

5 Illegal Drug Plant Cultivation and Armed Conflicts: Case Studies from Asia and Northern Africa

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In Asia and other continents, the internal peace of a number of countries has been affected, sometimes even conditioned, by the existence of illegal agricultural production and the ensuing illegal trade (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007). However, through loss of politico-territorial control, the armed conflicts that have afflicted certain states have made possible and even encouraged the development of such agricultural production and trafficking. Indeed, significant systemic effects have long existed between guerrilla and civil war economies on the one hand, and the economies resulting from illegal activities on the other hand. As demonstrated by Alfred McCoy as early as 1972 in his seminal book *The Politics of Heroin* (McCoy, 1972; re-edited in 1991 and in 2003), war economies and drug economies have a long common history, in Asia and elsewhere. Asia will be the main focus of this chapter since it holds a special importance in the history of illegal drugs, notably because the opium trade has long been part of various armed conflicts and geopolitical rivalries (from the Sino-British opium wars to the more recent Afghan and Burmese wars); and because, as a consequence of the economic, political and historical importance of the opium trade in the region, this is where 'the symbiotic relationship between trafficker and politician that has become the dominant feature of the contemporary drug

trade has its roots' (Meyer and Parssinen, 1998, p. 12), and this is also where the global prohibition of certain drugs originated.

In Afghanistan and in Burma the illegal opium economy has been partly responsible for financing the ongoing war efforts of some of the opposing factions, since the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989) in Afghanistan and since the independence (1948) of Burma (where the world's longest civil war is still going). But if opium has clearly been one of the sinews of war for some of the Afghan and Burmese guerrillas and factions, it often subsequently has become one of the stakes of war. Understandably, the strong synergies existing between civil war economies and illegal drug economies, especially agriculture-based drug economies, have therefore weighed upon the two countries' potential for political and economic development. As well as allowing and even encouraging prolongation of conflict and making any resolution of crises all the more difficult, the conflict/drug 'synergy' has also laid the foundations for the criminalization of the peace economies in both countries, so potentially compromising their internal peace and security.

Through these connections with the war economy, the opium economy has certainly had a destabilizing effect in the recent histories of Afghanistan and Burma. But it is important to stress that, while the opium economy has surely

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helped perpetuate the Afghan and Burmese conflicts, it did not cause them. Also, the ongoing politico-territorial and economic crises that exist in both countries do not result from their illegal drug economies – at least, not directly. Nor did the opium economy simply bankroll some of the parties at war to a greater or lesser extent. In fact, it enabled many Afghan and Burmese farmers to survive as best as they could during long periods of economic depression. As Jonathan Goodhand writes, ‘opium is simultaneously a conflict good, an illicit commodity and a means of survival’ (Goodhand, 2005, p. 211).

Synergies between war economies and drug economies are nothing new, although the oldest documented case of an Asian civil war to have been financed, at least to some extent, by opium proceeds is China in the late 1910s. Yuan Shikai, the second president (1912–1916) of the Republic of China, had perpetuated the opium suppression campaign started before him but, after his death in 1916, and the subsequent breakdown of the central government, former warlords-turned-military governors split into countless factions, and warlordism emerged again. During this period, ‘narcotics provided a means to finance the expensive arms and ammunition required to survive as a warlord’ and ‘opium revenue became a major financial resource for warlords, mainly through “fines” on cultivation, trafficking, selling, and smoking’ (Meyer and Parssinen, 1998, p. 143; Zhou, 1999, p. 40).

In the late 1920s, ‘the escalating cost of warfare forced even the most reluctant and high-minded politicians to turn to the opium business for revenues’ and even Chiang Kai-shek, despite his hostility to morphine and heroin, was forced to ‘acknowledge opium’s significance’ in order to consolidate his power in the country (Meyer and Parssinen, 1998, pp. 158, 154). Later, in the mid-1930s, the Nationalists, confronted with increasing international and national pressure, launched a nationwide antidrug campaign that eventually failed. However, as historian Zhou Yongming stresses, such a move was strategically motivated as it was in part designed to ‘consolidate the power of the central government nationwide by cutting off the revenue sources of regional powers’ (Zhou, 1999, p. 78). Then, as historians Kathryn Meyer and Terry Parssinen explain:

It was in this hothouse, created by China’s disintegration and the League [of Nations]’s successes, that gangsters and politicians molded the modern international narcotics trafficking industry. The symbiotic relationship between trafficker and politician that has become the dominant feature of the contemporary drug trade has its roots in Asia in the early twentieth century. The men in the shadows succeeded because they structured their careers with webs of smoke at the point where profits and power converge.

(Meyer and Parssinen, 1998, p. 12)

However, symbiosis between drug traffickers, politicians and other power holders, and synergies between war economies and drug economies only fully developed during the Cold War.

The Cold War and the Rise of Opium Production in Asia

The Cold War played a direct and prominent role in the production and trafficking of illegal drugs. Indeed, the financing of many anti-communist covert operations, such as those led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), resorted to the drug economy that existed in various proxy states where drug trafficking was often condoned and even encouraged. Specific historical cases illustrate how the anti-communist agenda of the CIA played a decisive role in spurring the global illegal drug trade by condoning it and even facilitating it. These include the French Connection and the role of the Corsican mafia against communists in France and in Southeast Asia (Laos and Vietnam), the propping up of the defeated Kuomintang (KMT) in northern Burma, the Islamic mujahideen resistance in Afghanistan, and, on another continent, the Contras in Nicaragua, as extensively and very convincingly documented and demonstrated by Alfred McCoy (McCoy, 2003; Chouvy, 2007).

The United States, as the leader of the global struggle against communism, extensively used its special services and intelligence agencies to conduct covert operations worldwide. In the global struggle to contain communism, local aid was needed and widely found in local criminal organizations. It is in Southeast Asia, in Southwest Asia and in Latin America that the CIA most significantly influenced the illegal drug trade. Its

anti-communist covert operations benefited from the participation of some drug-related combat units who, to finance their own struggle, were directly involved in illegal drug production and trafficking. Considering the involvement of different groups in the drug trade (e.g. the Hmong in Laos, the Kuomintang (KMT) in Burma and the mujahideen in Afghanistan), their CIA backing implied that the agency condoned the use of drug proceeds and the increase of opiate production in Asia. However, no evidence has surfaced to suggest that the CIA condoned or facilitated the exportation of heroin to the US or Europe, as clearly happened with the Nicaraguan Contras (McCoy, 2003; Chouvy, 2007).

In October 1949, the communists defeated the KMT in China, and in the years that followed they cracked down on what was then the world's largest opium production network. Opium production then shifted to the mountainous and frontier areas of Burma, Laos and Thailand, where KMT remnants had fled and became deeply involved in drug trafficking. Beginning in 1951, the CIA supported the KMT in Burma in an unsuccessful effort to assist it in regaining a foothold in China's Yunnan province. Arms, ammunition and supplies were flown into Burma from Thailand by the CIA's Civil Air Transport (CAT), later renamed Air America and, still later, Sea Supply Corporation, created to mask the shipments. The Burmese Army eventually drove KMT remnants from Burma in 1961, but they later resettled in Laos and northern Thailand and continued to run most of the opium trade (McCoy, 2003; Chouvy, 2007).

Following the 1954 French defeat in Indochina, the US gradually took over the intelligence and military fight against communism in both Laos and Vietnam. It also took over the drug trafficking business developed by the French by buying the opium produced by the Hmong and Yao hill tribes to enlist them in counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Minh. To meet the costs of this war, the French secret intelligence service, then called the SDECE (*Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage*), allied itself with the Corsican syndicates trafficking opium from Indochina to Marseille to take over the opium trade that the colonial government had outlawed in 1946. The CIA ran its secret army in Laos, composed largely of Hmong tribesmen led by General Vang Pao. Air America

would fly arms to the Hmong and fly back their opium to the CIA base at Long Tieng, where Vang Pao had set up a large heroin laboratory. Some of the heroin was then flown to south Vietnam, where part of it was sold to US troops. After the Americans pulled out of Vietnam in 1975, Laos became the world's third largest opium producer and retained this rank until the mid-2000s (McCoy, 2003; Chouvy, 2007).

However, Vietnam was not the only battleground of Cold War drug operations. The CIA launched a new major covert operation in South-west Asia in the early 1980s to support Afghanistan's mujahideen guerrillas in their fight against Soviet occupation. US President Ronald Reagan was determined to counter what he viewed as Soviet hegemony and expansionism, a goal shared by his CIA director, William Casey. To support the mujahideen with arms and funds, the CIA resorted to one of Pakistan's intelligence services, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which chose which Afghan leaders to back and used trucks from Pakistan's military National Logistics Cell (NLC) to carry arms from Karachi to the Afghan border. However, the ISI not only chose Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an important Afghan opium trafficker, as its main beneficiary, but also allowed NLC trucks to return from the border loaded with opium and heroin. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, US aid to the mujahideen stopped, and the internecine conflict that ensued in the country favoured an increase in opium production in order to maintain rival warlords and armies. Afghanistan eventually became the world's biggest opium-producing country and has remained such since (McCoy, 2003; Chouvy, 2009).

As Jill Jonnes puts it:

In the years before World War II, American international narcotics policy had been extremely straightforward. The United States was righteously against anything that promoted or sustained the nonmedical use of addicting drugs. But the Cold War created not only new national security policies, but a new shadow world that accepted a far more ambivalent attitude toward drugs and drug trafficking.

(Jonnes, 1996, pp. 164–165)

Illegal drug production and trafficking increased during the Cold War. During this period, the US government was less interested in waging the 'war on drugs' begun in 1971 by Richard Nixon than in using drug traffickers to support its wars

and proxies abroad. Indeed, had the CIA cracked down on drug trafficking during the Cold War, it would have forgone valuable intelligence sources, political influence and much-needed funding for its covert, and sometimes illegal, operations. Ironically, there is no evidence that the Soviet Union or its secret intelligence agency, the KGB, resorted to drug sales to fund activities during the Cold War. Therefore, after the modern international narcotics trafficking industry emerged in pre-World War II China, and after communism enabled the People's Republic of China to suppress local opium production, trafficking and consumption, the fight against communism implied by the Cold War justified that opium production and trafficking be resorted to in order to finance covert operations and secret wars.

In the third edition of *The Politics of Heroin*, Alfred McCoy writes:

Rhetoric about the drug evil and the moral imperative of its extirpation has been matched by a paradoxical willingness to subordinate or even sacrifice the cause for more questionable goals. The same governments that seem to rail most sternly against drugs, such as Nationalist China in the 1930s and the United States since the 1940s, have frequently formed covert alliances with drug traffickers

(McCoy, 2004, p. 459)

In his effort to reveal the extent of the 'CIA complicity in the global drug trade' McCoy then explains that 'nowhere is this contradiction between social idealism and political realism more evident than in the clash between prohibition and protection during the cold war' (McCoy, 2004, p. 459). However, the end of the Cold War was not to reduce illegal opium production in Asia, as the end of foreign subsidies to warring Afghan factions largely spurred opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. During most of the 20th century, wars and conflicts fostered illegal opium production and made peace-building more difficult as war economies and drug economies fed each other in a vicious circle.

War and Illegal Agricultural Drug Production

Illegal agricultural drug production does not only occur in Asia: vast expanses of illegally cultivated

coca bushes and cannabis plants, but also of opium poppies, exist in the Americas (including large-scale outdoor cannabis cultivation in the US and Canada, and opium poppy cultivation in Mexico and Colombia) and in Africa (widespread, though never properly estimated, cannabis cultivation). Of course, illegal cash crops are usually, though not always, more profitable than local food crops or even other possible, legal, cash crops, and it is tempting to explain that people resort to them simply due to economic considerations. But illegal cash crops proliferate above all in contexts of armed conflict (Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia) or open or rampant social, economic or political crisis (economic and political crises in sub-Saharan Africa, Morocco and Peru; social and political tensions in Bolivia) that compromise the politico-territorial controls necessary to impose the rule of law in a given country (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007). Illegal cash crops are not only and perhaps not mainly the result of economic problems, but instead thrive in political contexts marked by the use and consequences of force and violence, and by complex and often transnational power struggles.

This is precisely how opium production was first commercially developed in Asia: in the context of colonialism and of early globalization. War played a very early role in the spread of opium production and consumption in Asia as two 'opium wars' (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) were waged in the 19th century by the British in order to impose their opium trade upon Imperial China. Later, opium economies largely contributed to making wars more viable and even profitable and, in turn, wars and the political and territorial disruptions they caused made illicit opium production easier. In Asia, opium production clearly thrived in the two countries that underwent the continent's longest wars: Afghanistan and Burma (Chouvy, 2009).

Therefore, it seems that war best explains the success of Afghanistan's and Burma's illegal drug economies. In fact, to simply pretend that illegal drug crops prosper on the ruins of underdevelopment proves much harder. If low levels of economic development and (even more so) a strong incidence of poverty can logically and legitimately, yet not legally, urge certain populations, mainly rural and often peripheral and marginal, to resort to an agricultural illegal drug economy (as indeed do

many Afghan and Burmese farmers), nevertheless the drugs–underdevelopment correlation does not seem to possess the validity that we very often wish to lend it. It is indeed easy to observe that economic underdevelopment and poverty are not burdens endemic to areas of illegal agricultural drug production and that they cannot explain its emergence and perpetuation in a systematic way: in Asia as well as in Latin America (mostly Colombia and Mexico) illegal opium production is much more concentrated and localized than poverty. Concurrently, illegal agricultural production is far from being restricted to the developing world or to countries at war, since Canada and the US are among the world's very first illegal producers of marijuana (both indoor and outdoor cultivation). The market value of US-produced marijuana reportedly exceeded US\$35 billion in 2005, a time when it was still completely illegal, more than the country's most profitable staple crop, maize (US\$23 billion) (Gettman, 2006). Now that cannabis cultivation has become legal in a few select US states, the data would need to be reevaluated.

The overlap that can be observed between areas of underdevelopment and areas of agricultural production of illicit drugs does not explain the resort to the latter in a satisfactory way. Indeed, many more countries would resort to the production of illegal drugs, especially in Asia where history and ecology would make Central Asian, Chinese and Indian production all the more easy, if economic underdevelopment were the main cause of illegal opium production (Chouvy, 2009).

In the same way, it does not seem that the other variable frequently advanced to explain the appeal of the opium economy – that of an economic strategy designed by dominated and marginalized ethnic minorities – has any more validity than that of poverty. While in Asia opium production is almost exclusively undertaken by tribal people, opium farmers differ greatly in Burma, in Laos and in Thailand, where they all belong to ethnic minorities, and in Afghanistan, where it is the largely dominant (politically, culturally and demographically) Pashtun people, one of the world's largest tribal groups, who resort to opium poppy cultivation (yet, other ethnic/tribal groups also produce opium). In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, previously (1955–2010) known as the North West Frontier

Province (NWFP), where opium production had almost been suppressed until it reappeared in the early 2000s, poppies are not cultivated by the country's dominant group, but Pakistan's poppy farmers are, like in Afghanistan, Pashtun people, and are not really dominated as much as Southeast Asia's tribal group may be (although they are far from being dominant the way the ethnic Thais or Burmans are) (Chouvy, 2009).

Therefore, economics and ethnicity may be pushed aside as unique causal factors leading to illicit agricultural production. But even ecological or more classic geographical factors fail to explain why opium production is resorted to by some specific groups or peoples in some countries and why it is not more widespread. Of course, in Southeast Asia, opium production takes place in very different ecological milieus and geographical environments than in Afghanistan (Chouvy, 2011). The heavily rainfed highlands of Southeast Asia where opium is produced lie in the far peripheries and borderlands of Burma, Laos and Thailand, while the main opium-producing areas of Afghanistan are largely, but not exclusively, located in much drier lowlands, irrigated or not. Ecological and geographical constraints are definitely worse in Southeast Asia's hills and mountains, where most people rely almost exclusively on rainfed agriculture, suffer from a lack of access to regional markets and do not have many other cash crop opportunities than the one offered to them by opium (Chouvy, 2009).

But what changed the 'hill tribe economy from subsistence agriculture to cash-crop opium farming' (McCoy, 1991, p. 119) in Southeast Asia in the 1940s is similar to what spurred large-scale commercial opium production in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s. War, whether through strategic use of opium and opium producers (the Hmong in Laos and the mujahideen in Afghanistan), or through physical destruction (orchards, irrigation channels, landmines in Afghanistan), or both (added physical destruction and economic disruption caused by decades of war in Burma and Afghanistan), has turned opium production into a funding (or enriching) resource for military commanders and warlords confronted with finance shortages, and into a coping mechanism for farmers confronted with a new war-driven market (based on the strategic and therefore

economic value of opium) and with war-induced physical and economic disruptions.

Therefore, there clearly exists a strong correlation between war economies and drug economies, most notably in Afghanistan and in Burma. Although opium production predated the Afghan and Burmese conflicts, the wars and internecine conflicts that plagued both countries clearly spurred illegal opium production. In return, opium production helped perpetuate the Afghan and Burmese conflicts by making them economically viable. However, as Gaston Bouthoul warned – long before the World Bank economist Paul Collier argued that ‘greed considerably outperforms grievances’ in triggering and perpetuating civil wars – ‘one should not confuse the economic aspect of conflicts with their necessity or their economic fatality’ (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; Bouthoul, 1991, p. 226). Indeed, the Afghan and Burmese conflicts obviously did not start because of opium production, for their causes were much more complex and deep rooted. The key causes of large-scale illegal opium production in Afghanistan and in Burma lie in the pre-existence of opium production to war in both countries, in the transnationalization (mainly by the Soviet Union, the CIA, China, the Communist Party of Burma and the KMT) of their conflicts, and finally in the necessity of both countries’ belligerents to find alternative financial resources after foreign subsidies and support were cut off.

War alone, however, cannot satisfactorily explain the emergence or the development of illegal opium production. While the cost of war may explain such recourse in Burma and in Afghanistan, where many warring factions clearly resorted to the opium economy to fund their operations during decades, the case of illicit cannabis production urges some caution. Cannabis cultivation and hashish production have developed considerably in Morocco during the last decades of the twentieth century until, interestingly, the 2003 crop equalled that of opium poppy in Afghanistan in 2004: 134,000 ha of cannabis were reportedly cultivated in 2003 in Morocco (UNODC, 2003), while opium poppies covered 131,000 ha in Afghanistan a year later. The comparison is all the more striking since both countries hold almost the same area of arable land (Afghanistan holds 12% of arable land (7.8 million ha) and Morocco, whose territory

is smaller, holds 19% of arable land (8.5 million ha)) (Chouvy, 2009).

Yet, hashish production in Morocco differs greatly from opium production in Afghanistan or in Burma, or even from coca production in Colombia, as no armed conflict challenges the writ of the Cherifian kingdom over its territory (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007). Although cannabis cultivation is illegal in Morocco, a complex set of colonial, political and economic factors has resulted in an entrenched tolerance of hashish production in the northern region of the country, the Rif Mountains. The Rif is one of the poorest regions in Morocco and its tribal Berber population has long resisted foreign and even Arabic rule, eventually obtaining a *de facto* tolerance of cannabis cultivation by the Moroccan state that obviously saw the large hashish economy as an alternative to regular economic development (Chouvy, 2005). Both ecologically and economically, cannabis cultivation and its rapid increase in the Rif Mountains during the past decades are understandable. The Rif is densely populated and is one of the most unsuitable regions of Morocco for intensive agricultural production: a rugged relief of steep slopes and poor soils, combined with heavy but irregular rainfall compounded by a lack of irrigation infrastructure, make most crops other than cannabis not worth the labour invested.

War clearly cannot explain Morocco’s large-scale illegal agricultural drug production but other features previously identified in Afghanistan and in Burma are also present in Morocco: poverty, geographical and ecological constraints, and problematic inter-ethnic relations make a complex set that is highly favourable to the production of an illegal cash crop. But although Moroccan cannabis cultivation has not developed in an armed conflict context, it is nevertheless, at least to some extent, the consequence of tense and violent relations and even of full-blown wars (the Rif War, 1921–1926) between the Cherifian state and the Riffian Berbers. What the Moroccan example shows is that a crop whose production benefited both economically and strategically the French and the Spanish Moroccan Protectorates (cannabis cultivation was only really prohibited in 1954 in the French Protectorate and in 1956 in the Spanish Protectorate, at independence) became entrenched in one of the poorest and most restive areas of the country (Chouvy, 2005).

Long-term consequences of war and low-intensity conflicts have made the Rif perhaps the largest region of hashish production in the world. Without an ongoing war in the Rif that could explain its current existence and importance, illegal cannabis cultivation appears to be tacitly tolerated by the state, whatever the reason: either because the state benefits economically and strategically from it, or because it does not have the means to control its own territory and to impose its writ over it. Most likely, the reality lies somewhere in between: since independence the Moroccan state has not had the political and economic means to prohibit and/or eradicate cannabis cultivation in the Rif, nor has it had the means to promote economic alternatives to a fast-growing and profitable hashish industry. Corruption has of course played a large role in the development of cannabis cultivation, and many drug-related scandals have rocked the state's administration in the past years. In the end, what explains the huge extent of illicit cannabis cultivation in a country at peace such as Morocco is the failure of the state to control its territory, that is, by economic development, political integration and law enforcement. Most likely, the Moroccan state has lacked the authority, legitimacy and capacity to impose the rule of law on its entire territory, to formulate adequate strategies and to carry out reforms (Chouvy, 2009).

In Afghanistan and in Burma, war has played a fundamental role in the development of illegal opium production and it is highly probable that their respective productions would not have reached such levels if they had not been at war for so long. In fact, although underfunded wars clearly favour the resort to informal and illegal economies (both by civilians and the military), it is not war per se that makes large-scale illegal agricultural production possible, but the lack of state territorial control that war implies. While opium production preceded war in Afghanistan and in Burma and developed as it financially helped to perpetuate war, it does seem, according to the cases of Afghanistan, Burma and Morocco, that illegal agricultural production has a tendency to outlive war and to complicate transitions from war economies to peace economies. Worse, it is likely that forced suppression of illegal agricultural productions without adequate compensation and alternatives may well threaten old status quos, as in Morocco, or

compromise peace-building and state-building, as in Afghanistan and in Burma.

Drugs and War: The 'War on Drugs'

Throughout modern history, illegal agricultural drug production has been spurred on or even imposed by wars, among other things because it has helped make wars viable or even profitable for some belligerents, and sustainable for some civilians. Yet, wars have not only been waged by way of and for drug proceeds: they have also been waged against drugs. In fact, US President Richard Nixon (1969–1974) launched a 'war on drugs' in 1971 that, after it successfully attacked Turkish opium production, 'defined the character of subsequent drug wars by applying the full coercive resources of the United States government to eradicate narcotics production at its source' (McCoy, 2004, p. 47). However, during four decades the extremely expensive US-led war on drugs denounced at length by McCoy (2003, 2004) and many others not only produced many 'unintended consequences' (Tullis, 1999) and failed to achieve both US and UN objectives of global interdiction and suppression of *certain* drugs, it also proved counterproductive. As McCoy stresses, 'after 30 years of failed eradication, there is ample evidence to indicate that the illicit drug market is a complex global system, both sensitive and resilient, that quickly transforms suppression into stimulus' (McCoy, 2004, p. 96). Reduction and even suppression of drug supplies in producer countries has been the guiding line as well as the ultimate goal of the global prohibition regime and of the war on drugs (Bewley-Taylor, 2001). However, almost 40 years of war on drugs have in fact accompanied, if not encouraged, expansion not only of illegal opium poppy cultivation (in Asia as well as Latin America) but also of coca (in South America) and cannabis cultivation (worldwide).

In fact, as many observers have noted, 'the Drug war has achieved a self-perpetuating life of its own' for 'rather than reassess the failure of US prohibition policies, [US] federal officials blame smaller countries with meagre resources for the problems in their inner cities and suburbs' (Blumenson and Nilsen, 1998, p. 38; Davenport-Hines, 2001, p. 348). This is why drug war politics have been described as 'politics of denial'

(Bertram *et al.*, 1996). Despite its gigantic yet unmeasured global cost (around US\$50 billion spent annually by the US alone in the 2000s), the war on drugs has not only failed to reduce surface areas dedicated to illegal drug crops and quantities produced, it has also expanded and dispersed these illegal crops worldwide, while doing much to contribute to the militarization of many countries and areas of production (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007).

The steady increase in global opium production observed since the early 1970s occurred in spite of the many efforts deployed by the international community to suppress or reduce illegal opium poppy cultivation worldwide. Illegal opium production has increased despite countless forced eradication campaigns and in spite of many crop substitution and alternative development programmes. It can even be argued, as I have done elsewhere (Chouvy, 2009), that the increase of illegal opium production is due, at least to some extent, to the counterproductivity of forced eradication campaigns. Of course, the reasons for such a global failure are many and complex, rooted in the long history and politics of Asia and of the poppy.

First and foremost, opium production has clearly benefited from the turmoil of Asian history and geopolitics. The 19th-century opium wars, the 20th-century Cold War and its many local conflicts waged by proxy in Burma, Laos and Afghanistan, and even the 21st-century War on Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, have all spurred the continent's illegal opium production. Illegal drug economies and war economies share a long common history and have affected many territories in Asia and elsewhere.

Yet, illegal opium production has not benefited only from synergies between war

economies and drug economies. It has also thrived on economic underdevelopment and poverty, whether war-induced or not: it is now widely acknowledged that the vast majority of Asian opium farmers grow poppies in order to cope with poverty and, above all, food insecurity (Chouvy, 2009). But despite the fact that the vast majority of Asian opium farmers are among the poorest of the poor, too many observers and policy-makers still doubt that they engage in illegal opium production out of need – and not out of greed. In 2007, even the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime bluntly argued that Afghan opium production was not linked to poverty – ‘much to the contrary’. In fact, as shown by history and geography, illegal opium production never thrives better than when war and poverty overlap, as is the case in both Afghanistan and Burma. Part of the problem, in both Afghanistan and Burma, is that illegal opium production is likely to outlive their respective and successive wars. Obviously, peace-building is a difficult task and peace is hard to obtain and sustain. But war often transformed political and economic realities and dynamics to such an extent that time is needed for war-torn countries to achieve transition from war economies to peace economies. To bring an end to illegal opium production has proven as, if not more, difficult as ending wars – and maybe poverty – in the countries where poppies are illegally grown. In predominantly rural countries such as Afghanistan and Burma, whose conflicts have lasted for decades and have stalled economic growth and development, it seems that the suppression of illicit opium production can only follow – and proceed from – the establishment of peace and the initial reconstruction of the state and of the economy.

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