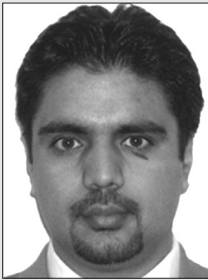


Fighting the Narcotics Industry With Human Security

■ By M. Ashraf Haidari



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Afghanistan's huge poppy-growing industry is a cause of alarm and worry in the international community, and there have been calls for the alliance that ousted the Taliban and now secures the government of President Hamid Karzai to clamp down on poppy growing and help farmers find alternatives.

The total income from production, processing and trafficking of opium in 2003, was approximately \$2.3 billion. It is estimated that this equals 52 percent of the country's official 2002 gross domestic product, or more than one-third of the total economy.

As the 2004 Human Development Report points out, these staggering figures not only reflect the growth and magnitude of the illicit opium economy in Afghanistan but also the pervasive poverty of the country.

However, eliminating this industry is not an easy task for anyone. The heroin industry flourishes at times of instability and insecurity, since it provides farmers with incomes considerably greater than what they can earn with traditional crops. Hence, we would argue that the best way to eliminate the poppy growing industry in our country, and the heroin trade it supports, is to enhance the security and well-being of our people, especially in the destitute rural communities. Our farmers need opportunities that will allow them to work in legal production and distribution activities.

The cover of Afghanistan's first Human Development Report is a graphic depiction of the plight of most Afghans. It shows hands reaching through a chain-link barrier to reach basic means of survival: water, food, electricity, shelter, sanitation and medicine in a secure environment maintained by the rule of law. The cover shows that Afghans seek social and economic security beyond protection from violence and conflict.

The 316-page report discusses causes, and possible remedies, for Afghanistan's low state of development. The country currently has some of the world's lowest social and economic indicators, ranking it 173 out of 178 nations on the 2004 Human Development Index.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan once defined human security as embracing "far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human

rights, good governance, access to education and healthcare and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential." He went on to say that, "Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict." In Afghanistan, over two decades of civil war have destroyed the basic conditions of human security and allowed a boom in the illicit opium economy.

Before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Afghans were self-sufficient in food production. Agricultural produce accounted for 30 percent of exports, earning the country \$100 million annually in foreign exchange. In addition, social capital embedded in the Afghan culture cushioned Afghans against life's hardships. However, destructive conflicts during the decade-long Soviet occupation devastated Afghanistan's agricultural economy and decimated rural communities where social fragmentation replaced the social cohesion which previously insulated Afghans against economic difficulties.

From 1992-2001, internecine factional infighting increased suffering in Afghanistan and culminated in the advent of the Taliban who seized power from fractious rulers. As is now known to the whole world, the Taliban, alongside global terrorists, further victimized the people of Afghanistan and made their economic lot a great deal more miserable.

It is in this context of extreme human insecurity caused by years of violent war

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and destruction of agricultural life that Afghan peasants have come to rely on opium poppy cultivation as a way of survival. Drug mafia with domestic, regional, and international criminal networks have capitalized on this economic need and vulnerability to engage more than 2.3 million poor farmers in opium poppy cultivation, now found throughout Afghanistan.

Peasants remain extremely poor, however, as most of the drug revenues go to usurious landlords, traffickers, drug traders, narco-warlords and corrupt government officials. These criminal groups benefit from a weak central government and general instability in the country, and they work together to undermine the consolidation of central government authority and security in Afghanistan.

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The strategy cautions against quick-fix eradication solutions that can suddenly destroy the only means of survival for millions of poor peasants before providing them with alternative livelihoods. Doing so will indeed ensure the alienation of a vast majority of destitute peasants who would make easy recruits for the Taliban insurgency and the terrorists threatening the process of peace-building in Afghanistan.

The government's 2005 Counter Narcotics Implementation Plan opposes short-term eradication policies, including the use of aerial spray. Instead, it proposes a longer-term integrated counter-narcotics strategy to strengthen human security in rural Afghanistan through social and economic assistance, while building judicial and law enforcement capacity to target and bring to justice the real drivers and beneficiaries of the illicit opium economy.

The strategy's success hinges on increased, well-coordinated development aid from the international community. Afghanistan's success in eliminating its drug problem will not only emancipate its impoverished citizens and secure their future, but also enhance regional security and development and save the health and lives of many in the world./End