

PAKISTAN: FAR-RIGHT ISLAMIST MILITANTS AND A RESURGENCE IN THE ILLICIT OPIATES TRADE

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Abstract

Between the mid-1970s and late-1990s, Pakistan was a major source of illicit opium and heroin to the global market. By 2001, development and law enforcement activities were successful in creating a business environment in which Pakistani opium poppy farmers could not compete with their Afghan counterparts, resulting in Pakistan being declared 'opium free' by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime. Since 2003, there has been a gradual increase in illicit opium production in Pakistan, however, the state has been able to eradicate as much as 77 percent of all crops; this was not the case in 2008, mainly due to the redeployment of resources from counter-narcotics to countermilitancy operations. This paper posits that the current high levels of violent conflict between the state and far-right Islamist militants could act as an impetus to an increase in illicit opium production in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

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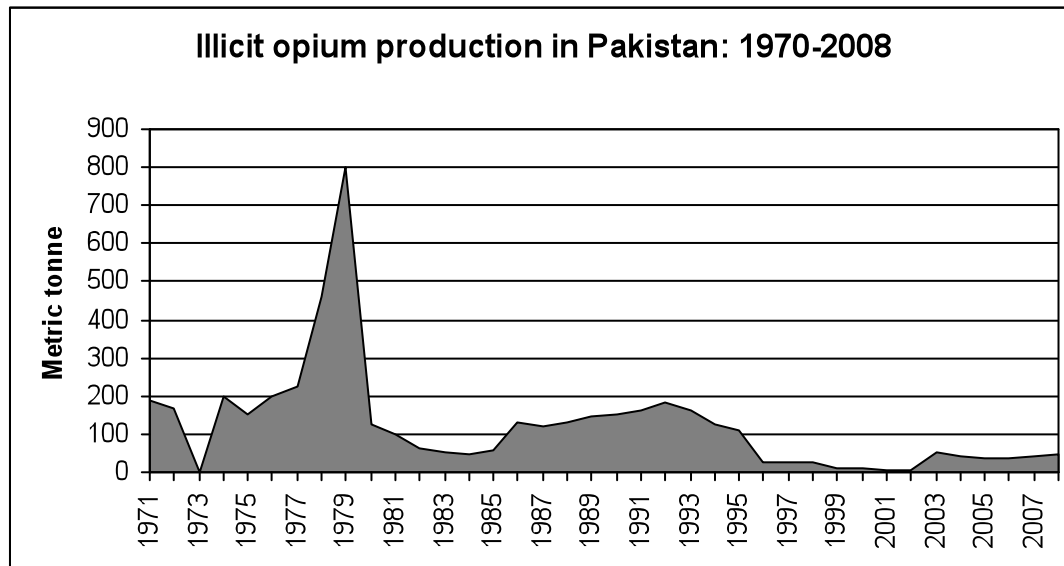
This paper is split into six main sections. Section one offers a brief introduction to the history and present administrative and criminal justice structures of the NWFP and FATA, this section examines the current situation in context to engage a deeper understanding of the current issues. Section two, describes the activities of far-right Islamist militants within NWFP and FATA. Section three draws from contemporary illicit drug control theory to explore the possibility of a further, more pronounced, resurgence in illicit opium production. Section four, investigates the interconnectedness of the Pakistan and Afghan illicit opium trades and the possibility that the high-levels of Afghan illicit opium production could act as a barrier to Pakistan's re-entry into large scale illicit opium production. Sections five and six summarise the cumulative effects of the various strands effecting illicit opium production in Pakistan before offering some conclusions and broad suggestions.

The conflict between the Government of Pakistan and far-right Islamist militants² in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has implications for national and regional security, and large scale humanitarian repercussions. A further, neglected, concern is that this conflict has the potential to act as a catalyst to a resurgent production of illicit opium in Pakistan.

As illustrated in Chart One, from the mid-1970s until the late 1990s, Pakistan was a substantial supplier of illicit raw opium - much of which was refined into heroin in laboratories situated in Pakistan and Afghanistan - to the global market. The majority of this illicit production was situated in NWFP and FATA. From the mid-1970s onwards the Government of Pakistan, with the assistance of international agencies and donor nations, undertook eradication and 'alternative development' programmes in opium cultivating areas, which were supported by law enforcement operations against traffickers and heroin refiners.

² While many militant groups in Pakistan are founded on far-right patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law, favoured by the Taliban and al-Qaeda, there is no universal theology or objective binding all groups. In December 2007, several of the larger militant groups in FATA and NWFP entered into a loose coalition operating under the umbrella of Tehrik-i-Taliban (US State Department 2008), sometime referred to as the 'Pakistani Taliban' (Yusufzai 2008). There are also some foreign militant groups and non-'Pakistani Taliban' affiliated far-right Islamist groups such as Lashkar-i-Islam and Ansar-i-Islam in Khyber (BBC 2009). Further, some have argued that many are no more than criminal organisations using Islam as a pretence (Fisher 2009). As such this article shall use the generic far-right Islamist militants, unless referring to a specific group.

Chart One



Sources: Adapted from NNICC. (Various years). *The Supply of Illicit Drugs to the U.S.* Drug Enforcement Agency: Washington; UNODC. (Various years). *World Drug Report*. United Nations: Vienna.

Note: data for 1970 and 1973 unavailable.

Though all projects differed in substance, and effectiveness, their overall foundation was development and, for the purposes of this paper, some generalisations are made. The illicit opium growing areas received assistance in constructing transport and social welfare infrastructures and, irrigation and land levelling to increase crop productivity. Agricultural extension workers introduced high-yield varieties of existing crops or established new crops such as tobacco or fruit trees, while instructing farmers in up-to-date agricultural techniques. All this was often completed through continual discussion with tribal leaders (see Der Meer 1989; Gillett 2001; Hunting Technical Services Limited 1984; Murphy 1983; USAID 1994; Williams and Rudel 1988).

Once the development projects began to produce tangible results for the tribes the state implemented phased eradication programmes. Each September, the Government of Pakistan decided in which areas it would suppress the cultivation of the opium poppy. State representatives would meet with tribal leaders and opium farmers in the targeted areas and inform them of the enforcement schedule. Farmers were advised that crops would be eradicated and that they could be prosecuted; the risks of illicit opium cultivation and production were highlighted to the opium poppy farming communities. Two more meetings were held prior to the sowing of poppy seeds to give second and third chances to accept alternative crops and support. Agricultural extension workers were on hand during this time to give advice on substitute crops and modern agricultural techniques (Boner 1991; Qureshi 1987).

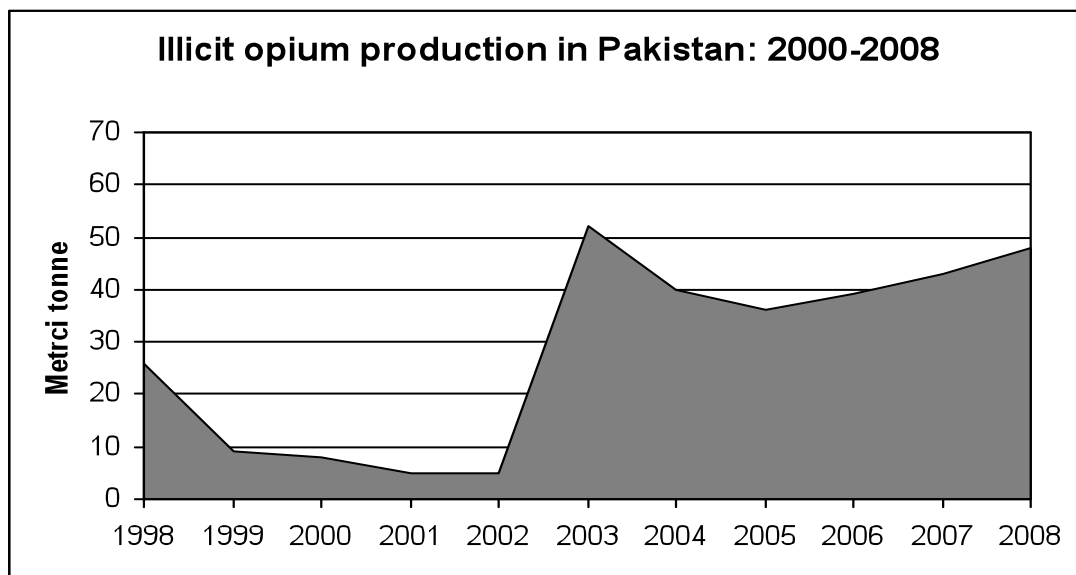
If any opium poppies were discovered following the initial warnings, they were eradicated. Eradication campaigns often consisted of the ploughing of farmers fields by state employees under armed guard. However, the military 'bombardment' of resistant villages with heavy artillery was practised (Girardet 1989), as was the aerial spraying of hard to reach crops with herbicides (Asad & Harris 2003; Economist 1987; Sadeque

1992). If farmers re-cultivated opium after the initial eradication, they were prosecuted (Qureshi 1987).³

Individually, the projects have been responsible for suppressing opium cultivation and, to varying degrees, increasing development in the Buner region of Swat District, Dir District, Malakand and Gadoon-Amazai in NWFP, Gilgit in the Northern Areas and Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies in FATA. The cumulative effect was Pakistan being declared 'opium free' by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2001.

However, in 2003 resurgence in illicit production was witnessed, Chart Two below illustrates this upward and potentially worrying trend. The Pakistani state has been able to limit the damage of this resurgence by eradicating as much as 77 percent of all opium poppies cultivated (UNODC 2008). However, in 2008 virtually none of the 1,729 hectares of opium poppies cultivated in Khyber, Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies of FATA (180 hectares were reported to be cultivated outside of these Agencies), were eradicated due to the redeployment of troops and tribal militia to anti-militant operations (US State Department 2009a). The experience of the 1998 to 2008 period is illustrative of both the achievements of the development projects - in establishing an infrastructure which facilitates law enforcement - and the inherent problems of illicit drug control during times of violent conflict.

Chart Two



Sources: Adapted from UNODC. (2009). *World Drug Report*. United Nations: Vienna.

History and present administrative structure of NWFP and FATA

The nation state of Pakistan is a strange and complicated administrative machine. The following section will provide a context for a deeper understanding of the present situation regarding illicit drug control and the existence of far-right Islamist militants within FATA and NWFP. The section is divided into three sub-sections. The first

³ For an account which places both developmental and law enforcement operations in a more repressive, and corrupt, perspective please refer to Assad & Harris (2003).

briefly introduces the Pakistan state structure. The second offers an introduction to the administrative and criminal justice history of the NWFP and FATA. The third discusses the current administrative and criminal justice structure of FATA and NWFP.

Pakistan's current state structure: The state is currently divided into the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP. In addition are the Islamabad Capital Territory, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, known in Pakistan as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2009).

Administrative and criminal justice history of NWFP and FATA: The origins of the administrations of these areas are based within British colonial rule. Throughout the 19th Century the British administration in India was concerned that their territory and resources were vulnerable to raids from the Pashtun hill tribes of modern day NWFP and FATA. Furthermore, they were concerned that the mountain passes of Afghanistan offered a route for Russian forces to invade, or support uprisings in, British controlled India. To prevent these, three frontiers were established:

- The first area is now called the NWFP, and was directly administered by the British;
- The second was Afghanistan, independent of British rule;
- The third was the area, now FATA and parts of NWFP, between British controlled NWFP and Afghanistan. This was officially under the authority of the British Government yet retained legal autonomy; tribal custom was the primary authority of these areas, although British coercive forces were stationed near-by (Embree 1977; Keppel 1911).

From 1852, the British attempted numerous military campaigns to subjugate the Pashtun tribes of the NWFP and FATA; with little success.⁴ These conflicts resulted in many treaties between the British and individual tribes; represented by tribal *Jirga*'s.⁵ The majority of these treaties consisted of an obligation to remain loyal to the British Empire, to not commit offences in British territories or trade routes, or give refuge to outlaws; in-exchange the British paid the tribes a yearly fee. If a member of the tribe broke these obligations then the state could legitimately fine the tribe or, as a last resort, use the military power of armed battalions stationed close-by. Through accepting these obligations, the tribes were free to govern their own affairs with minimal interference (Murphy 1983).

In 1901, the NWFP was granted the status of a separate province of India (prior to this, the area was classified as a part of the Punjab province). The province was divided into Settled Areas and Tribal Areas. Settled Areas, were administered as all other provinces of British India, headed by Deputy Commissioners and obliged to conform to all

⁴ Between 1849-1890, 42 military expeditions were sent into what is now NWFP to exert authority over Pashtun tribes (Haq 1996). For example, in July 1897, what is now the NWFP witnessed 'tribal revolts' against the British garrisons posted in Chitral and Malakand. The British sent in over 60,000 troops to suppress the uprising (SurrIDGE 2008).

⁵ The *Jirga* is a Pashtun customary dispute resolution mechanism practised by Pashtun tribes in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The primary sources of law are Islamic law, tribal custom and the Pukhtunwali (the Pashtun code of honour) for further details please refer to Wardak (2006).

Indian laws. Tribal areas, which were divided into Agencies and headed by Political Agents, continued to be legally autonomous. The role of the Agent was in many respects that of a diplomat, as its primary mandate was to protect British interests and ensure compliance with treaties signed between tribes and the British Government. Alongside the creation of the NWFP the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901 was enacted. This act created a framework for law enforcement including provisions of Indian criminal law modified to suit the tribal areas, while legally preserving the Pashtun *Jirga* system of customary dispute resolution (Qayyum 1993).

At partition the Indian Independence Act of 1947 Section 7, declared void any treaty or agreement between the tribes and Great Britain. Thus, Pakistan inherited no formal obligation to the tribes, yet they chose to honour all treaties and as a consequence they maintained the administrative structure and provisions of tribal autonomy. Approximately 30 treaties of accession were later entered into between Pakistan and many of the tribes, which strengthened these colonial agreements (Government of Pakistan 2009).

Current administrative and criminal justice structures: The 1973 Constitution includes FATA as a Pakistan territory, represented by the National Assembly and Senate, and under the direct authority of the President. However, the laws created by the National Assembly do not automatically apply to FATA, as they do in other parts of Pakistan, unless mandated by the President. The primary piece of legislation operating in the area continues to be the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901. At present the areas of FATA are classified as either 'Protected Areas', under the direct authority of the government, or 'Non-Protected Areas', under the authority of local tribes. The Protected Areas are those in which the Political Agent has the greater authority. The tribal *Jirgas* continues to implement the Frontier Crimes Regulations, however, the Political Agent examines the *Jirga's* verdict and has the power to either administer or reject a 'decision', or return the case to the *Jirga*. In Non-protected Areas the Agent has no authority over the decision of the *Jirga*; the tribes have primary authority over the implementation of justice. However, citizens can challenge the *Jirga's* decision in the Supreme Court or Peshawar High Court. The Political Agent continues to act as the diplomat, being the conduit between state and tribes and mediator between inter-tribe disputes. Furthermore, the Agent is mandated to act as project coordinator of development programmes (Government of Pakistan 2009).

The International Crises Group (2006: 3) has argued that the administrative structure in FATA treats the:

population as separate from and unequal to other Pakistani citizens'. FATA today is formally a part of Pakistan but more closely resembles a colony whose population lives under laws and administrative arrangements that set it apart from the rest of the state.

Of great importance is that the Frontier Crimes Regulations, and the *Jirga's* which they devolve much authority to, are inconsistent with many elements of international human rights law such as due process and non-discrimination before the law. Further Political Agents and external actors can often exert unofficial authority over a *Jirga's* decision.

The remaining 18 Districts of the NWFP come under the authority of the Constitution of 1973 and thus subject to the full scope of Pakistani law. These are referred to as Settled Areas. Five Districts were renamed Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) (Chitral, Swat, Dir, Buner and Kohistan) and have some tribal autonomy but are subject to a greater width of federal legislation (Murphy 1983; Qayyum 1993).

Thus, at present, parallel criminal justice systems operate in Pakistan. The state enforces federal and provincial laws over all 'settled' areas; it is the primary body of authority. Yet within parts of NWFP and all of FATA, the state criminal justice system has minimal legal authority and must negotiate with tribal leaders.

To add to this legal autonomy, many parts of FATA and NWFP offer inhospitable mountainous terrain, which makes law enforcement difficult - as is evident by the problems witnessed in the current counter-militant operations (Tellis 2008). One of the major objectives of the development and eradication programmes during the 1980s and 1990s was the linkage of the state to isolated tribal areas. The most successful projects allowed farmers to transport goods to national markets, allowed non-farm workers to search for employment outside of their locality and, allowed the state to enforce opium eradication and law enforcement.

To summarize, much of NWFP and all of NWFP is geographically and legally semi-autonomous; the state is reduced to negotiating with individual tribes to exert its authority. It is in this environment in which the current violent conflicts and illicit opium production is thriving.

Far-right Islamist militancy in FATA and NWFP

This section builds on the contextual foundation offered by the previous section by introducing a brief history and the present situation of far-right Islamist militant operations in NWFP and FATA.

During the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan, the Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency supported the Taliban against the Soviet regime and as a result many Taliban fighters were recruited from NWFP and FATA's Pashtun tribes (McCoy 2003). Thus, when the Taliban were removed by coalition forces from authority in Afghanistan in 2001 many, followed by al-Qaeda, returned to and sought refuge in the border regions of Pakistan. During the intervening years the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other far-right Islamist groups used these areas as staging grounds to launch offensives against Afghan and coalition forces within Afghanistan (Tellis 2008). Many far-right Islamist militant groups, most notably those under the 'Pakistani Taliban' umbrella, began to impose their vision of a repressive and backward Islamic state in Pakistan territory. They found much support in some areas and by 2007 far-right Islamist support had increased in almost all Tribal Agencies of FATA and settled areas of NWFP, such as Charsadda, Chitral, Dir, Mardan, Mansehra, Malakand, Peshawar and Swat⁶ (Fair 2007).

⁶ The 'Swat Taliban', a militant group under the 'Pakistani Taliban' umbrella, seized control of Buner, once the primary source of Pakistan opium, in April 2009. As of late May 2009, it appears that the Pakistani military are making some headway into reasserting their authority (Dawn 2009; Khan 2009).

At present parallel state systems (i.e. militant run courts, police, tax collection and relief programs) are operating in many areas of FATA and NWFP (US State Department 2009b). In addition to tax collection, the various militant groups are profiting from illegal logging, the mining of precious minerals (Roul 2009),⁷ kidnapping, bank robbery and smuggling to maintain their war chests (International Crises Group 2009).

There are cultural and religious links between militant groups and some Pashtun tribes which, coupled with the isolated and inhospitable nature of these areas, make counterinsurgency a difficult task. As such the Government of Pakistan has had to rely on demonstrations of heavy military force – often, though not always, lacking the support of the effected tribes - including the use of heavy artillery, aerial attacks and the large scale deployment of troops (Tellis 2008). For example, in May 2009, Pakistani air force bombed militants in Swat before sending in 12,000 troops, reportedly killing 700 militants (Economist 2009). The fighting in Swat alone has resulted in 1.7 million people being officially registering as internally displaced persons by mid-2009 (Rummery & Caux, 2009). These operations have stretched Pakistan's military resources, resulting in a redeployment away from illicit narcotics control (US State Department 2009b).

In the areas in which far-right Islamic militants have assumed authority, they have imposed their own version of repressive Islamic law. Prohibitions on girls attending school have been enacted. Barbers, video and music shops have been closed, while parallel criminal 'justice' systems are created with militants patrolling areas and meting out punishments (Dawn 2009; Hali 2007; International Crises Group 2006; Imtiaz 2008; US State Department 2008); including the burning with acid of girls breaking the prohibition on gaining an education (Hassan 2009) and the public hanging of those suspected of spying or 'anti-Islamic' behaviour (Masood 2009).

In summary, to combat militant activities the state has been forced to redeploy military and criminal justice resources away from illicit drug control operations. Further, in the worst effected areas an already weak state presence has been eroded to an even greater extent, as has traditional tribal criminal justice institutions. The existence of far-right militants has led to a further weakening of the capacity of the state to enforce illicit narcotics control laws.

A resurgence in illicit opium production

An impoverished agricultural population, with a weak state presence (Potulski 1991) and/or high levels of corruption coupled with high to medium levels of armed conflict (Morrison 1997) are often seen as necessary conditions for the large-scale production of illicit opium or coca; together they have the effect of decreasing the personal and economic risks associated with operating an illicit enterprise. The current conflict areas of NWFP and FATA satisfy these criteria.

Impoverished population: Pakistan is one of the poorest nations in the world: 22.5 percent of the population are below the poverty line, as defined by not being able to

⁷ In Mohmand Agency a marble quarry administered by a far-right Islamist group is believed to net the group up to US\$500 a day in taxes (Shar & Perlez 2008)

meet their daily food needs; the average life expectancy is 65 years; 94 out of every 1,000 children die before reaching the age of five; one in three do not have access to safe drinking water and 44 percent of children receive no primary school education (DFID 2009). The areas in which militants are engaged are usually the less developed areas of Pakistan (US State Department 2009b), for instance 60 percent of the population of FATA are below the poverty line while per capita income is half the national average. Literacy rates are also significantly lower than the Pakistan average (International Crises Group 2006). Far-right Islamist militants are operating in areas occupied by the most impoverished peoples of one of the world's least developed states.

High levels of corruption: The World Bank (2008) has ranked Pakistan within the lowest quartile of states with the ability to control corruption, it is reportedly less able than its neighbours of China, India and Iran. Illicit narcotics related corruption, during the 1980s and mid-1990s, has long been acknowledged as being widespread and unbridled at all levels of political, military and criminal justice institutions (McCoy 2003). Presently, the US State Department (2009a) reports that there is no evidence of senior state employees involvement in illicit narcotics related corruption, adding the caveat that low wages and general 'endemic' levels of corruption within state institutions make narcotics related corruption plausible at lower levels of the state.

Low levels of state authority: As discussed above, state authority has historically been minimal within FATA and parts of NWFP. Legal autonomy is constitutionally protected for many tribes, a position supported by the geographical isolation of many mountainous areas. In many parts of FATA, local tribal *Jirga*'s have high levels of judicial authority and state sovereignty appears to be more dependent on diplomacy than authority. State authority has been further eroded in areas in which far-right Islamist militants exert authority. In the worst effected areas state, and tribal, criminal justice and bureaucratic institutions have been ejected and replaced by militant groups.

High levels of armed conflict: Cornell (2007: 222) maintains that 'conditions of armed conflict boost, exacerbate, transform, and occasionally shift pre-existing patterns of narcotics production'. He proposes that if there is a tradition of illicit narcotic production within an area, as in Pakistan, violent conflicts can increase illicit production through the weakening of the criminal justice system and the inherent attractiveness of the profits of the trade to insurgent groups. Fighting a war is an expensive endeavour, taxing or controlling elements of the trade – such as the conduit between farmers and traffickers – can be a major source of revenue. Further, the existence of illicit narcotics generated revenue, as with other commodities, can shift the 'motivational structure' of militant/insurgent groups from ideological or theological, to primarily economic.

Examples of linkages between militant/insurgent groups and opium/heroin and coca/cocaine cultivating and producing operations include; Burma (United Wa State Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Shan State Army); Columbia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [FARC]); and Peru (Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path]) (Cornell 2007). From a more historical perspective, the case of China between 1911 and 1949 is illustrative. During this period the Nationalist Government (Guomindang), Communist Party, Colonial Japanese militarists and various provincial warlords varyingly facilitated, or completely

controlled the illicit/quasi-illicit trade in opium for revenue purposes (See articles in Brook & Wakabayashi 2000; Meyer & Parssinen 1998).

The trade in non-medicinal opiates should be counter to the theology of far-right Islamist militants; Islamic law prohibits intoxication as *Hudud* (a crime that threatens the existence of Islam) (Baderin, 2003). However, Labrousse (2005) has noted how both the Afghan Taliban⁸ and Columbian FARC actively opposed the illicit opium/coca trade in their early days on Islamic/ Marxist grounds, respectively. Before protecting, taxing and using the trade to inflate their rural support base. Both later become more explicitly involved in the trade.

The ‘Pakistani Taliban’ are already known to support and profit from the smuggling of drugs to support their operations (International Crises Group 2006). Further, if far-right Islamist groups were intent on the prohibition of the opium poppy, a reduction would be apparent in the areas under their authority. If such groups can administer a prohibition on women’s education as well as short hair and beards for men, it would be likely that they could enforce a prohibition on opium production, if the will was present. Furthermore, It would appear counter-intuitive that they would not seek some form of recompense for allowing the trade to continue.

The three largest opium growing areas in Pakistan at present are Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber Agencies in FATA. As of May 2009, Bajaur was under the authority of the ‘Pakistani Taliban’, which also have a strong presence in Mohmand, as do foreign Islamist militant groups. There are several far-right Islamist groups operating in Khyber, including the ‘Pakistani Taliban’, Lashkar-i-Islam, Ansar-i-Islam and Amar Bil Maroof (BBC 2009). A further worrying trend is that areas that once were large producers of illicit opium such as Buner, Dir and Malakand are either at threat or under the direct authority of far-right Islamist militants.

Thus, drawing from illicit drug control theory and relevant case studies both FATA and NWFP have business environments highly suitable for the illicit cultivation and production of opium.

Pakistan-Afghanistan interconnectedness

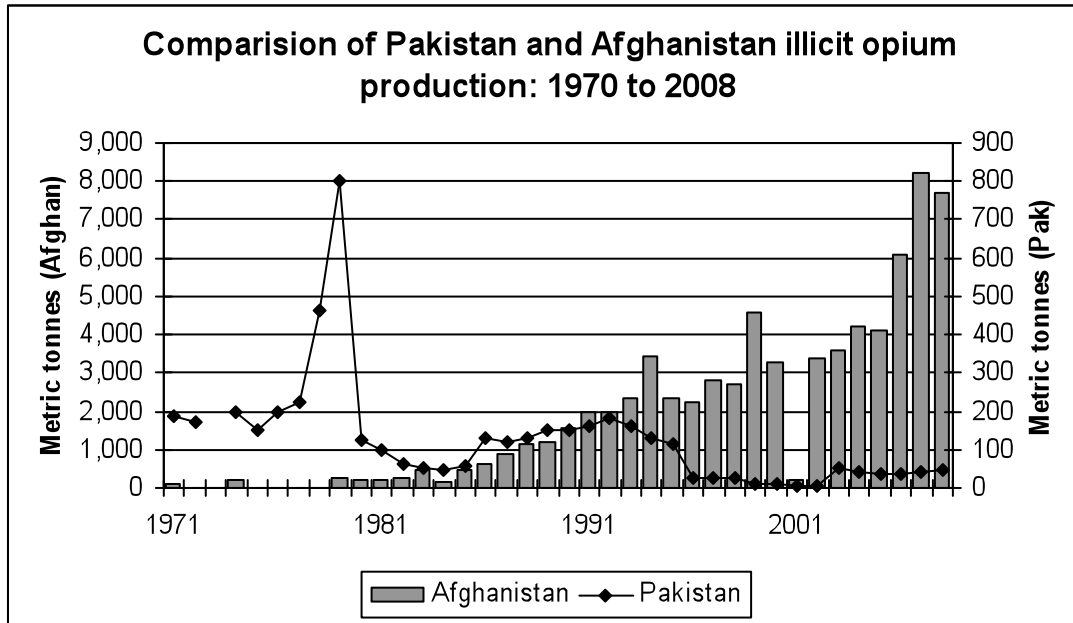
Pakistan has the factors necessary for the large scale illicit production of opium: the population of NWFP and FATA suffer extreme poverty; there is a distinct absence of state authority; there is a proliferation of large scale violent conflict; while corruption is endemic throughout the Pakistan state machine. Taken together, these factors result in a lowering of the economic and personal risks associated with illicit opium cultivation, production and trafficking. However, there is another major factor which has influenced the Pakistan illicit market since the late 1970s; Afghanistan.

Increases in Afghan illicit opium supply have generally been met with decreases in the Pakistan output (Chart Three). Statistically, there is a significant negative correlation

⁸ Symbolic of the links between the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban is the destruction in Swat of a 7th Century 23-foot statue of Buddha in 2007, reminiscent of the Buddha’s of Bamyán statues destroyed in Afghanistan (Fair 2007; Hali 2007).

between Pakistan and Afghan opium production between 1979 and 2007 ($\rho = -0.449$, $p = 0.011$) indicating that as opium production decreases in one country, it increases in the other.

Chart Three



Sources: Adapted from NNICC. (Various years). *The Supply of Illicit Drugs to the U.S.* Drug Enforcement Agency: Washington; UNODC. (Various years). *World Drug Report*. United Nations: Vienna.

Note: data for 1970 and 1973 unavailable.

Chart Three suggests that the increasing supply of Afghan opium during the early 1990s, which was likely to have reduced the farm-gate price of opium in Pakistan, is a factor in the paralleled decreasing Pakistan supply. For example, by 1997/98, all heroin and morphine manufacturing laboratories had moved across the border to Afghanistan due to increased pressure from the Pakistan state and from tribes seeking development money (US State Department 1998), similar pressures would have been felt by opium farmers.

Three factors explain the reductions in Pakistan opium supply from 1994 onwards. First, risk to poppy farmers and heroin refiners increased when enforcement and development projects provided more access to poppy growing areas. Second, farmers became more receptive to the state due to the increased profitability of substitute crops, improved technology, agricultural techniques and the social welfare packages extended as part of the development process. Third, the price of opium fell dramatically due to the Afghan boom driven by the Taliban and warlord rulers at a time when the Afghan agricultural infrastructure, market access and bureaucratic and criminal justice systems had been decimated by decades of violent conflict.

Conversely, in 2000 the Afghan Taliban successfully, albeit briefly, prohibited and suppressed the production of opium in areas under its authority (Farrell & Thorne 2001) this resulted in a shortage of heroin in Pakistan (Pietschmann 2004). As a result by 2003, Pakistan production had increased by over 1,000 percent from 5 tonnes to 52 tonnes.

At present the extensive supply of cheap opium originating from Afghanistan is likely to be keeping the farm-gate price of opium in Pakistan low. However, the current conflicts are resulting in a reduction in law enforcement, interdiction and eradication within NWFP and FATA. The conflict may prevent further marketing of licit crops, external aid and investment, and the availability of micro-finance; which would increase the impoverishing an already poor population. Combined with the reduced risk this may once again make opium poppy a rational cash crop.

Summary

Far-right Islamist militants in FATA and NWFP are a threat to the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, they impinge on the internationally recognised human rights of the peoples of these areas. They also have the potential to act as a catalyst for a resurgence in illicit opium production in Pakistan, undoing the work undertaken by the Pakistani state and international community since the mid-1970s.

Conditions in Pakistan are such that past successes in reducing opium production could be easily lost. Within FATA and NWFP the risk of being involved in the opium trade has decreased due to political instability, the erosion of already weak criminal justice and bureaucratic institutions, and the redeployment of anti-narcotic resources to counter-militancy operations. This is paralleled with a worsening of economic conditions for the peoples of these areas. These factors reflect and combine with increased political instability generated by far-right Islamic militant groups. In short, the current conflict in FATA and NWFP has created a business environment highly suitable for the illicit narcotics trade. The primary barrier to large scale re-entry into the illicit opium trade is the magnitude of Afghan production. However, the conditions created by the conflict and existence of far-right Islamist militants may make opium, even at a deflated price, an attractive and rational agricultural cash crop.

Experience with the Afghan Taliban as well as Colombia, Myanmar and elsewhere suggest that militant groups have used and facilitated the trade as a means to enhance revenue and rural support. These past experiences suggest that far-right Islamist militants in the NWFP and FATA regions of Pakistan will likely seek to rejuvenate the illicit opium trade as a revenue-enhancing activity in the near future, if they have not done so already.

The revenues collected from the facilitation of illicit opium cultivation and production could intensify or elongate the conflict. Not only would the various far-right Islamist militants have greater resources with which to fight the Pakistani state, they may seek to avoid, or spoil, peace deals which would remove their involvement in the illicit opium trade; a source of personal enrichment.

Conclusion

If Pakistan is to regain an element of control over the NWFP and FATA then they, supported by the international community, should seek to remove the conditions which presently threaten a resurgence in illicit opium production. To be successful in their activities against these far right Islamist militants, the state should:

- Exert greater judicial and bureaucratic authority in FATA and NWFP;
- Take steps to reduce the overall corruption prevalent in Pakistan's state machine;
- Invest heavily in sustainable and effective economic development in FATA and NWFP.

These suggestions are of course easier said than done, but they would appear necessary if Pakistan is to regain its status as 'poppy free'.

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