic opposition gained control over them, the continuation of this situation is linked to the presence of the drug trade. Active efforts by the IMU to destabilize those regions along the border with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan through which trafficking routes pass indicate the dedication of criminal groups to limit effective state control over territory.

²⁷ Emmanouela Mylonaki, "The Manipulation of Organized Crime by Terrorists: Legal and Factual Perspectives," *International Criminal Law Review* 2 (2002): 214, 228. Mylonaki among others asserts that the primary difference between terrorists/insurgency groups and organized crime is the motivation: organized criminal groups lack political motivation and pursue violence strictly for the purpose of profit rather than as a *raison d'être*.

²⁸ Monica Serrano, "Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?" in *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security*, 18. This is based on Thomas Schelling's conception of organized crime, which focuses on the operational activities of organized crime rather than their role in the market.

²⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, "Drugs, Terrorism and Regional Security."

³⁰ Makarenko, 16.

³¹ International Crisis Group, "Central Asia: Drugs and Conflict," *ICG Asia Report* No. 25 (November 2001): 6.

The ability and necessity of criminal organizations to control pieces of territory not only physically weakens the ability of the state to govern, but it often facilitates the presence of military opposition groups. Currently in Afghanistan the Taliban continues to operate out of southern Afghanistan, a region that remains beyond the control of the transitional authority and where poppy cultivation is once again flourishing despite an official government ban.³² Moreover, in Tajikistan the site of the majority of trafficking routes as well as possible sites of opium processing plants, Gharm and Tavildara, are also the traditional sanctuaries of the IMU.³³ In this case the coincidence is likely due to the heavy involvement of the IMU in the drug industry. Nonetheless evidence from other cases suggests that the presence of anti-state military groups often follows criminal control over territory.³⁴ Moreover, the ability of criminal war economies to subsist in post-war environments suggests that in many cases the control of territory is dependent on criminal organizations more so than a guerrilla or terrorist presence. In order to survive, organized criminal operations mount a considerable challenge to the ability of the state to govern by wresting away control over pieces of territory, which often reinforces the ability of political groups to maintain violence against the state.

The Politics of Organized Crime: Securing Loyalty

Organized crime also serves as a proximate cause of state failure by feeding on some of its symptoms and key grievances: poverty and insecurity. An important element of state failure is the inability of the state to provide public goods, especially security and economic opportunity.³⁵ Organized crime serves to reinforce this failure of the state by providing alternative sources of protection and finance, thus directing loyalty away from the state and further weakening its control.

Economic need rather than greed is the driving force behind the decision by most peasants to participate in the drug economy. In Afghanistan the cultivation of poppies emerged as a survival mechanism in the absence of a functioning legitimate economy. Opium became the basis of economic transactions. Cash could be obtained through opium sales, however it was also a means of securing loans and credit under a coercive system of futures called *salaam*.³⁶ Moreover, growing poppies earns farmers considerably more than growing legal crops.³⁷ In Tajikistan the drug trade coincides not only with those regions beyond government control, but also the poorest parts of the country.³⁸ Moreover, the people whom it recruits are often the

³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 44.

³³ International Crisis Group, “Central Asia Drugs and Conflict,” 6.

³⁴ T. David Mason and Christopher Company, “Guerrillas, Drugs and Peasants: The Rational Peasant,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7 (Winter 1995): 140. In Peru, the Shining Path moved into territory beyond the control of the government, which was used to grow coca.

³⁵ Rotberg, 87.

³⁶ Barnett, R. Rubin, “Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan,” *World Development* 28 (2000): 1793.

³⁷ The average income value to farmers of opium in 2003 ranged from US\$ 1,700 in the North to US\$ 6,800 in the South. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003* (October 2003), 51. Available online: http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afghanistan_opium_survey_2003.pdf. Although the income generated by poppy cultivation is only a fraction of that received by traffickers and dealers, the amount earned is nonetheless significantly more than what is possible by cultivating alternative legal crops. Testimonies from farmers in the North, where the income from opium is the least, estimate that the income gap between opium and wheat is about 10 to 20 times. See Jonathan Goodhand, “From holy war to opium war? A case study of the opium economy in North Eastern Afghanistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 19 (2000): 269.

³⁸ International Crisis Group, “Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace,” 8. Gharm, the Karategin Valley, Tavildara and Gorno Badakhshan are among the poorest regions of Tajikistan and are also the stronghold of the drug industry.

poorest and most vulnerable. Increasingly women are becoming drug traffickers and dealers, many of them war widows with many children to support.³⁹ Not only does the drug industry take advantage of the state's inability to provide a stable income to its most vulnerable citizens and entrenched itself in their lives, it exacerbates this. By drawing citizens into the informal economy it shrinks the state's tax revenues, further eroding its ability to provide social goods.⁴⁰

The ability of criminal organizations to offer economic opportunities that the state cannot provide serves a severe challenge to the capacity of the state to command loyalty. The extent to which ordinary citizens are dependent on the drug economy is profound: up to eighty percent of Afghans and fifty percent of Tajiks are connected to it.⁴¹ This feeds into state failure by focusing individual loyalties away from the state and towards lower-levels of political association, most notably the clan. The drug industry is largely based on sub-ethnic solidarity, which is also an important way of coordinating political and military action in the region as well as for providing individual security in the absence of functioning state institutions.⁴² Thus, economic well-being and security have become functions of a clan-based drug industry rather than the state; the void has been simultaneously widened and filled. This is one of the key challenges that the interim government is now facing in Afghanistan. In the absence of state social support in most of the country, peasants are once again turning to opium cultivation and the protection of local warlords to provide necessary economic and physical security, which in turn is limiting the state's tax base and ability to fill this gap. By re-orienting survival techniques towards the clan and usually its respective warlord, organized crime detracts from the political authority of the state, contributing to its irrelevancy in the everyday lives of citizens.

The situation is complicated further in Afghanistan and Tajikistan by the presence of political opposition groups in regions dominated by criminal organizations, which strengthens the ties between economic and political preferences. Drug mafias, insurgency groups and the government all compete to control the behaviour and loyalty of individual citizens.⁴³ The tacit if not outright cooperation between organized crime and the Taliban and IMU means that the decision to engage in opium cultivation is tied to support for anti-state political organizations: need, greed and creed merge, whether or not this is a conscious choice. Support for insurgency groups may become quite active, however, especially if they are perceived to protect and permit the drug industry upon which citizens have come to depend for both economic and security provisions. In Tajikistan, regions with high political support for Islamic opposition groups coincide with regions where the IMU and the drug trade are most active. Similarly in Afghanistan, the greatest resurgence of opium cultivation has occurred in the south, where there is also growing support for Taliban once again. When such strong connections exist between economic survival, security, drugs, warlords and insurgency groups, the state faces a significant challenge to maintain its relevancy in the lives, hearts and minds of its citizens.

The Politics of Organized Crime: Corruption and Illegitimacy

The most straightforward yet perhaps the most insidious way in which organized crime contributes to the process of state failure is through corruption and de-legitimization of the

³⁹ International Crisis Group, "Central Asia Drugs and Conflict," 8.

⁴⁰ Wilton Park, "Transforming War Economies: Challenges for Peacemaking and Peacebuilding," *Program on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (International Peace Academy, December 2003), 10.

⁴¹ Svante E. Cornell, "Nexus of Narcotics, Conflict and Radical Islamism in Central Asia," *Caspian Brief* No. 24 (Cornell Caspian Consulting, June 2002), 12.

⁴² Rubin, 1794.

⁴³ Mason and Company, 141.

government. Although much of this analysis has focused on the contribution of organized crime to violence against the state, profit is the *raison d'être* of organized crime and the means of profit can be both violent and non-violent. The primary reason for which criminal groups seek to control and defend territory is to create a safe haven for their operations, however the transnational nature of most criminal economies demands further risk management strategies, which include corrupting local governments.⁴⁴ The transnational characteristic of organized crime has been labeled the single greatest threat to the region, particularly because it involves a chain of regional and international players, including government and security personnel, which involve both economic and political motives.⁴⁵ Their influence in the region is established through corruption and intimidation, both of which are destructive for state and regional security. Where possible, co-opting high-ranking officials through bribes works best.⁴⁶ This destroys the legitimacy of the state, however, turning it into a criminal organization itself. Once corruption begins to grow it is very difficult to weed out and to re-establish the state as a credible body capable of governing its territory.

Corruption from the drug trade is already threatening the fledgling Afghan State. High-ranking officials in the new State are involved in the trade. Many former members of the Northern Alliance have been incorporated into the government and ironically some of them are responsible for anti-drug programs despite the fact that poppy cultivation increased in those areas under Alliance control while it fought the Taliban.⁴⁷ Many local warlords have also been brought into the new governance structure in an effort to bring the entire state under the control of the central government, however this will only contribute to corruption if their ties with the drug industry are not broken. Thus far there have been no incentives to do so because of the lucrative tax available on the drugs grown in their regions.⁴⁸ Afghanistan thus runs the risk of institutionalizing the drug industry and becoming a narco-state similar to Tajikistan's fate following the end of the civil war. This is reinforcing disillusionment with the interim government and serving as a source of grievance that the Taliban has been able to exploit for political support.⁴⁹

The drug trade in Tajikistan has been institutionalized within state structures. Drugs were an important source of financing for both the government and the opposition forces during the civil war, and afterwards many people involved in the trade were incorporated into powerful positions in the new government, entrenching corruption.⁵⁰ Culpability exists not only in the upper echelons of power, but also in the front lines of defense against trafficking: security and customs officials. It has been estimated that up to fifty percent of these personnel are involved in the drug trade.⁵¹ Indeed, the profitability of such positions through corruption is such that they are sold to the highest bidder.⁵² Thus, while Tajikistan is attempting to create an image of being

⁴⁴ Williams and Godson, 337.

⁴⁵ Makarenko, 8.

⁴⁶ Makarenko, 9.

⁴⁷ Cornell, 9.

⁴⁸ Olcott, "Drugs, Terrorism and Regional Security."

⁴⁹ Barnett Ruben et al. "Building a New Afghanistan: The Value of Success, the Cost of Failure," *Centre on International Cooperation* (March 2004), 8.

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, "Central Asia, Drugs and Conflict," 15. One of the most famous examples is the active participation of the former Ambassador to Kazakhstan in the drug trade.

⁵¹ International Crisis Group, "Central Asia, Drugs and Conflict," 7.

⁵² George C. *Organized Crime: The National Security Dimension* (Marshall, European Centre for Security Studies: Report from conference held August 29-September 2, 1999), 19.

tough against drug trafficking and flaunts its success at stopping significant amounts of opium and heroin at its borders, this is only a fraction of the picture.⁵³ The success stories of drugs stopped at the Tajik border are a distraction to the amount of drugs that successfully enter and leave Tajikistan. Major shipments of drugs are rarely intercepted because they enjoy protection from law enforcement agencies.⁵⁴ Indeed, those traffickers stopped at the border may be an attempt by large-scale traffickers with connections to the government to block competition. Regardless, the heavy involvement of Tajik government officials in the drug trade is undermining the legitimacy of the government and contributing to its continuation as a failed state. This reputation reinforces the grievances that non-state actors use to challenge the state.⁵⁵ This is evident in Tajikistan where support for Islamic opposition groups is related not only to poor socio-economic conditions but also widespread disillusionment with government corruption.⁵⁶ Perceived illegitimacy of the state weakens its support, encouraging people to turn away from it and towards their own criminal means of survival in a vicious cycle that strengthens the void of the state.

Conclusion: Findings and Recommendations

Organized crime based on the drug trade in Afghanistan and Tajikistan on the surface appears to be a symptom of state weakness, however; it has created its own dynamics that intensify the causes of state failure and is itself best conceptualized as a proximate cause. Although the *raison d'être* of organized crime is profit, the means of operation and the profit itself contribute to a crisis of governance and state failure. Illicit trade sustains violence and chaos by financing armed groups who are involved in it and provides an economic incentive to maintain a failed state incapable of exerting control over all of its territory or citizens. In a less obvious but similarly insidious fashion, criminal organizations reinforce and widen the divide between the state and citizens by providing the public goods that the state often cannot: economic opportunities and security. The negative political consequences of this division of labour can extend to support for insurgency groups when they are associated with the means of survival that the state cannot or will not provide, especially if the state is perceived as a threat to such means or as illegitimate. Even when the negative consequences of illicit economies are recognized, they can be extremely difficult to eradicate, especially once they have taken root within the state itself, as the case of Tajikistan has demonstrated. Nonetheless, given the contribution that organized crime makes to state failure and its resistance to efforts to strengthen the state, steps must and can be taken to weaken its presence. To do so, it must be addressed as a proximate cause of state failure rather than as merely a symptom of deeper root causes. Moreover, as part of a political economy, care must be taken to isolate the organized greed aspect

⁵³ “Drug Trafficking Emerging as Top National Security Threat To Tajikistan,” *Eurasia Insight* [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050803.shtml>], May 8, 2003. Tajikistan is responsible for eighty-five percent of all drug seizures in Central Asia.

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, “Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace,” 19.

⁵⁵ William J. Olsen, “Crisis of Governance: Present and Future Challenges,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (Summer 1994): 151.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, “Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace,” 9. Support for Islamic opposition groups including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Hizb-ut-Tahir is growing in the northern region of the country, which is traditionally the most secular and not a stronghold of anti-government movements. The sudden growth of support for such movements has been attributed to a perceived illegitimacy of the government due to increasing poverty among the population and corruption within the government.

of organized crime without exacerbating the legitimate need and grievances of citizens that it exploits and seeks to reinforce.

Strategies to combat organized crime in general and drug trafficking in particular can be grouped into two categories: reducing supply and immobilizing crime lords. Traditionally efforts have focused on the former, particularly through crop-eradication and substitution as well as interdiction. Current policy analyses with regards to Afghanistan continue to call for similar efforts and include a new emphasis on military security.⁵⁷ Such efforts do not address the proximate role that organized crime plays in state failure, however, but merely treat it as side effect of poverty and conflict. Moreover, they often exacerbate the need and grievances of citizens that are intertwined with organized crime, further eroding loyalty to the state. Consequently, such approaches are not likely to succeed as evidenced by the lessons learned in similar cases, particularly Colombia and Peru.

Targeting opium cultivation is not likely to have an immediate impact on the drug trade and thus address its role as a proximate cause of state failure, which is the crux of management and prevention. First, efforts that focus on coercive crop eradication ignore the political implications of involvement in organized crime and will likely contribute to the erosion of popular support for the state. This happened in Peru, where government coercive measures against farmers increased their allegiance to the Shining Path, and currently anger is rising in Afghanistan against coalition forcers over covert crop dustings.⁵⁸ Second, attempts at crop substitution through economic support are not likely to be sustainable in the absence of immobilizing the organized elements of the drug trade.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that recently in Tajikistan the Agha Khan Foundation has enforced a smuggling ban near the border with Afghanistan by threatening to cut off aid, without which it would be impossible to survive.⁵⁹ This is not sustainable in the absence of either eternal support or true economic development. Given the vast difference in earning opportunities between opium cultivation and trafficking and legal local crops such as wheat and onions, however, addressing the drug trade through anti-poverty measures will take decades of structural economic reform at both the local and international level.⁶⁰ Moreover, efforts aimed at the supply side of the drug trade tend to have paradoxical effects. In Latin America, they have simply caused displacement and dispersion of cultivation to other regions and have added

⁵⁷ The International Crisis Group continually calls for efforts at crop-substitution, particularly in Afghanistan. See ICG “Central Asia Drugs and Conflict”. The donor conference on Afghanistan held in Berlin in March 2004 also highlights the security concern posed by the resurgence of the drug trade and its connections to the Taliban. Recommendations focus exclusively on the need to extend military resources throughout the country in order to combat insurgents and terrorists. Amy Frumin, Morgan Courtney, Rebecca Linder, “The Road Ahead: Issues for Consideration at the Berlin Donor Conference for Afghanistan March 31-April 1 2004,” *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* [http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/0403_AfghanistanReport.pdf], accessed April 1, 2004. Washington has recently unveiled a new offensive against drugs, which is directed solely at crop eradication and providing alternatives to farmers. Jill McGivering, “US to tackle Afghan drugs trade,” *BBC News Online* [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4021323.stm], November 18, 2004.

⁵⁸ T. David Mason and Christopher Company, 152. Andrew North, “Mistrust hampers Afghan opium battle,” *BBC News Online* [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4066525.stm], December 4, 2004.

⁵⁹ ICG, “Central Asia Drugs and Conflict,” 5.

⁶⁰ Jake Sherman, “The Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed and Greed – A Conference Report,” *Program on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (International Peace Academy, September 10, 2001), 5. In Afghanistan and Tajikistan the situation is similar to that in Peru and Colombia where drugs are the only crops with free access to the international market at a reasonable price. Addressing the drug trade through economic development and crop substitution thus requires significant changes in the international market and trade regime.

economic value to coca production, raising the incentives of anti-state actors to strengthen their military and territorial power over those regions.⁶¹ The point is not that efforts should not be made to target root causes of the drug trade and state failure, especially poverty, but that this is not the key to addressing the immediate problems of the drug trade. Although organized crime preys on poverty, it is not merely a symptom. Moreover, the threat emanating from crime is immediate and it needs to be addressed immediately, whereas development approaches are a long-term process. In the short term aiming at the supply of drugs will disproportionately hurt the poor and reinforce many of the causes and effects of the drug trade.

Targeting the drug trade through military means is another popular policy with little potential for success. The problem lies in the assumption that the drug trade will disappear if the Taliban, IMU and other *political* insurgency groups are defeated. Organized crime, while connected to violence against the state, is not inimical to it and has its own primarily *economic* logic and dynamics that must be directly addressed. Moreover, such approaches have not worked elsewhere including Colombia, particularly because these groups have the financial and often political support to sustain a war against the state.⁶² The difficulty is compounded by the military realities faced in reconstruction. As a British Colonel in a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan testified, their role is peace support, which requires the consent of local peoples and necessitates the avoidance of conflict with criminal elements, especially when the number of troops is limited.⁶³ Moreover, military personnel are not properly trained for the specific requirements of counter-narcotic operations. Military security and law enforcement, while complimentary, are distinct, as are organized crime and political insurgency.

The participants who benefit the most economically and who most actively seek to weaken the state politically are the drug traffickers; they are the most important actors in the drug trade and offer the most immediate benefits from targeted counter-narcotics efforts. The best option for dealing with them is by treating them in their proper role: as criminals. Their source of income must be eliminated and they must be immobilized as actors without directly reinforcing the political and economic grievances of farmers and their support for anti-state actors. In this regard, intelligence and law enforcement efforts currently underway by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and similar projects by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are the most valuable contribution to the struggle against drugs and should be stepped up and more strongly integrated into regional structures.⁶⁴ While the need to vastly increase interdiction capabilities in Afghanistan was emphasized during the International Counter Narcotics Conference on Afghanistan, including the need for rapid reaction forces and counter-narcotic police, missing from the recommendations is a vision for regional cooperation.⁶⁵ Greater emphasis needs to be placed on regional intelligence sharing, which can be coordinated

⁶¹ Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, 6.

⁶² Olsen, 154. The Colombian government fought a war against the Medellin cartel for three years – in the end it won, however the Cali cartel simply expanded to take over Medellin operations and the government was too weak to fight it as well.

⁶³ Colonel Duncan Frances quoted in Andrew North, “Following the Afghan drugs trail,” *BBC News Online* [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3774003.stm], November 18, 2004.

⁶⁴ For an overview see the statement by Karen P. Tandy before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources Committee on Government Reform U.S. House of Representatives, “Afghanistan: Law Enforcement Interdiction Efforts in Transshipment Countries To Stem the Flow of Heroin” [http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/cngrtest/ct022604.htm], February 26, 2004. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *UNODC Afghanistan Projects*, 2003. Available online: www.unodc.org/afg/en/projects.html#AFG/H10.

⁶⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *International Counter Narcotics Conference on Afghanistan* (Kabul: February, 2004).

through existing multilateral organizations in the region such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which focuses on addressing common regional concerns including separatism, terrorism and drug trafficking.⁶⁶ Moreover, the organization has recently created a Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure for the purpose of intelligence sharing and coordination, which can easily be extended to include a focus on drug trafficking. Granted, this is a weak organization with limited experience in cooperation and it has yet to accept Afghanistan as a member, however with institutional support its efforts to jointly combat regional security threats including the drug trade can be enhanced.

In this regard, monetary, training and knowledge-sharing technical assistance should be provided to strengthen the capacity of not only the Afghan government but also other governments and organizations in the region to effectively gather intelligence on the drug trade and apprehend those individuals involved in trafficking. Conceptually this requires an expansion of the traditional toolbox for conflict management beyond traditional military and development instruments to include a greater integration of intelligence and law-enforcement agencies. This expansion is necessary if proximate causes of state failure and violence, such as organized crime, which not only feed off of root grievances but also sustain the process of state collapse and reinforce its incapacity, are to be addressed.

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⁶⁶ Roy Allison, "Structures and frameworks for security policy cooperation in Central Asia" in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, eds. Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 256. The current members of the organization are Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

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