

Forum: Legal Committee

Issue: Combating drug trade in the Golden Crescent

Student Officer: Can Kuzey Güner

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

The Golden Crescent is one of the biggest areas that is producing opium and other drugs. The Golden Crescent covers the area of 3 big nations, these nations being Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Even though the Golden Crescent is made up of only 3 countries, the largest producer in the world is Afghanistan, producing more than 80 percent of the world's opium. The drug trade going on in the Golden Crescent has affected local communities, neighboring countries, and markets. Overall, the production of opium going on in Afghanistan has been on the increase for decades now. Drug trafficking affects nations in a negative way due to border measures not being tight enough. The illicit trade of drugs in the Golden Crescent makes it so that neighboring countries also get affected. Even though there have been many attempts to combat the issue at hand, none of them have been successful enough. This is because of the lack of government authority and also is caused by the lack of proper law enforcement in the Crescent. Weak legal frameworks and political problems also make it harder for these countries to battle illicit drug trafficking. Since the countries that reside in the area known as the Golden Crescent do not cooperate with each other, the problem becomes even harder to solve, so it is important to not forget that international cooperation is a must when battling this issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Golden Crescent: The Golden Crescent is an area that consists of 3 countries. The countries are Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. In this area, a significant amount of drug trafficking is being done. The Golden Crescent is the largest hub of the world for the illicit production of heroin and opium. Drugs that are produced in Afghanistan get leaked into Iran and Pakistan with the help of trafficking. Due to the drugs being accessible in the crescent, it has led to the immense use of syringes, which led to syringe sharing and caused diseases to spread faster and more efficiently.

Drug Trafficking: Drug trafficking is the illegal production, distribution, and trade of drugs. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime tries to limit drug trafficking and is the main body that deals with the issue. One of the main reasons that Drug trafficking is done is because it is a way for organized crime groups to earn money. It should not be forgotten that the Golden Crescent is one of the biggest hubs of the world when it comes to drug trafficking, and drug trafficking often leads to violence and

other unwanted circumstances.

Opium: Opium is an addictive substance that is mainly produced in the Golden Crescent. The drug known as opium can be smoked, taken as a pill, or even injected into the body with the use of syringes. Since opium can be taken with injection, this can lead to syringe sharing, which leads to diseases spreading, as mentioned before. Opium has effects on the human body like relaxation and the relief of physical pain, however, the overdose effects are slowed down breathing, seizures, coma, and maybe even death.

Heroin: Heroin is another highly addictive substance that is being produced in the Golden Crescent in a significant amount. This drug is also produced from the same plant type as opium, the poppy plants, to be exact. Heroin can also be smoked, injected like opium, but heroin can also be snorted. The effects of heroin on the body are not quite like opium, heroin has the effects of what is called a “rush,” then there are physical symptoms like nausea and constricted pupils. Overdose of this drug can often lead to death, so it is really important to limit the production and the use of these drugs in the Golden Crescent since often they lead to death and spread diseases.

Organized Crime: Organized crime is basically organizations that commit crimes or plan it. These organizations, however, usually participate in illegal activities like theft, drug trafficking, fraud, and even kidnappings. These groups sometimes demand payment in return for protection as well. These groups have developed their own system and hierarchy as well, which causes them to be even more dedicated and efficient when committing crimes.

Narcoterrorism: Narcoterrorism is the involvement of groups in drug-related crimes. The connection with the Golden Crescent is that some groups, like the Taliban, for example, tax other groups' traffic of opium to fund their operation.

Money Laundering: Money laundering is used by organized crime groups to cover up the money that they have earned from illegal activities. This technique is usually used by organized crime groups that generate a significantly large amount of money with illegal activities like drug trafficking and human trafficking. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that there is at least 776 billion dollars laundered every year.

Supply and Demand Reduction Strategies(SDR): Supply and Demand Reduction Strategies are vital for our issue at hand. These strategies are used to destroy drug crops and also used to dismantle the drug trafficking routes. In these strategies, especially in the demand reduction part, education and rehabilitation are important.

Balkan Route: The Balkan Route is one of the routes that has been in place because of the Golden Crescent. This route makes it so that the drugs that are produced in the crescent can get to Europe by using Türkiye as a connector. This shows that even though the Golden Crescent is a problem for Asia, it still poses threats for Europe. The Balkan route is one of the busiest routes that traffic opium in the

world.

Precursor Chemicals: Precursor chemicals are chemicals that are needed in order for a controlled substance to be produced. Precursor chemicals can also be used for the production of medicine and other pharmaceuticals or even fragrances, but they can also be used for the processing of heroin.

Controlled Substances: A controlled substance is a drug that has its production, possession, and trade regulated by the government. These drugs can also be prescription and illicit drugs as well.

General Overview

History of the Golden Crescent

The production of the plants used for opium has been going on for a long time. It is said that the cultivation of opium has been going on for thousands of years in Afghanistan and Pakistan.. However, even though the cultivation has been going on for a long time, this does not mean that the plants have been turned into drugs yet. In the 1960s, the plants started to be transformed into drugs such as morphine and heroin and were introduced to the market. The local men of the countries smoke the drug while women prefer to eat it, and it is important to not forget the fact that this is somehow traditional.

In the 1970s, Afghanistan became a vital player in global opium production, and when the Soviet-Afghan war broke out, the smuggling of drugs and arms only became faster and more efficient. The smugglers, with this newfound opportunity, developed new drug routes so that they could transport the drugs and arms more easily.

The anti-Soviet groups and their Pakistani supporters significantly increased the production of opium after the invasion of the Soviets. This was done so that these groups could fund the war efforts even if it meant that this would be done by the trade of drugs. Drugs such as heroin and opium that were produced were sold a lot. About 70 percent of the produced drugs were sold.

After the war ended, the Taliban took over Afghanistan from Soviet Rule. However, this did not mean that the trade of drugs was stopped, the Taliban still used narcotics as a way of funding themselves. Since the government collapsed, the warlords were struggling to earn money, and they relied on poppy plants until the Taliban took over the poppy farms. The Taliban encouraged poppy farming, and this act resulted in Afghanistan passing Burma to take place on top of the leaderboard when it comes to opium production. Seeing the numbers, the Taliban decided to ban the cultivation of poppy plants in the year 2000 because it was declared to be against Islam. However, this did not mean that the Taliban was going to destroy the current stockpile of the plant or ban the trade of it, which raised suspicions of whether the Taliban was just trying to increase the value of the plant. However, the ban was not here to stay since the Taliban lost its power in 2001 by the invasion led by

the United States of America.

After the Taliban got dethroned, the production of Opium increased once again, which resulted in Afghanistan becoming the world's biggest opium producer. Since the Taliban rose to power again in 2021, there have been worries about whether opium production is going to spike again, resulting in the increase of the trade of the drug. Even though the Taliban has made statements about limiting the production and the trade of the drug, there are still some doubts. It is also important to not forget the fact that weak governance and law enforcement can be counted as the reason that the issue is happening in the first place.

To conclude this part of the overview, we can say that foreign intervention has been a real problem for the region, but without said intervention, things could have gone both ways.

Current State of the Golden Crescent

In April of 2022, the Taliban yet again imposed another ban on the cultivation of poppy and of its trade as well, furtherly, they also imposed a ban on the production of opium and its trade as well. The Taliban also took action by destroying cannabis and poppy fields and even assisting some traders. The ban that they imposed in 2001 was because of religious beliefs, and this ban once again is because of the same reason, religious beliefs. This act also damages the informal or, as some say, the illegal economy of Afghanistan. The ban has significantly limited the cultivation of the plants, lowering the trade with it as well, but these drugs are somehow still making it to the market since the stockpiles do not get destroyed, allowing dealers to continue with their trading. Some farmers even resist the ban.

One of the most important parts that all drug dealers need to know is the routes, these routes make it so that the drugs and arms that are produced in the crescent can reach even further, leaving the crescent and even into other continents. Smugglers in the Golden Crescent have a lot of different ways to smuggle the drugs, they also involve local communities in their smuggling operation. The smugglers usually have 3 methods on smuggling the drugs, the first of them being with the use of trucks which are small, the second way of smuggling that these people use is heavily armored vehicle convoys, and the last method of smuggling drugs is on foot with the use of animals like donkeys or camels. There are 3 main routes that these smugglers use, The Balkan route which is through Iran and Türkiye, the northern route which is through Central Asia, and the last route which is the southern route.

The Balkan route is the main route that allows drugs to be smuggled into Europe. This route passes through the countries Iran and Türkiye with the intent of smuggling the drugs into Europe, it is important to not forget the fact that this route is the busiest route when it comes to opium trafficking.

The northern route is the route that intends to smuggle drugs into Russia. The route consists of the countries Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which allows the drugs to be smuggled into Russia since

they are bordering countries. However, due to the syringe sharing already going on in Russia, the number of diseases that are contracted by syringes has increased in Russia because of this route, which makes it so much easier for drugs to be smuggled.

The southern route is the route that allows smugglers to smuggle the opium from Afghanistan to South Asia, African Nations, and even the Oceania region through Pakistan and Iran. However in the earlier routes mostly land transport was used but that's the case here for this route, the Indian Ocean region route is also a preferred route for smugglers, the reason behind this is because the area is large it makes it harder for law enforcement authorities to intercept the smugglers and also make it harder to run patrol operations.

To conclude this section of the general overview, we can say that the routes are the main problem for the law enforcement authorities. We can also say that there might be suspicions about if the Taliban is still benefiting from the drug trade or not. It is also important to know that even though there have been bans imposed in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran also play a vital role in the issue.

The Lack of Order in the Golden Crescent

Since Afghanistan is not being run by an official government, this can lead to certain issues for example, the authorities have a really hard time when it comes to securing the borders because of the constraints and ongoing conflicts caused by the Taliban. The Taliban also makes it harder for these bans to be upheld the lack of authority in the region makes it so much easier for drug traders and farmers to keep operating

The countries in the Golden Crescent like Iran and Pakistan already have weak governance systems; they also host corrupt government officials on top of all of that the security forces of these countries are not working properly and they are basically undermining the rules that they are trusted with to enforce.

Even though the countries that reside in the Golden Crescent are signatories to multiple drug related treaties, like the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1988 UN convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotics, countries have been facing difficulties implementing the clauses of these treaties, this is mainly because of the reason that these countries do not even have the right groundwork to implement these treaties what is meant by this is that they indeed need support which they are not able to access and on top of all of this they have a hard time because of the international conflicts they are facing and internal problems like the Taliban for example.

There have been international interventions by NATO, for example, but it has failed because of the lack of cooperation in the region, which led to the issue not being resolved and drug trafficking and production to continue.

Even though there have been bans officially, it will not be a surprise if it turns out that the Taliban is using smuggling operations as a means of earning money to fund their operations. The

organized crime groups in the countries that are in the Golden Crescent also contribute to the issue. These groups bribe law enforcement to make it easier to run the drug routes.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Iran

Iran is one of the most important countries in play when it comes to our issue at hand since it is one of the main countries that reside in the Golden Crescent. The most important reason that makes Iran important is that it is the main country that connects Afghanistan to Türkiye, which then connects to Europe. We can basically say that this country is the main transit hub for opium and heroin. Even though Iran has a lot of laws about drugs and they are indeed very strict about the manner, Iran is still one of the world's biggest opium and heroin seizure countries, to be exact, 90 percent of the world's heroin and opium gets intercepted in Iran.

Iran has implemented a lot of border security measures in order to stop the drug traffic going into Iran. For example, they have built a fortified border structure that has a length of 2 thousand kilometers. But as mentioned before in the report, corrupt officials and organized crime make it almost impossible for these policies to be proven effective.

Iran is known to have a controversial role in the drug trade. Even though they have put a significant amount of security measures and policies in place, they still seem not to work. Yes, the border control of Iran has conflicts and encounters with drug traffickers, but there is said to be that security and political officials are actually benefiting from the narcotics trade that is going on.

To conclude, even though there have been measures taken, corruption and the lack of resources make it so that the drug traffickers are still going through Iran, which allows them to smuggle the drugs into Europe.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is said to be the main country in this issue. They hold the title of the largest opium producer in the world, and they have been supplying heroin through Pakistan, Iran, and also Central Asia. Even though the Taliban bans the production of opium and the cultivation of poppy whenever they come back in charge, this allows the price of the drug to skyrocket because if there is less of something or a limited amount of something, the price goes up. However, the bans that are enforced by the Taliban do not mean that the trafficking has come to a stop, it just means that the production of opium stops. Even though the Taliban banned the cultivation of the plant, the enforcement of the ban is nowhere near the standard, which still allows some factions to continue to benefit from the drug.

The Taliban, even though they are said to have strict border control mechanisms, is quite not the case here, trafficking networks that are strong still get around the border control. They manage this by exploiting the weakness of rural areas to move the drugs into Pakistan and Iran. This mainly happens because the Taliban is not an official government and does not have enough resources to properly secure the borders of its own territory.

For the Taliban to battle this issue, they are in desperate need of international cooperation, but once again, they are not an actual government, and countries hesitate to engage with the Taliban. The countries have concerns about trying to cooperate with a group that is not recognized by a significant number of countries, which is not a surprise. They have fears that if they help the Taliban, they might face political repercussions since the Taliban is a group that limits women's rights, and countries helping the Taliban might be seen as terrorist financiers.

To conclude, we can say that the main reason that drug trafficking is still going on is that Afghanistan is being run by a group that is recognized, which makes the countries hesitate to help. However, it is certain that this is because of the Taliban's policies, especially the policies on women's rights.

Pakistan

Pakistan is another country that is vital for the issue at hand. Pakistan is one of the bordering countries of Afghanistan just like Iran and to be exact Pakistan shares a border with Afghanistan that is above the range of 2 thousand kilometers, this allows for border controls to be weaker than normal which allows the drugs to get into Pakistan and then into different countries easier, so we can say that Pakistan is the best transit hub for drugs. The Karachi port, to be exact, is critical for the export of the drug. Even though Pakistan, just like Iran, has seizure operations for these drugs, yet again, due to weak governance and corruption, these operations are not efficient enough and let these drug trafficking networks keep operating and growing. Even though there are some encounters going on with the traffickers, this only disrupts the traffic and does not strike at the core of the smuggling going on.

As mentioned earlier in the report, there were ways to smuggle drugs, like the use of small trucks. There is still another method that has not been mentioned yet. To clear things up, what is meant by this is that drug traffickers are using Afghan refugees as couriers.

To conclude, Pakistan is another country that has a hard time dealing with this issue because of a corrupt government and limited resources.

Timeline of Events

24 December 1979	The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
27 July 2000	The Taliban bans opium cultivation.
7 October 2001	The United States invaded Afghanistan.
3 April 2022	The Taliban banned the cultivation of opium once again.
26 October 2023	The largest ever seizure of drugs produced in Afghanistan in the Indian Ocean.

UN Involvement

The United Nations is a major actor when it comes to the issue at hand. Most importantly, its body is the UNODC. The UNODC conducts a lot of reports, and they also work on surveys to monitor the opium cultivation that is going on. The UNODC is also trying to limit the cultivation of opium by striking at its core, the farmers. What is meant by this is that the UNODC has been implementing development measures so that the farmers who cultivate the drug do not need to rely on the money that is being paid to them for cultivating it. The UNODC also works closely with national organizations to find new drug policies to limit the cultivation and trafficking of drugs. The UNODC also helps nations like Iran and Pakistan to collaborate to solve the issue. To sum it up, the UNODC is the main body of the UN that deals with drug and crime-related issues and can be a key player in solving these issues.

Relevant UN Documents

-United Nations Security Council Resolution 1333 S/RES/1333(2000)

This resolution imposed an embargo on Afghanistan, limiting the gun accessibility of the Taliban, and also highlighted concerns about the Taliban's involvement in drug trafficking.

-United Nations Security Council Resolution 1817 S/RES/1817

This resolution calls for international cooperation to monitor and restrict the chemicals that are used in Afghanistan to produce drugs.

Treaties and Events

United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

This convention made it so that countries criminalize the production and sale of narcotics. This convention also calls for the international cooperation that is needed for the elimination of drug trafficking.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

This treaty's main goal was to battle organized crime on an international level. It aimed to limit and eradicate drug trafficking, money laundering, and corruption. This treaty also aimed to fill in the legal loopholes that helped the drug cartels in the Golden Crescent to operate.

The Commission On Narcotic Drugs

The CND is a body of the UN that was created as a sub-body and is responsible for overseeing the international drug policy. They have developed a lot of resolutions to battle the issue. Like the CND resolution of 2021, it encouraged Golden Crescent countries to invest in alternative crops for the farmers who relied on poppy.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been a lot of treaties to solve the issue, but sadly, they were not successful. The main reasons why these attempts failed are the lack of political power, corruption, and the lack of enforcement. These treaties were mainly designed to limit the production and disrupt the trafficking but failed due to the burden falling on the Golden Crescent countries alone.

Another big reason why these treaties have not been able to do what they have intended is because it does not find a solution on what to do when it comes to the communities that rely on these drugs as their main source of income. Legal frameworks needed to be improved, but none of these treaties managed to accomplish that part of the issue, which resulted in the issue not being fixed. If legal frameworks are not improved, this issue will never be fixed. The countries in the crescent all have different priorities that need fixing. For example, Iran and Pakistan have the focus on border

security while Afghanistan has to deal with internal matters like the Taliban. The treaties do not address these issues, and this is the reason why they fail.

Possible Solutions

In order for there to be a solution to the issue at hand, there needs to be an approach that covers all parts of the issue. The root causes of the problem have to be addressed, so we need to strengthen law enforcement, economic development, and, most importantly, international cooperation. If we can find sustainable solutions for these problems, a better future for the Golden Crescent is almost guaranteed.

Establishing new organizations with the sole purpose of solving the issues stated above is a must, since the treaties that are addressing the issue generally have not been proving successful. Enhancing regional cooperation and cross-border law enforcement is a must for Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. There must be non-transparent information sharing between these countries. Border control measures should be broader and stronger. Economic alternatives for farmers should be put in place so that they do not have to rely on the cultivation of these plants anymore.

Finally, closing legal loopholes is a must. International drug laws need to be in compliance with one another so that counter-narcotic operations can run smoother. As you all know by now, many drug traffickers exploit the weak extradition agreements and use conflicting policies to evade prosecution. Establishing a regional legal framework just for the Golden Crescent might be a solution that can prove efficient. This would make sure that traffickers cannot just escape the law by crossing a border. Countries should also be encouraged to enhance financial crime regulations in order to limit money laundering that is mainly used by organized crime groups. To sum it up, regional legal frameworks are essential in solving the issue, with the creation of a new treaty or maybe even a new organization.

Notes from the Chair

Dear delegates of the Legal Committee, I hope that this report can be all you need to understand the issue, but I highly advise you to do research on your own as well. In my opinion, you guys should all look at and read the documents that I have put down below to get a better understanding of the issue. Watching a video for the ones that completely hate reading like me might do the trick. I also highly advise all of you to look at the bibliography part where I stated all of my resources; they are the backbone of the report, and if you guys would like to see stuff in your own perspective, I highly encourage you to look through the resources stated on your own. Do not forget the issue at hand both concerns the internal matters of countries and external at the same time as well, please prepare according to that. I already know that all of you will contribute to the committee to your fullest and that you guys will be able to show your best efforts.

With all of that said, I hope to see all of you in April and cannot wait to see how you guys

grasp the issue.

[S/RES/1333\(2000\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1333(2000)), [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1333%20\(2000\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1333%20(2000)).

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/afghan-sres-1817.php>

Bibliography

Select a language for S/RES/1333(2000), [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1333%20\(2000\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1333%20(2000)). Accessed 11 March 2025.

“The Commission on Narcotic Drugs.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/index.html>. Accessed 11 March 2025.

“Controlled substances and precursor chemicals.” *Canada.ca*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/controlled-substances-precursor-chemicals.html>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

Dennis, Michael Aaron. “Organized crime | Definition, History, Characteristics, & Facts.” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/organized-crime>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Drug trafficking.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Drug trafficking.” *National Crime Agency*, <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Golden Crescent - History, Routes and its effect on India.” *BYJU'S*, <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/golden-crescent/>. Accessed 11 March 2025.

“Heroin.” *DEA.gov*, <https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/heroin>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Money laundering - European Commission.” *Migration and Home Affairs*, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-traffic-king/money-laundering_en. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Narco-Terrorism.” *Office of Justice Programs*, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/narco-terrorism>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“Opium.” *DEA.gov*, <https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/opium>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

PECK, GRANT. “UN drug experts say opium production has leveled off in Myanmar, but instability

may trigger a rise.” *AP News*, 12 December 2024,

<https://apnews.com/article/opium-heroin-golden-triangle-drug-trade-da7bd1347de918027324de05815dbf46>. Accessed 11 March 2025.

“Trouble In Afghanistan’s Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs.” *Crisis Group*, 12 September 2024,

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFIC IN NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES, 1988.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 19 December 1988, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1988_en.pdf. Accessed 11 March 2025.

“United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>. Accessed 11 March 2025.

Watson, Michael. “Guns, Drugs, and Thugs: Smuggling in the Golden Crescent — THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW.” *THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW*, <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/rd6yeppccpud0opgkamoq1uzjz5izy>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“What is a controlled substance? | Environment, Health & Safety.” *Environment, Health & Safety*, <https://ehs.ucla.edu/what-controlled-substance-0>. Accessed 10 March 2025.

“What is Golden Crescent - Know Its Routes And Impact on India.” *Testbook*, 27 September 2023, <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/golden-crescent>. Accessed 10 March 2025.