

**ILLICIT NARCOTIC ECONOMIES AND
STATE FRAGMENTATION: COLOMBIA
AND AFGHANISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the illicit narcotics economy in Afghanistan and Colombia is the central force fragmenting state power through two main processes of internal regression and external attack. Internal regression refers to the capture, infiltration and corruption of the state by the drug industry that impairs effective state function. External attack refers to the territorial control, coercive force and political legitimacy that the illicit economy provides non-state armed actors. In this way, I contend that the fragmentation of state power by the illicit narcotics economy is two- fold. First, it diminishes state power in absolute terms - hindering the effective state function in terms of key institutions. Second the illicit narcotics reduces state power in relative terms - drug rents providing for the growth in reach and operational capacities of non-state power rivals when the state at the same time is losing its own.

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INTRODUCTION

Political insurgents, illegal drug traffickers, organised criminals, warlords, militant fundamentalists and numerous other “snakes with a cause” are fast becoming the underlying sources of domestic and global instability. Particularly in contexts where the economy or state is weak, these actors are the central protagonists to widespread insecurity and conflict. Since the end of the Cold War a partnership has emerged between criminal enterprises and non-state politically motivated armed actors in all corners of the world. Hezbollah’s reliance on the multi-million trade in narcotics and cigarettes, the Taliban and warlords’ concerted facilitation of Afghanistan’s opium poppy, Somali rebels’ dependence on piracy plunders, RUF’s key role in Sierra Leone’s blood diamond trade and FARC’s long-established links with Colombia’s cocaine are just few examples of this malignant phenomenon. Of particular notoriety are narcotics, by far the most lucrative illicit economy, with its ever-growing global demand and relative ease of production and transportation. This is especially the case with regards to coca and opium, the crops from which the most profitable psychotropic substances, cocaine and heroin, are produced. Incidentally the world’s top producers of opium and coca - Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia and Peru are all states confronted by, to varying degrees and consequence, the violent insurrections of non- state armed actors.

The interconnection between non-state armed actors who focus on contestations for state power, with illicit economic activities, which subvert the state to secure economic dominion for extractable returns, pose significant theoretical and practical challenges. Firstly, it queries previous scholarly efforts to categorise armed action against the state as having either political or economic motivations, with this association staging an ostensible hybrid aim. Secondly, the symbiosis poses policy dilemmas: what response provides the most leverage to contain the challenge posed by the partnership? Targeting

the economic dimension? Or concentrate on confronting the non-state armed groups at the political level?

To be sure, the existence of an illicit narcotics economy while always closely associated with criminal organisations does not by itself give rise to terrorists, warlords, guerilla insurgents or other politically motivated actors. However when non-state armed groups penetrate, take over or set up new criminal activity, the resulting interaction profoundly affects their means, strategies and under some circumstances: their goals and identities. Moreover, when we consider the money, resources and political influence that “pure” criminal organisations have in countries where an illicit narcotics economy dominates – it becomes clear that these “economic actors” in reality have far more wide reaching political impacts than is assumed, perhaps even on par with ideologically motivated non-state armed actors.

Therefore, of both critical academic and policy importance is an understanding of the dynamics underlying the illicit narcotics economy beyond just static analyses focused on the volume of production, seizure rates, composition of criminal organisations and the relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness of anti-narcotics policies and legal enforcement that haunts so much of the research on illicit narcotic economies. For the most part, drug industries are predominantly conceived of in terms of law enforcement, criminal deviancy, lack of institutional structures. Rarely are illicit narcotics economies considered in terms of its impact on state functions and the effect that the illicit narcotics economy’s networks and support systems have on power configurations within the state. Therefore, a more thorough and well-informed conceptualisation of the relationship between illicit narcotics economy and the state is needed, as this will not only provide insights to the

dynamics propelling the operation of the illicit economy but also a better understanding of the forces underlying state power and the formation of public authority.

Accordingly, examining how an illicit narcotics industry emerged, developed and “connected” to the social, political and economic fabric in the world’s two leading producers of cocaine, and heroin – Colombia and Afghanistan and the resultant impact of the illicit narcotic economy on the state is the purpose of this thesis.

ARGUMENT

This thesis argues that the illicit narcotics economy in Afghanistan and Colombia is the central force fragmenting state power through two main processes of internal regression and external attack. Internal regression refers to the capture, infiltration and corruption of the state by the drug industry that impairs effective state function. External attack refers to the territorial control, coercive force and political legitimacy that the illicit economy provides non-state armed actors. In this way, I contend that the fragmentation of state power by the illicit narcotics economy is two- fold. First, it diminishes state power in absolute terms - hindering the effective state function in terms of key institutions. Second the illicit narcotics reduces state power in relative terms - drug rents providing for the growth in reach and operational capacities of non-state power rivals when the state at the same time is losing its own.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The first chapter provides a brief review of the relevant literature on illicit economies, resources and civil war, organised crime and non-state armed actors. Chapter Two traces the impact of the illicit narcotics economy in the Colombia, detailing how the drug industry has infiltrated the highest levels of state institutions, funding all non-state actors in the country's protracted internal war. The chapter will also trace how Colombia has managed to push itself onto the path of gradual recovery from its partial collapse in the last decade, despite the continued presence of a strong drug industry. This suggests that the damaging impacts of an illicit narcotics economy can be managed and curtailed if the state efforts to handle the organisational environment of the illicit narcotics economy rather than target overall drug supply and production. Chapter Three examines the evolution and impact of Afghanistan's opium economy on state power, showing how the opium economy underpins the patrimonial powerbase of warlords, militant Taliban forces. This malicious symbiosis has had significantly debilitating impacts on effective state function in the present era. Chapter Four compares the cases of Afghanistan and Colombia, reflecting on their similarities and differences to discuss some of the implications of the variant trajectories in the two states. Chapter Five concludes and presents a possible future research agenda.

Chapter One: Illicit narcotics economies and organised crime, conflict and natural resources

ILLICIT NARCOTICS ECONOMY AND ORGANISED CRIME

The study of illicit narcotics economies is dominated by a criminological approach that typifies the drug industry as a sum of its productive capacity. Highlighted in studies by Reuter (2010), Buxton (2010) and Thoumi (2010), MacCoun and Reuter (2001), Caulkins and Reuter (1998), much of this analyses examines the volumes produced, profit distribution mechanisms, trafficking routes, coordination strategies and functions of players at various stages of the production chain. These scholars examine the mechanisms and processes by which the drugs industry, at all stages of the production value chain operate and the extent to which anti-narcotics initiatives ranging from eradication, interdiction, legalisation, alternative livelihood options are effective.

For the most part, the illicit narcotics economy in this area of ‘drug scholarship’ is conceptualised as a security threat and therefore analyses driven with little attention to the nature of the partnerships and networks that are created by the illicit narcotics economy and the impact this has on the state, its institutions and political structures. In essence these studies, along with the great wealth of policy driven research from institutions including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), while extremely valuable in the data collected nevertheless offer broad descriptive accounts of the drugs industry in various countries without detailing how these industries interact within and among extant institutions and the possible transformations that may take place as a result. While the underlying acknowledgement in this scholarship is that states that host strong

illicit narcotics economies are weak, there is little explanation or examination of how and why this is the case and what causal mechanisms are involved. In addition, these studies because of its focus on the illicit narcotics economy in and of itself with minimal analyses of the nature and character of the key actors involved fall short of adequately recognising the nexus between illicit narcotics economies and non-state armed actors in the key producer countries.

That said, there is growing literature outside the realm of specific studies on drug industries to the broader field of crime that offers some insight into the impacts of an illicit narcotics economy on state function, however significant debate exists over the exact form of the participation. Specifically, some theories focus on the creation of business links between transnational groups and armed insurgents while others see the gradual transformation of non-state armed groups or insurgents into organised criminals through their participation in illegal markets.

Broadly speaking, four major models emerge from the existing scholarship.

Criminologists argue that criminal organisations are increasingly cooperating with one another to support their common goals, this analysis has been extended to include cooperation of organised criminals with terrorist organisations, armed groups and even rogue states in a great international conspiracy. Claire Sterling (1994) wrote a series of sensational books describing the emergence of a 'pax mafiosa' where global conglomerates of crime cooperated with one another to carve up criminal markets.

Scholars including Arnau de Borchgrave (2002) and Jeffrey Robinson (2003) lent support to Sterling's arguments by documenting example of high-level cooperation among criminal organisations. Around the same time, Rachel Ehrenfeld published 'Narco-Terrorism' which identified an alliance of terrorist organisations and Marxist

Leninist regimes using drug trafficking as part of a communist plot to undermine western society (1990). This first generation of what arguably can be construed as simplistic conspiracy theories were expectedly heavily criticised for being too crude, over-emphasising of element of conspiracy among groups, and failing to distinguish the separate motivations and identities of groups involved. That said, this vision of a purely cooperative relationship between various armed groups and criminal organisations can and has been readily applied to the case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) today with many scholars warning that an alliance exists between illegal drug industry, insurgents and paramilitaries, which although may be one of a convenience nevertheless functions as a major political psychological moral military entity that appears to have developed a political agenda for exerting leverage in the international as well a national arena. What this “conspiracy theorist” area of criminal-insurgent literature does not answer however, is under what circumstances and why some non-state armed groups eventually collude and transform into pseudo- criminal groups and others do not. Far from providing an explanation for this process, these sorts of analyses locate the illicit narcotics industry in a historical and contextual vacuum and again describe the illicit narcotics phenomenon as a state weakening mechanism without answering how and why this this is the case.

A second set of theories predicts violence and conflict between organised criminals and armed insurgents for two reasons. Conflict may break out when the insurgents threaten to enter the illegal market in which have already established themselves or when the political goals of the insurgents threaten to undermine the weak and acquiescent state in which organised criminal have established a base of operations. This competition explanation of conflict between armed and criminal groups stems from the observation of Harvard economist Thomas Schelling (1971) that the pursuit of monopoly is a defining

characteristic of organised crime. Therefore organised criminal groups will try to undermine and destroy any organisation, criminal or insurgent, which attempts to establish itself within the same illegal market. This kind of analysis became popular among criminologists who found apparent ample evidence to support this interpretation - including the conflict between Medellin and Cali drug syndicate in the late 1980s and 1990s. Violence may also break out due to the conflict of motivations between criminal groups and armed insurgents. In the same weak countries where organised criminals have established their operations, domestic and armed insurgents fight to upset the status quo and support the national government and elite system. Such goals then would appear to directly conflict with those of criminal groups who wish to maintain the status quo to ensure continued operation. In this way, the apparent incompatibility that this theory of violence argues comes short of being able to explain why in spite of discordancy partnerships do emerge between 'political' non-state armed groups and 'economic' criminals. Moreover this sort of analyses by confining explanations purely to violence fails to acknowledge the various other ramifications that emerge from the operation of illicit narcotics economy on state function.

A third analysis of the relationship between crime and insurgents suggests instead that instead a situation of pure conspiracy or pure conflict, criminal groups may form varied types of linkages with other criminals or armed insurgents to pursue specific mutual economic gains. Williams (2002) argues that these linkages mirror the types of relationships formed between legal businesses, ranging from long term, high- level strategic alliances to short- term supplier or tactical linkages. He stresses that strategic alliances are the least common form of interaction as this cooperation is often uneasy and difficult to initiate or sustain due to the environment of anarchy and violence in which such groups operate. Groups may choose to cooperate in order to spread risks of engaging

in criminal activity, to minimise the investments necessary to enter a new market or to secure local knowledge and experience for marketing and distribution. Naylor (1995) document a variety of examples including ad hoc deals where cocaine dealers paid for the use of air strips and bases run by the Nicaraguan Contras and a proliferation of arms for drugs barter agreements fuelling conflicts in Peru, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Chechnya. Again, while these theories provide valuable insight into the dynamics of various associations and power relations, it do not cast these interactions back to state and the impact that the illicit narcotics economy, in its various manifestations have on state power.

One final analysis is that armed insurgents interested in raising money through crime are more likely to develop "in house criminal capabilities than to form alliances with criminal organisations. Dishman (2001) argues that there is only scant evidence that criminal groups and insurgents are interested in pursuing collaborative arrangements and stresses that their differing motivations curtail any attempts at collaboration. Instead Dishman argues that a political or criminal organisation would rather mutate its own structure and organisation to take on nontraditional, financial or political role rather than cooperate with groups who are already effective in those activities. Other authors have similarly noted the tendency of armed groups to engage in criminal activities themselves, indeed Makarenko (2004) calls this trend the convergence thesis and both she and Schmid (2004) warn that such activities may make armed insurgents and criminal organisations indistinguishable as originally political underground organisations engaged in various practices of illegal fundraising run the risk of 'gangsterisation'. In a study of armed groups in nine narcotics producing areas, Cornell (2007) finds that insurgent groups invariably became involved in the drug trade and that such involvement changes their motivational structures. Hutchinson and O'Malley (2007) provide a more nuanced

description of how terrorist organisations become involved in crime by linking the organisational sophistication of a given group to the type of crime in which they are involved. The authors divide terrorist groups into ephemeral sporadic groups with more limited financial requirements a loose network structure and participating in less sophisticated crime and organised enduring groups with higher financial requirements strong organisational cohesion and group loyalty and therefore greater ability to participate in organised crime.

Broadly speaking, the existing literature on illicit narcotics economy is generally illustrative of the illicit narcotics economy rather than explanatory of it. The tacit acknowledgement is that non-state armed actors readily engage in illicit narcotics trade, as do criminal groups and that states that host narcotic economies are invariably weak and to some degree dysfunctional. While these factors are all acknowledged, no explanation is provided as to why this is the case. The negative impact of illicit narcotics economies in states is apparent as are the interactions and associations it constructs with antagonists forces but little by way of a explanatory framework is provided as to how it operates for its damaging ramifications.

CONFLICT AND RESOURCES

The second body of literature that is relevant to this thesis's study of the relationship between the illicit narcotics economy and the state in Afghanistan and Colombia is the extensive scholarship on the economic based explanations for civil conflict. Given that both Afghanistan and Colombia have experienced decades long internal conflict alongside the presence and operation of strong narcotics industries, the scholarship emanating from Paul Collier and colleagues' path-breaking World Bank study that posits

a strong positive association between material factors of economic gain with the opportunity of civil war are enlightening to some aspects of this study's concerns.

To provide a brief overview of this extensive field of research: Collier and Hoeffler concluded that states that rely heavily on the export of primary commodities face a higher risk of civil conflict than resource poor states (1998, 2002). Fearon and Laitin (2003) and de Soysa (2002) each using unique data sets find that oil-exporting states are more likely to suffer from civil wars. Fearon also shows that the presence of certain types of resources gemstones and narcotics tends to make wars last longer, similarly Doyle and Sambanis (2000) demonstrate that civil wars are harder to end when they occur in countries that depend on primary commodity exports. Buhaug and Gates (2002) show that presence of mineral resources in a conflict zone tends to increase a conflict's geographical scope. That said, there is little agreement among these and other scholars on why natural resources have these effects. Most scholars have little to say about causal mechanisms. Indeed there is strong disagreement on whether natural resources at all increase the risk of war, Ross concluding that the inconclusiveness of results is likely the result of differing methodologies and data sets (2004).

More specifically for the purposes of this thesis' concern, drugs have been accorded interest as a limited part of a broader discussion in the sub-categories of lootable resources. The results of this research show that lootable resources, while having no link to conflict initiation nevertheless are positively correlated with conflict duration (reference). The assumption in the literature is that lootable natural resources, like drugs, extend conflict - but these large end quantitative studies are silent as to the processes and dynamics as to how this takes place. Moreover, drugs may indeed lengthen the duration of conflict in a state but it would also reasonably be expected to have an impact on the

capabilities, cohesion, and motivations of parties to a conflict as well. This being the case, the impact of an illicit narcotics economy is an infinitely more complex picture than what these large-N studies highlight. While these studies identify an important and significant correlation, it errs to providing an analyses or explanation as to why such an association is founded.

Therefore, drawing from the literature on organised crime and illicit economies which highlight that illicit economies empower non-state armed actors and criminal actors to challenge the authority of the state as well as constrain proper state function, alongside conflict research which highlights that drugs extend the duration of internal conflict, I argue that narcotics economies in Colombia and Afghanistan fragment state power through two main processes. First by capturing, infiltrating and corrupting of key institutions. Second, by acting as the resource base of key non-state actors to augment territorial control, coercive force and political legitimacy. Therefore, I contend that the fragmentation of state power by the illicit narcotics economy is two- fold. First, it diminishes state power in absolute terms - hindering the effective state function in terms of key institutions. Second the illicit narcotics reduces state power in relative terms - drug rents providing for the growth in reach and operational capacities of non-state power rivals.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparative study of Colombia and Afghanistan. Both states are hosts to the world's leading centres of the heroin and cocaine industries respectively. Both countries have had to deal with protracted internal conflicts, ideological non-state armed insurgencies of a basically rural nature, while also dealing with foreign intervention, though of different nature and degree. At the same time, Afghanistan and Colombia present significant differences in cultural, political and geographical settings. The

economic development of Colombia is medium- low while Afghanistan is low, Colombia having nearly ten times the income per capita of Afghanistan. While both states are weak, they are qualitatively different sorts of weakness. The Afghan state actually experienced a large scale breakdown in the 1990s. Colombia, while having to deal with a protracted almost sixty year conflict with significant portions of its territory under the influence of non-state armed actors, nevertheless has never ceased working as a modern bureaucratic apparatus with a continuously existing army and a small but relatively solid bureaucracy and technocracy.

This study relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data of a secondary nature. Academic literature of anthropological, ethnographic, historical, economic, social science and political science approaches are drawn upon. Significant field- work data undertaken by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, The London School of Economics' Crisis Research Centre, International Crisis Group, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and New York University's Center on International Cooperation is also relied upon. In addition, journalistic accounts and newspaper articles have been utilised for contemporary examples and where possible cross-checked before being used as a source.

It needs to be emphasised upfront that illicit narcotics economies are a difficult subject of research. Not only is it very much in the informal sector with activities unregistered but those involved in the drug industry have strong incentives to conceal their activities and roles and do not always provide accurate information. The sensitivity and controversy surrounding the drug industry exacerbates the difficulties in securing accurate data. Moreover as has been acknowledged in the scholarship relating to illicit activity (Friman and Andreas 2009:4) contamination and exaggeration on illicit narcotics activities are

often motivated by the agendas of international agencies, law enforcement administrations and governments are pervasive, which means that information collected is subject to wide variation. In my research, of particular difficulty was data on Afghanistan, a country that has never had any institutional mechanisms for gathering national data with all official estimates and figures to this day emanating from sources outside the country. Prior to 1994, there were no official agencies inside the country that collected field based investigations on the illicit opium economy, with the only available information based on approximations from secondary literature. Therefore, a significant limit – as demonstrated in the thesis in the relative lack detailed information relating to the emergence and early years of Afghanistan’s opium economy.

In this way, while every attempt has been made during research to obtain as accurate as possible data, the very nature of illicit activities means that there is reason to remain cautious and allow room for error. That said, in spite of these methodological difficulties and inconsistencies, the analysis presented in this thesis is nevertheless presents what is hoped to be a fairly accurate account of illicit narcotic economies in both Colombia and Afghanistan.

Chapter Two: Colombia

DRUG NATION

Colombia has had one of the world's largest illicit narcotics economies for almost thirty years, being the only country that produces all three plant based narcotics. It is the source of approximately 80% of the world's supply of cocaine, while also being the Western Hemisphere's largest producer of heroin – supplying 50% of the US market. Over the same period, Colombia has been torn apart by a civil war pitting leftist guerrillas, rightist paramilitaries and the Colombian state against one another, resulting in more than 47 000 casualties over the past fifteen years (Felbab-Brown 2010: 69).

This chapter examines the evolution of Colombia's illicit narcotics industry through three main stages from the late 1970s to the present. It first traces the impacts of the Medellin and Cali cartels, through to the period of significant internal upheaval between and among Marxist insurgent groups, paramilitary forces; to the present era where Colombia has seen to significant improvements in overall security with the state gradually reclaiming territorial control and making significant inroads against the insurgency. Through this analysis, it will be shown that the illicit narcotics economy in Colombia is the central force driving the Colombian state's process of erosion and decay through two main ways: internal regression and external attack.

First, through a process institutional de-legitimation, drug dealers have sought to translate their enormous fortunes into political influence and have gained access to political decision- making processes via multiple paths. This includes the creation of personal

electoral vehicles, open participation in traditional political parties, financing of electoral campaigns alongside the enormous power they wield in local politics. Furthermore, *narcotraficantes* have resorted to all kinds of violent means ranging from bribery and corruption, all the way to death threats, assassination of state officials and the use of large- scale terrorism on civil society.

Second, the rents produced by the drug trade have fed all non-state armed actors in Colombia. From the first generation paramilitaries guarding the drug dealers to the second-generation paramilitaries-cum-drug traffickers and Marxist guerrillas, all these actors have based their expansion on the resources extracted from the drug business. The 1980s and 1990s boom in drug trade fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of Colombia's internal conflict – greatly augmenting the coercive force, territorial expansion of the Marxist insurgency and paramilitaries and in significant challenge of Colombian state's coercive capacity and territorial control.

CARTELS AND NARCO-REPUBLICS: LATE 1970s-MID 1990s

Low scale drug production and trafficking has existed in Colombia since the 1950s. Labs in Medellin processed heroin, cocaine and morphine, which were transported to Cuba for distribution in Miami, Mexico and distribution elsewhere in the United States (Harding 1998: 67). By the early 1970s numerous entrepreneurs sought to exploit increasing demand for cocaine in US drug markets by transporting small quantities of the drug from Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru to Colombia where it underwent further refinement in makeshift laboratories before final shipment northwards. Over time and through repeated exchange, numerous entrepreneurs developed intricate transportation and distribution networks capable of coordinating several multi-tonne cocaine shipments a year (Thoumi

1995: 127). From this emerged two large organised distribution networks, cartels based in the cities of Medellin and Cali.

These two organisations controlled most of the international cocaine market and drug trafficking industry and became entrenched in Colombian society, funding political campaigns, making large purchases of rural land and urban real estate as well as enjoying extensive social support networks. As the illegal drug industry flourished, these cartels amassed great wealth and began to launch a war against the state. After President Belisario Betancur began to extradite Colombian traffickers to the United States in 1984, the Medellin capos launched a systematic narco-terrorist campaign against the Colombian state designed to force the government to halt further extradition (Thoumi 1994:57). The Medellin Cartel ordered and successfully undertook a series of high profile assassinations including those of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Attorney General Muaro Hoyos Jimenez, Liberal Party presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan alongside the murders of hundreds of government officials, judges, police officers and journalists (Clawson and Lee 1994: 32-56).

The penetration of the Medellin's coercive force and influence demonstrated in 1987 when a thoroughly intimidated Colombian Supreme Court ruled the US Colombian extradition treaty as unconstitutional in hopes that this would curtail the drug industry's concentrated assault on the state (Clawson and Lee 1994: 78). This decision however did not deter narco-terrorism; in 1989 alone, three presidential candidates were assassinated as a result of cartel directed violence with a further fifty-six judges, 115 journalists and 1300 policemen killed in the period between 1989-1993 (Thoumi 2003: 131). In the month after Galan's murder alone, drug traffickers had set thirty-six fires and detonated 37 bombs on public works signalling the shift in the narco-violence campaign from

selective assassination to indiscriminate terror attacks against the Colombian state and society in general (Harding 1998:76)

In further usurpation of the state's security and coercive capacity, by the mid 1980s, Medellin traffickers had consolidated a private security structure by professionalising and controlling about three hundred previously fragmented groups of common criminals in Medellin to form a private narcotics based paramilitary group MAS (Death to Kidnapers) (Sanin and Baron 2005:3-10). A suite of similar spectacularly violent private militias followed - all established to protect the more than 2.5 million acres of land purchased by the narcotraffickers as well as well as carrying out the cartel's violent campaigns (Hunt 2009:67) Crucially, in demonstration of the drug industry's comprehensive infiltration and weakening of state structures in many frontier regions of the country, these narco-paramilitaries often operated as quasi-state counter-insurgency forces supported by the Colombian military itself in defense from Marxist insurgent groups (Hunt 2009:68-90)

In some areas of the Middle Magdalena Valley, criminal entities maintained a functional symbiosis with state security forces. For example drug lord Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha maintained a direct radio contact with the military command centre of the S-2 section of the Barbula Battalion in the Puerto Boyaca area in Santander department (Thoumi 2003:78). In the majority of contested regions of strong guerrilla presence, the Colombian military supported narco-funded paramilitary groups with a range of weapons including AK-47s, M-16s and Galil 762s and ongoing military training. A 1989 investigation in the regions of La Rochela and Santander found that the highest- ranking military official in the area, commander of the Rafael Reyes Battlalion actively provided tactical support and intelligence to narco-paramilitary operations (Hunt 2009: 69). Such de-facto cooperation between state military structures and narco-based militant forces therefore emphasises the

overpowering influence of the illicit industry over the state with the state so frail that it was left with little option but to work with the very same entities, which on the other hand were defying state authority through illicit narcotic activities. In one particularly startling example of this, the Major Luis Becerra Bohorquez before a massacre undertaken by the MAS paramilitaries in the La Honduras and La Negra farms reportedly paid the Medellin hotel bill for the paramilitary killers the previous night (Simon 2004: 57).

In addition to its usurpation of the state's coercive functions, the Medellin cartel under the leadership of Pablo Escobar assumed a particularly virulent political crusade. Escobar sought political office and established the political movement *Civisimio en March*, which became the vehicle for his election to the Colombian Congress as an alternate deputy on the parliamentary list of Jairo Ortega Ramirez (Clawson and Lee 1996: 56). In addition, the Medellin cartel sponsored several high profile civic programmes including the donation of 450-500 new housing units under the 'Medellin Without Slums' project, as well as using drug money to support infrastructure projects including water wells, sports facilities and satellite TV dishes. Escobar's personal zoo in Napoles, Puerto Tirunfo was a tourist stop for many years along the main Medellin - Bogota highway (Clawson and Lee 1996:61). The cartel went on also to buy out media entities, using local newspapers and television stations to convey the trafficker's agendas and sponsorship of paramilitary units in distinction from and in criticism of the state's incapacity. Essentially, at the apex of the cartels' function, the Medellin conglomerate successfully transformed the Middle Magdalena Valley into what was effectively an independent "narco-republic" (Thoumi 2003:115). The Medellin cartel grew so rich and powerful that it was able to not only

threaten Colombian state security but also displace the state's function, taking on the role as a security provider and economic and political regulator in its areas of operation.¹

On the other hand, the Cali cartel though not as politically adventurous and openly confrontational was no less effective in usurpation, displacement and de-facto assumption of state authority. The Cali used cocaine money to finance extensive protection and intelligence networks in key national institutions including the military, police, court and various other government bureaucracies (Harding 1998:98). The 'Process 8000' a judicial process investigating the extent of the Cali cartel's penetration into Colombia's political fixtures found that up to 260 members of the Colombian Congress was on the Cali payroll and the cartel paid \$ 60 000 a month in bribes to police and military officers. A third of that total went to the Cali police force (Clawson and Lee 1996:78), which in effect became as the Cali cartel's private militias. In this way, the situation in Cali resembled a state sponsored protection racket, where traffickers obtained enforcement prerogatives and legislative advantages in exchange for regular payments to politicians and police officers. It has been reported that a police general in Cali was provided 2000 pesos a month by the cartel in contrast to the monthly wage of 700 peso, while a police general received 5000 pesos in return for a wage of approximately 1700 (Clawson and Lee 1996:76). Moreover, the cartel established a sophisticated network of informants in the city's taxi drivers who informed on the movements of every visitor. The group also had access to passenger lists at the airport; hotel guest lists in the cities and had infiltrated all local units of the National Police. The extent of the cartel's economic penetration and

¹As a testament to his extreme tactics and the Medellin cartel's success in intimidating state authority, Escobar was able to obtain highly favourable terms for his detention following capture – detained in a complex that he had personally constructed, which was equipped with fax machines, cellular telephones and computers where bank accounts and business transactions could be managed. The La Cathedral prison was also complete with a bar, lounge, sauna amenities and attended by prison guards personally selected by Escobar.

legal manipulation clearly revealed in a 1994 judicial and police investigation which uncovered that 12 retired army officials, the majority of the city police force, the entire contingent of the airport police, employees of the El Valle telephone system, the regional prosecutor, six of the 22 city councillors were on the payroll of the crime group (Snyder and Martinez: 72-76).

In sum, as a direct consequence of the illicit narcotics economy the Colombian state was crippled from within to complete dysfunction. The judicial system was completely ineffectual - society having no trust that it could deliver even marginally just outcomes as a result of the drug industry's penetration. Furthermore, the state had lost not only its monopoly of violence but had yielded this responsibility to the narco-paramilitaries in contested regions of state territory. In this sense the operation of the illicit narcotics economy amassed such substantial economic, political and military clout that it not only weakened extant state institutions but also assumed state functions in regions of dominance in the provision of security and social services.

THE GROWTH AND CONSOLIDATION OF GUERRILLAS AND PARAMILITARIES, NON-STATE SPACES AND THE AMBIGUOUS WAR: MID-LATE 1990s

In response to the significant threat posed by the two cartels, Colombian law enforcement agents under significant pressure from the United States undertook drastic actions against the cartels. From 1989 to 1996, police officials apprehended or killed virtually all of the kingpins from the dominant Medellin and Cali trafficking groups (Peceny and Durnan 2006:101-103). In the six years however, following the incarceration of the last original kingpin not only did the estimated potential production of cocaine in Colombia increase

by 143% from an estimated 300 tonnes in 1996 to 730 tonnes in 2001 but the illicit narcotics economy underwent substantial restructuring: streamlining and downsizing operations (Kenney 2003:188).

Therefore from the embers of the two cartels sprang medium sized groups – cartelitos or ‘boutique cartels’. Unlike the Medellin and Cali cartels, these smaller trafficking groups maintained relatively lower profiles and often operated from labs located in Colombia’s many intermediate and secondary cities and small towns where they could bribe and intimidate local officials to gain protection for their activities in relative anonymity (Diaz and Sanchez 2004: 6-7, Thoumi 1994: 153-154).

These new and reformed smuggling operations were smaller but also “flatter”, comprising no more than a dozen participants and two layers of management and subcontracting whole portions of the chain to specialised entities. Most significantly the downsizing of trafficking organisations and the parcelling out of the various stages of the production chain (Clawson and Lee 1994:40-41) saw to the growing involvement of Colombia’s Marxist guerrilla groups as well as the gradual evolution of narco-paramilitaries into autonomous trafficking organisations in and of themselves (Restrepo and Guizado 2001:24, Meza 1999).

Due to anti-narcotics drives in neighbouring Peru and Bolivia, a majority of the cultivation of coca crops shifted into Colombia from the early 1990s. Incidentally, in avoidance of eradication and state enforcement the majority of this cultivation concentrated in the traditional southern peripheral rural strongholds of the FARC in Caqueta, Guaviare and Putumayo departments (Bagley 2001:7-9). The insurgents’ initial involvement saw the imposition of a ‘revolutionary tax’ of 15% on coca farmers which

progressively grew to the levying of tariffs on related activities including the importation of precursor agents and cocaine refinement. The FARC also grew to collect a 20% fee from traffickers on use of territory under its control and demanded protection fees for labs and airstrips. Over time the group began to participate directly in production by acquiring coca plots and processing coca leaf into cocaine. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, one third, or twenty- three of the FARC's *frentes* were collecting payment in coca growing regions and six operating in opium producing zones (Richani 2002:70, Steinitz 2002, Chernick 2005: 19, ICG 2005: 8,).

Following its growing involvement in the illicit narcotics economy, accruing on average an estimated \$60-100 million a year (Richani 2002:75, Chernick 1997, Buscaglia and Ratliff 2001:26) the FARC was able to substantially upgrade its military capacity², extend territorial control and initially broaden its rural support base by protecting coca farmers from state anti-narcotics policies and provision of price quotas for coca crops (Pearce 1990:173, Suarez 2000:585). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, prior to the guerrillas' involvement in narcotics, the insurgency was a very low intensity affair. The FARC could not seriously challenge the armed forces for even nominal control of the state. Some scholars have characterised the formative years of the FARC as an "imaginary war" (Ortiz 2002:133) with the group no more than a small band of rural fighters with limited military capacity, territorial control, limited largely to isolated ambushes on small military units and occasional raids on farms. In 1979 three years before its entry into the drug economy, the FARC consisted of nine *frentes*, by 1986 it had approximately 3600

²In the early 1970s it relied largely on old rifles, but participation in the illicit narcotics economy has allowed the movement to acquire M60 machine guns, M16 rifles, AK 47 assault rifles, mortars, rocket propelled grenades, M79 grenade launchers land mines, explosives and detonators all. Drugs not only provide the money to buy new hardware but through the contacts established with international smuggling organisations – it has greatly simplified the procurement mechanisms and logistics of this as the FARC often engage in cocaine-for-arms swaps.

fighters in thirty two *frentes*, by 1998 at the peak of the FARC's power, it was present in 622 municipalities: 61% of Colombia's total area. Drug rents also provided the FARC with capacity to rearm its forces with up-to-date military equipment (ICG 2005: 8-12).

The augmentation of the FARC's military capacity therefore allowed the guerrillas to intensify its conflict with the state. Before 1980 they had little capacity to launch large - scale assaults (Richani 2002:49, Rochlin 2003:100, The Economist 2004). But between 1980 and 2002 in the context of growing participation in the drug industry– the guerrilla's willingness and ability to confront the government was substantially increased. Clashes between the guerrillas and government forces increased from 94 in 1985 to 600 a year in the mid 1990 to more than 2000 in 2002 (Moser 2000:14). In 1997 the FARC defeated the Colombian Army in several battalion- sized battles – the first time that a modern Latin American army was successfully beaten by irregular armed formations in the field (Rabas and Chalk 2001:42). By 1998, the FARC had encircled territory surrounding Bogota with some analysts estimating that the FARC's urban branch had reached 12 000 in strength (Felbab-Brown 2010:89). Several bomb attacks in 2002, including an attack on a disco in Bogota and routine targets on the city's electrical grid were clear of the FARC's almost capitulation of the state in that a traditionally rural based insurgent organisation had ascended into the county's capital (Guaqueta 2003:85, Sweig 2002:127). In these terms, through the control of large parts of the Colombian national territory, the guerrillas were replacing the state as they were denying the state its traditional monopoly on violence and challenging central state authority over other parts of the country still under state control.

Parallel to the ascension of the guerrillas stemming directly from the drug industry was the analogous rise and growth of rightist paramilitary forces. Tapping into the same opportunities of the narcotics economy's decentralisation in the 1990s, the paramilitaries

began to recognise that direct participation in the illicit narcotics economy beyond protection money from criminal narco-groups provided far more profitable returns (Tate 2001:164-165). 75% of paramilitary forces centralised under the group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) in 1996 and soon became deeply involved in all phases of the drug trade: taxing drug production; running cocaine laboratories, protecting trafficking sources and even running drugs themselves. According to William Wood, former US ambassador to Colombia, the AUC came to control 40% of Colombia's drug trade with 70% of the group's estimated annual budget of \$110 million provided for by the drug economy (ICG 2005: 16). Expectantly, drug rents resulted in the great expansion of the paramilitary's military capability: while counting only 93 members in 1986, it had between 4000- 5000 in 1995, 12 000 in 2000 and claimed 27 000 – 29 000 in 2006 (Richani 2002:148, Isacson 2002, Sanin 2003:268,). Drawing from its strengthened economic position, the AUC embarked on a calculated strategy to expand their operations into new regions of the country. Following a summit in July 1997 the AUC issued a statement announcing an offensive war and significantly increased their territorial spread carried out by mobile squads, elite training and combat units newly created from the proceeds of the drug economy. In 2001 the paramilitaries were estimated to have a presence in 40% of Colombia's territory: twenty-six of the country's 32 departments and 382 of its 1098 municipalities (Isacson 2002:4).

The bind of the Colombian state during this period was that it faced a guerrilla insurgency increasingly strengthened by an illicit economy, that was incapable of containing. To remedy this governance deficit, the state chose to supplement its fight by continuing to embrace the paramilitaries as part of the state's counter-insurgency operation while simultaneously ignoring their significant drug activities. The paramilitaries were not confronted with the same enforcement actions from the state in relation to their

significant narcotic relations, going in part to explain why paramilitary forces were able to conduct their narcotics business with relative impunity and in commission of mass violence. Paramilitary groups are responsible for more than 80% of Colombia's political violence during the mid 1990s till their disarmament beginning in 2003 (Sweig 2002:126-128, Olney 2006:5). While paramilitary organisations claim to share a common enemy with the state, and in defence of state institutions – in reality paramilitaries represented arguably the most serious threat to the state by utilising violence purely as a means to consolidate their control of territory, crush efforts at institutional reform, sabotage peace efforts with the insurgency, all the while protecting drug production and trafficking to ensure impunity from prosecution.

The Colombian military were reported to enlist paramilitary combatants into their intelligence operations and support them with logistics, organisational expertise, and hardware including uniforms, small arms. These relations were maintained despite the fact that consecutive Colombian governments declared paramilitary forces illegal.

According to statements made to the UN, paramilitary groups during this period 'became the illegal arm of the armed forces and police, for whom they carry out the dirty work which the armed forces and police cannot do as authorities subject to the rule of law' (Sanin and Baron 2005:9-13). High- ranking officers charged with serious abuses, or support and tolerance of paramilitary activity were allowed to remain on active duty.³

³ For example General Rodrigo Quinones allowed heavily armed paramilitaries to travel past his command to the village of Chengue, Sucre. The paramilitaries proceeded to separate the villagers into two groups and according to an Amnesty International report: 'One by one, the killed the men by crushing their heads with heavy stones and a sledgehammer. When it was over, 24 men lay dead in pools of blood.' Two more were later found in shallow graves and as the troops left they set the fire to the village. A second example is General Carlos Ospino Ovalle who allowed a joint army paramilitary force to surround the village of El Aro where it secured the perimeter while 25 paramilitaries entered the town, rounded up residents and executed four people.

This partnership proved wholly ineffective in containing the growth of the insurgency⁴ as seen in the growing spread and success of the FARC during this period (Olney 2006:22).

Importantly the state's inability to curb guerrilla growth had much to do with the growth of the FARC's extraordinary economic power during the 1990s. In essence the FARC developed a powerful incentive to abstain from the resolution of the conflict as drug rents had placed the guerrillas in a position of strength vis-à-vis the chronic coercive weakness of the state. This recalcitrance most clearly demonstrated in 1998 during the Pastrana Administration's attempts of reaching a peaceful resolution – led by the extension of a 42 000 square kilometer demilitarised zone to the FARC. Not only did the FARC fail to show up to the first round of negotiations, the subsequent three and half years of negotiations saw to no serious proposals (Council for Foreign Relations 2004: 71, Shifter and Jawahar 2004:144-145). The eventual cessation of talks in 2002 at the end of the Pastrana Administration saw to no inroads being made for a resolution to the conflict – with violence and conflict only increasing in this period due to paramilitary resentment that the government was showing too soft a line with the guerrilla insurgency and thus

⁴ Significantly, data analysed by Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas (2004) show that civilian killings increased dramatically after the formation of the AUC in 1997, yet it was not until 1999 that the paramilitaries began to kill as many guerrilla fighters. Despite the paramilitary's rhetoric of being at war with the guerrilla insurgency, the paramilitaries were not traditional "war actors" in the sense that they did not engage in battles against either the guerrilla or the military – the majority of their confrontations were against the civilian population in the form of systematic torture, assassination and massacres. According to Gonzalez, Boliva and Vasquez paramilitaries did not engage in a single war activity of battle, armed confrontation or sabotage with either guerrilla groups or the state between 1990 and 1996. At the height of their power and expansion in 2000, the paramilitaries engaged in merely 58 battles, in comparison to the FARC who engaged in 530 battles with the state and/or other armed groups. Therefore many scholars have concluded that the paramilitaries, despite ostensible political claims to the contrary are overwhelmingly motivated by personal enrichment, increasing political power and negotiations with the state that ceded additional material and political benefits rather than having a desire to save the country from the guerrillas.

intensifying violence and attacks against the FARC but more so, mass terror attacks on Colombian society (Shifter and Jawahar 2004: 146-147).⁵

It is crucial to emphasise in distinction from a simply greed based explanation of the conflict, the FARC's reluctance to enter into a cessation of conflict was not because guerrillas were driven by a desire to continue exploiting coca for personal gain. Guerrillas and their commanders do not personally benefit from the profits of the drug trade, with the majority of the dividends going back to operational funds of the group (Sanin 2004:266). The failure of the negotiations therefore was more on the basis that at the time of negotiations, the FARC was at the zenith of its strength - occupying close to 60% of the territory (Bejarano and Pizarro 2004:105) and thus greatly encouraged by this military strength to not engage in demobilisation when it was in a clear position of strength.⁶

⁵In practice, the zone of distension quickly became a sanctuary for the FARC. 5000 of its troops were permanently stationed, and the guerrillas' own law was imposed on the municipal council and other government officials with the FARC becoming the de facto government in the area. The FARC violated the letter and spirit of the accord by carrying out selective assassinations, harbouring kidnap victims, threatening local mayors and judges, conducting illegal searches and seizures, detaining innocent civilians, improperly re-routing public money, forcibly recruiting children into their ranks, training new troops and terrorist commandos and constructing anti-aircraft batteries and other military fortifications to strengthen their defences in the zone. The FARC effectively used the DMZ as a logistical support base for military operations as well exploiting the space to intensify its illicit narcotics activities - 35 000 hectares within the 42 0000 hectare zone was demarcated for coca production, with the guerrillas also buying up coca leaf from peasant farmers in surrounding departments and selling it directly to drug cartels, eliminating the intermediaries and taking on all stages of the cocaine production chain from base manufacturing to market wholesale. Furthermore, the FARC utilised thirty-seven landing strips at their disposal inside the DMZ to fly processed cocaine all over the country. In spite of the government's renewal of negotiations in good faith in face of these contraventions, the FARC continued to engage in increasingly brutal and virulent behaviour, peaking on February 20 2002 with the hijacking of a civilian aircraft and kidnapping of one passenger, Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechem Turbay the head of the Senate Commission of Peace and member of a large politically prominent family.

⁶ Some suggestions have been made that the failure of the negotiations had much to do with the failure of the Pastrana administration to develop a coherent negotiation strategy as well as failing to gain the support of Colombia's landed elites and military.

That said, participation in the drug economy did produce over time significant internal legitimacy problem for the FARC. As the demands of conflict grew – against the state and the paramilitary there was added pressure to intensify extraction activities to sustain war-making activities (Hough 2011:390). Therefore the FARC shifted to take an increasingly exploitative role in the drug economy. The tension seen in the growing reports since the mid 1990s of the FARC displacing *cartelitos* in its territory and tightening of control of coca cultivation (Guaqueta 2003:78, ICG 2008, Richani 2002:99). Instead of compelling traffickers to pay the farmers higher prices for coca leaves and coca paste like it did in the formative years of its narcotics involvement, the guerrillas started imposing its own prices and forcing *cocaleros* to sell only to the group. In most of the areas it controlled, the FARC became the sole buyer of primary products, with some *frentes* moving up the chain to control the smuggling of chemical precursors and the production of pure cocaine in makeshift jungle laboratories. In some areas, such as in parts of Norte de Santander, the FARC dictated the terms of coca cultivation, harvest and processing, often against the wishes of the local population (ICG 2005: 9). The group’s monopoly on buying coca paste in many areas generated resentment on the part of *cocaleros* with the guerrillas under-cutting peasant farmers and imposing harsher terms afforded by their monopoly market control (ICG 2005:8, ICG 2009:10).⁷

Resultantly, the shift of the drug industry in the 1990s rendered the illicit economy more intractable by increasing the number of active players through the incorporation of the country’s key subversive and anti-subversive movements. The paramilitaries and guerrillas began to behave like internal “rentier states” (Benjarano and Pizarro 2004:110),

⁷The decision in the mid 1990s of the FARC’s recently deceased leader Manuel Maulunda Tirofijo to institute self- financing for each of the FARC’s *frentes* no doubt had significant influence in raising the importance of the illicit economies in the group’s overall strategy and turn to increasingly repressive methods of extraction.

achieving a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the population they now only pretended to control – with neither group needing the support of the peasantry or the population at large to continue waging its war. By this stage, any attempt to categorise Colombia's armed groups according to their involvement in drug trafficking was not informative, nor could strict distinctions be made between political violence and commercial or money driven violence. All power rivals to the state had reasons to accept for their own benefits the rewards that came from the lucrative drug trade. Most crucially, the symbiosis between the illicit narcotics economy and conflict produced in excess of \$3 billion for violent groups (Shifter and Jawahar 2004: 145). This essentially meant that there was a spectacular imbalance between the resources and capacities of lawless groups on the one hand and those of the Colombian state on the other. In this sense, the state existed in the shadow and at the mercy of its power rivals and faced a significant delegitimation in its significant relative lack of capacity and resources compared with the drug industry. One of the key elements of this crisis as Thoumi points out was rife impunity and complete collapse of the judiciary, more than 95% of crimes and 90% of all murders during this period went unpunished (Thoumi 2002: 109)

By the end of the 1990s, Colombia's internal conflict and the drugs industry became intertwined and Colombian state was at near collapse with the illicit economy extending non-state armed rivals with significant coercive capacity and territorial control. 75% of Colombia's territory by the late 1990s was estimated as either controlled or contested by guerrilla and paramilitary forces (Shifter 1999:26, Manwaring 2002:9, Sweig 2002: 126-127) and Colombia political, social and economic institutions devoid of any effective function and capacity.

THE RECOVERY: MID 2000s TO PRESENT

It became increasingly evident that the Colombian state was on the brink of imminent collapse at the end of the 20th century. Statistics on homicides, kidnappings and violence were staggering and the slide into rampant lawlessness and insecurity was no doubt related to the state's weakness and inefficiency. This being the case, central to Colombia's gradual recovery in the last ten years has been efforts to "undo" the internal erosion and external assaults of the illicit economy which by and large have had little to do with counter-narcotics policies or any major attempts to suppress the productive capacity and volume of the drug industry.

The first significant factor to Colombia's recovery is a shift in overall policy by moving away from the dominant "narco-terrorist" approach of successive Colombian administrations that targeted the narcotics economy as a solution to reasserting state power and ending the internal conflict. This focus on counter-narcotics was in large part influenced by the understanding that US aid and military assistance would only be extended if Colombia identified with US foreign policy security imperatives that focused on supply side narcotics control in Colombia (Rochlin 2011: 719-721). That said, the later years of the Pastrana Administration following the unsuccessful negotiations with the FARC, attention was directed towards ungoverned non-state spaces under guerrilla or paramilitary control. The Colombian government came to the realization that antidrug policies were wholly misdirected as it only shifted the balance of control for the illicit economy among various conflict actors without actually reducing overall supply and only going to further exacerbate conflict tensions between violent non-state actors. As such, securing state presence and consolidating absent state institutions became the driving mantle of the President Alvaro Uribe's Democratic Security Policy (DSP) in

implementation of a two pronged strategy of Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota after gaining the presidency in 2002 (ICG 2010: 1-6).

The central premise of the DSP is the strengthening of the rule of law and the gradual consolidation of state control over the whole of Colombian territory. To this end, the national police substantially extended its presence throughout the country. In August 2002, at the beginning of Uribe's term, the national police were absent from 158 municipalities, by the end of 2003 that number dropped to only 18 (Presidency of the Republic and Ministry of Defense 2002). State presence – by way of the police had extended to all of the 1098 municipalities in the country for the first time in its history. The percentage of budget spending on military expenditures rose quickly – increasing by almost 33% between 2001 and 2004 with defense accounting for 5.6% of the GDP in 2006, evening out to 5.2% in 2009 – in comparison to 3.5% in 2002 when Uribe first assumed office and an average of below 2% for much of the 1990s (Jawahar 2004).

International assistance by way of US aid has been critical to the success of these security policies. Crucially, US policy in Colombia has been transformed by the global circumstances following 9/11 terrorist attacks. Colombia's internal armed conflict was heightened to become the primary regional playground of the US' global war on terror (Vuturs and Smith 2006:171). The US for the first time allowed the Colombian government to use all past and present counterdrug aid to wage war against the guerrilla insurgency. Accordingly from 2000 to 2008 the US government appropriated \$ 4.9 billion to the Colombian military and police with US forces also providing technical and signal intelligence to the Colombian military (Rochlin 2011: 722-730). As a result the training, force structure and mobility of the Colombian armed forces have greatly improved.

Previous to the overhaul of Plan Patriota, the Colombian military, as previously intimated

in its defeat by the FARC throughout the 1990s was weak, poorly trained, underequipped and badly structured (Vauters and Smith 2006:).⁸ The number of professional soldiers in Colombia since Plan Patriota has almost quadrupled to 78 000 with new military units, including two divisions, six brigades twelve mobile units and six mountain battalions (Vauters and Smith 2006: 173-174).

Broadly speaking, US' financial aid and military assistance has transformed the Colombian national military from an immobile, vulnerable and predictable force into a rapid, all terrain military machine better equipped to fight an asymmetric warfare, which has successfully limited the FARC's mobility, communication and offensive capacity .⁹ In 2002 FARC was reportedly present in half of Colombia's territory, 514 of 1098 municipalities; in 2009 however, it registered in only 206 municipalities, mostly in departments of strategic importance for drug trafficking and in greatly reduced form (ICG 2009:6-7). Overall, the insurgents' presence has been reduced by more than 50% between 2002 and 2010, with most of its operations in only five of the 32 departments with only 30 of 61 *frentes* believed to be active (ICG 2009: 8). Furthermore, US Southern Command reported in 2008 that FARC's numbers have now been reduced to 9000 combatants down from an estimated 18 000 high in 2001 (Saab and Taylor 2009:459). The guerrillas have been pushed out of heavily populated areas with the state regaining control of road arteries and other strategic infrastructure (ICG 2010: 4). The FARC has

⁸In 1997, the total number of soldiers in the navy, air force and army amounted to 131 000 with 22 000 of those professional soldiers deployed for largely defensive purposes – with rare offensive actions against the guerrillas. The rest were administrative and logistical support that created a significant tail to tooth ratio heavily skewed toward support staff.

⁹The aid and assistance from the United States has prompted the formation of Colombia's first rapid action brigade, the *Fuerza Despliegue Rapida* and five battalions of 33 combat elements specialising in riverine battles to stop maritime narcotics trafficking. Furthermore the US provided counter insurgency teams in Colombia to provide specialist training to 4000 Colombian troops and provision of C- 26, AC- 47 fighter aircrafts, Huey UH-1H helicopters and sixty Blackhawks. As a result, Colombia has become the third highest recipient of US military aid in the world (behind Israel and Egypt) and the leading recipient of direct US military training.

withdrawn to mostly inaccessible high mountain range or tropical jungles on the border regions with Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and Panama losing much of its capacity to mount large- scale offensive actions or assaults for new territory (ICG 2009: 4).

The cumulative effect of the government's sustained offensive has not only dealt heavy blows to the physical strength of the guerrilla insurgency but fear of attack and or infiltration by security forces has prompted rank and file loss of morale - making the leadership's control of guerrilla combatants ever more difficult. Taking power by force seems more distant than ever with many defectors arguing that the organisation has lost its purpose. Previously strong internal cohesion has been replaced with a culture of distrust. The contributory factors to this include the deaths of several important commanders such as "J.J", "Negro Acacio", "Martin Caballero" and Raul Reyes and FARC founder Pedro Antonio Marin, which has put the internal chain of command under tremendous pressure. The strategic pressure has produced a less ubiquitous Secretariat, less control from superiors has meant that many commanders have become more involved in regional and local illicit economies for personal profit, especially in units along strategic corridors and borders where they can charge for the passage of drugs. This has led to an increase in abuse of subordinates who question their superiors' actions and has spurred defections of disgruntled combatants¹⁰ (ICG 2010:4-8). Increasing FARC defections make it easier for the government to collect intelligence and advance better and more targeted counter-insurgent plans. In addition to the claw back by the state on the

¹⁰Most recent figures show that between 2002 and 2009, 11 615 fighters abandoned their ranks and demobilised. While there is some conflict over the exact figures of FARC's fighting force, the Colombian government estimating that troop strength is now between 7000-8000, other sources put it closer to 10 000; the broader point nevertheless is that FARC is significantly physically weakened. Units are reducing their size to avoid air to ground attacks and using hit and run tactics by highly mobile, plain clothed three man cells for minimal overall impact. At the same time the fear of infiltration by security forces and intelligence agents has led to even more repressive action towards the rural population – numerous reports have surfaced in the last three years of indiscriminate massacres, displacement and prohibition of international humanitarian assistance organisations from entering municipalities

FARC, the AUC has also undergone a demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration process since 2003 under the so-called Justice and Peace Law (JPL). By the end of 2007 some 31 000 paramilitaries including their most notorious commanders had demobilized (Felbab-Brown 2010).¹¹

Significantly, as a result of the pace and strength of state security policies, the FARC has been forced to fall back as a survival strategy to securing financial resources. The FARC have been increasingly cooperating with a band of third generation paramilitary groups – smaller entities made up from groups and leaders who did not undergo the JPL processes, to manage the narcotics trade. Depending on the territories and individual commanders, FARC units operate in tolerated cohabitation, territorial division or division of labour schemes for drug production and trafficking (ICG 2010:5). Broadly speaking, the guerrillas usually control the cultivation stages, and paramilitary forces manage the transportation of coca paste and cocaine precursor agents. For example, on the Orinoco plains in eastern Colombia, drug trafficking operations are shared by the FARC and the Popular Revolutionary Anticommunist Army (ERPAC) - a new paramilitary group. Coca paste produced in FARC controlled territory is sent to labs controlled by the ERPAC. This cocaine is then forwarded to Venezuela in corridors controlled by the ERPAC (icg 2009: 7).

¹¹ There has been considerable controversy over this demobilisation process given that the number of demobilized members significantly increased previous estimates of the size of the paramilitaries with many critics charging that the paramilitaries had in actual fact hired local available men to “demoblise” in order to be seen in compliance with the law, whereas in actual fact, numerous paramilitary groups retained coercive operations while reaping the financial benefits of the government’s demobilisation compensation. The membership between the FARC and the paramilitaries has been extraordinarily fluid in some highly contested areas, and is likely that some FARC members defected to the AUC in the early 2000s when the AUC took over some former FARC territories or switched to the AUC after 2005 to take advantage of the demobilisation deal.

A shift into such arrangements of functional cooperation between previously sworn ideological enemies portends the possibility that the internal conflict in Colombia rather than being nudged towards termination is being reproduced into a new form – evolving into a situation similar to the late 1980s and early days of the 1990s where the growth of criminal gangs threatened state stability. This next phase perhaps characterised by armed actors not struggling for political dominion, control of the state or a reversal in patterns of political exclusion, but for economic dominion so they can as much as possible control turf and territory to exploit the illicit narcotic economy. If that does indeed end up being the case, the crucial difference since the cartel age is that the institutional strength of the state has been greatly improved and the extent to which criminal-state collusion will manifest, which saw rampant corruption and narco-terrorism in previous times is unlikely to manifest to the same degree in the present era.

Institutional strengthening in large part derived from the significant political and judicial reform in the last ten years, which give clear signs that prosecutorial institutions no longer look the other way with respects to criminal-political collusion. By 2010 prosecutors dealing with demobilised paramilitary leaders under the JPL had passed to competent authorities evidence for the possible involvement of 24 governors, 225 mayors, eleven members of departmental assemblies and 55 local councilors (ICG 2011:2-5). By February 2011, 121 members of Congress elected in 1998, 2002 and 2006 had come under investigation for alleged links to paramilitaries, 25 to date have been sentenced. In addition, some 27 politicians and other public officials faced prosecution for alleged links to the FARC by 2009.¹² In addition, stronger electoral funding regulations providing for

¹²These investigations at the national level are slowly trickling down to the local arena. At least 103 acting and formal local officials elected between 1997-2010 had come under investigation for alleged links to paramilitaries including twenty acting and former departmental governors, seven of whom were found guilty of those connections. A

the introduction of robust penalties on political parties whose candidates have links to illegal actors have been recently introduced. It stipulates that parties or political movements that endorse politicians with connections to illegal armed groups – that is, drug money will be forced to pay back public money received for campaign financing or risk losing their legal status. These sanctions also apply if parties endorse politicians who have been sentenced for drug trafficking, with parties prohibited from replacing candidates facing proceedings for these crimes. These reforms also make strides to reduce the importance of private funding for campaigns, reducing the pressure under the new rules, parties can claim an advance corresponding to up to 80% of the public campaign funding they received in previous electoral contest with individual prohibited from contributing more than 10% of the total allowed campaign costs (ICG 2011:5-16).

If the Colombian state continues along at the same pace of enhanced political, economic and military efforts towards greater legitimacy and capacity, the conflict and fragmentation of the Colombian state could be in its terminal phase, with the end game perhaps in sight. With the substantial weakening of the leftist guerrillas and demobilisation of the paramilitaries – the number of massacres and attack on the population including community activists have fallen dramatically. Compared to 2002, homicides are down 40%, kidnappings have been reduced by 83% and terrorist attacks decreased by 76%. In a demonstration of international law enforcement, a total of some eight hundred Colombian traffickers have been extradited to the United States by 2009 (DeShazo, Priminani and McLean 2007:18).

further thirteen local politicians from Uraba were added to the growing list of regional ‘parapolitics’ suspects.

CONCLUSION

The emergence, development and presence of Colombia's infamous narcotics economy highlights that the drug industry has played a key role in the erosion of the Colombian state. Through the course of the illicit narcotics economy's operation it has provided significant funds to non-state armed actors: allowing a significant augmentation of their territorial control, coercive force and on occasion political legitimacy which has allowed these groups to contest state power to the extent that the strengths of the illicit economy overpowered that of state institutions.

While Colombia's illicit narcotics economy has not been eliminated, the pernicious ramifications of its operation –cartel para-states and the aggressive symbiosis with armed anti-state movements have nonetheless been marginalised in the last decade. This gradual recovery of the state in Colombia despite the continued presence of the illicit narcotics economy intimates that it is not the volume of production or size of the drug industry that is of salience but the nature of the organisational environment in which it is situated. In the broader context where the drug industry in producer countries is unlikely to see to great reduction absent dramatic changes in global demand, Colombia shows that significant institutional and structural reform, rather than harsher law enforcement and anti-narcotics initiatives have a significant role in curtailing the fragmenting ramifications of the illicit narcotic economy. That said, the extent to which Colombia's recent gains are sustainable remains to be seen. While security improvements have no doubt been made, the possible threat of a new phase of instability characterised by an increasingly decentralised, fragmented and opportunistic power configurations around the drugs industry is conceivable. Either way, Colombia illustrates that an illicit narcotics economy is a driving force to the fragmentation of a state, effecting both an internal erosion of state

function as well as an external assault, sourcing the non-state usurpation of the state's territorial control, coercive force and legitimacy.

Chapter Three: Afghanistan

THE GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES

One of the poorest countries in the world, Afghanistan has been torn by war and insurgency since 1979¹³. The genesis, development and expansion of opium production in Afghanistan is intimately linked with the wars and upheavals that has blighted the country over the past thirty years with Afghanistan now supplying more than 90% of the global illicit market (UNODC 2008).

This chapter analyses the illicit opium economy through three key stages from the Soviet invasion in 1979, the period of internecine fighting between various warlord forces dominance of the Taliban, to the present era of post-Taliban reconstruction. Through this analysis it will be shown as was similarly the case in Colombia, the illicit narcotics economy is the key force underlying state erosion through both internal regression and external attack. First, the opium economy by way of external attack on state authority funded the political power bases of numerous anti-state polities in Afghanistan. During the Soviet occupation- the forces of the *mujahideen*, in the stage of a power vacuum in the country during the 1990s, the illicit opium economy was the basis of both the Taliban and warlord operations and in the present era, the militant groups of the Taliban insurgency. Second in terms of internal delegitimation, the impacts of the illicit narcotics economy has undertaken significant capture of the post-Taliban new Afghan state, engendering corruption within both state figures and institutions to the extent that there is in effective a defacto-criminalisation of the state.

¹³ Afghanistan has been observed by many to have been in a constant state of conflict since the second half of the eighteenth century, since the ‘Great Game’

THE SOVIET OCCUPATION AND MUJAHIDEEN INSURGENCY, THE EMERGENCE OF THE OPIUM POPPY: 1979-89

Although opium has been produced since the mid eighteenth century in Afghanistan on a small scale for traditional use, the large- scale production of the poppy and assemblage of the Afghan narcotics industry emerged during the anti- Soviet jihad following the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979 (Maass 2011: 6, Isby 1986:8). Extensive foreign patronage underscored by the United States Cold War strategy of proxy conflicts promoted a powerful American-Pakistani CIA/ISI arms pipeline that delivered massive financial aid and capital to the anti-Soviet resistance vanguard made up of military strongmen or ethnically based warlords (Rubin 1995: 196). This system of brokerage saw profits accumulated by the seven *mujahideen* resistance leaders reinvested in the opium economy and warlords carving out key facilitative roles in the drugs industry (McCoy 2003:15-16). For example Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of *Hezb-I-Islami* (Islamic Party) was the largest recipient of US military aid, who in partnership with Pakistani heroin syndicates invested in heroin processing plants. Hekmatyar went on to control at least six refineries in south-western Pakistan that processed opium produced from southern Afghanistan (US Department of State 1984:4). In addition, within the traditional poppy growing area in the Helmand Valley, Mullah Nasim Akhundzada another of the *mujahideen* partners issued a fatwa legitimising poppy cultivation, production quotas for farmers as well as provision of cash advances to farmers engaged in poppy cultivation and opium production (Guistozi and Ullah 2006: 12). Nasim also sought to control as much of the trafficking component of the trade as possible, going so far as maintaining an office in Zahidan, Iran to handle trade once it left Afghanistan (Rubin 1995: 263).

The more that Soviet forces engaged in their scorched earth policy during their occupation- misappropriating their military superiority in systematic destruction of Afghanistan's country's agricultural resources and infrastructure, the more that Afghanistan's largely rural population turned to the cultivation of opium poppy, which as a resilient agro-crop can grow in the poorest agricultural conditions. Resultantly Afghanistan's opium harvest doubled to 575 metric tonnes between 1982- 83 and in 1985 31% of the global share of opium production came from Afghanistan (Haq 1996: 956). By 1989 the seven *mujahideen* groups were responsible for a total production 800 metric tonnes of opium – more than one third of global opiate production (MacDonald 1992: 319).

Drug profits allowed warlords to scale up their military capabilities - replacing their single shot rifles with automatic weapons and light artillery. This augmented their coercive capacity and military effectiveness against the flailing Soviet occupation and relatedly the strength and capacity of the nascent government (Jalali and Grau 2001: 65-66). In addition, control over the drug economy became a significant source of political legitimacy for the *mujahideen*. Traditionally, tribal elites in Afghanistan derived support from their ability to provide security and distribute goods among members of their community (Roy 1990: 23). Because the poppy economy could be grown in most parts of the country and provided cash not only through sale but also through credit and labour dividends it became the country's key industry during this conflict period. Farmers could sell the crop to wholesale traders and when faced with cash flow problems or food deficits - they could obtain loans from traders under a system of future contracts called *salaam* that used the opium poppy as leverage (Rubin 2000: 1793). Therefore, the warlords' facilitation and protection of this key source of livelihood for large segments of the population, who otherwise bore the brunt of an incredibly destructive civil war and

absent public goods, secured the power-base of warlord commanders in displacement of the nascent state. Moreover warlords often used drug profits to build public works and social services, for example in 1987 Mullah Nasim Akhundzada claimed to have established hospitals, clinics and forty madrassas in the Helmand Valley from the dividends he reaped from the opium trade (Rubin 1995:245).

Therefore to the extent that participation in the opium economy provided warlords with the accumulation of economic and political resources as well as social and territorial control, it could be seen that the opium economy delivered an assortment of warlord para-states alongside and within the broader ailing shell of the extant formal Afghan state. By the time the Soviets withdrew in 1989, a greatly weakened central state government was left in the wake of their departure (Goodson 2001:21). The state was not in control over great portions of its territory and unable to bring any significant services to the population (Rubin 1995:159). Afghans were increasingly coalescing around the individual fiefdoms of warlord commanders, polities of which whose power and authority were rooted in the control and regulation of the country's opium industry.

INTERNECINE CONFLICT, FRAGMENTATION, ABSENT STATE AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE OPIUM ECONOMY: 1992-2001

Following the Soviet's exit, a three year struggle between the forces of the *mujahideen* and Najibullah regime ended in the collapse a central state in 1992, catapulting Afghanistan into a flux of internecine conflict between feuding warlords, characterised by the mass pillage and predation of the population for much of the 1990s where the concept of the 'state' meant very little in Afghanistan (Goodson 2001: 143-

178). Politically, there was a definitive fragmentation of central power, reversing the state building processes of the last century and the emergence of regionalised ethno-political military groups (Rubin 1995:203). The locus of the conflict during this period centred between the Pashtun led force of Hekmatyar's *Hezb-I-Islami*, the Tajik forces under the military leadership of Ahmed Shah Massoud and Uzbek groupings under formerly pro-communist general Abdul Rashid Dostum (Goodson 2001:61-64).¹⁴ In this context, the Afghan economy became increasingly peripheralised, with the economies of the provincial centres more integrated with those of neighbouring countries and Kabul relegated to the economic backwaters. Coupled with the decline of superpower patronage from the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent termination of US support during the 1990s; warlords were forced to locate and secure internal revenue sources to sustain their operations. This income derived largely from the control and regulation of the opium economy.¹⁵ Between 1992 and 1995, Afghan opium cultivation rose dramatically: Afghanistan produced between 2200 – 2400 metric tons of opium per year, rivalling Burma as the world's largest producer of raw opium (Goodhand 2005:200).

Afghanistan as a whole became once more a borderland, a vast non-state space drawn into a civil war of ethnic-nationalist tendencies. This most clearly highlighted in the minting of different currencies by opposing politico-military groups and the defiant planting of the opium poppy in prime easily accessible areas, unlike other drug producing countries where it is grown illicitly on borderland zones beyond the reach of the state

¹⁴ Numerous scholars argue that it is misleading to speak of a purely 'Afghan conflict' during this period as the internal war part was part of a larger conflict spanning over interconnected zones of instability that included Kashmir, Tajikistan and the Gerghana Valley. According to Peter Wallensteen, Afghanistan was part of a 'regional conflict complex' - one of sixteen regionalised violent conflicts that emerged from the end of the Cold War.

¹⁵ This was supplemented in small amounts by taxation revenue from goods smuggling and precious minerals, exact figures and calculations are expectedly hard to come by due to the informational black-hole that Afghanistan plunged into during this period although most scholars have put this figure somewhere around \$200 million

(Giustozzi 2011:76-79). In this sense, going from being a buffer state, Afghanistan shifted into a marketing corridor for an increasingly expansive illicit narcotics economy. This new status as an illicit transition zone drew on the country's geographical comparative advantage – situated at the interstices of key global narcotics markets in Europe and Asia and its de-facto free trade zone with limited governmental regulation and well established social networks for trade and transportation (Goodhand 2005:199).

Therefore the fragmentation of state authority underscored by the violent rivalries of competing warlord polities became the main obstacle to political settlement and the formation of a centralised state apparatus. Autonomous powerful warlords had few incentives to put the state back together as a return to centralised power apparatus would disrupt the systems of production and exchange that provided their followers with livelihoods and thus would jettison their personal political support bases. That said, in 1994 a new and powerful armed group re-emerged on the scene: the Taliban, composed of Islamic fundamentalists who became notorious for their unrestrained brutality, religious fanaticism and ruthless oppression (Davis 1998:46, Rashid 1998: 85-86).

Although led by Afghans, notably Mullah Omar, the Taliban was formed as a transnational network based in both Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rashid 2000: 1-24). In Pakistan it drew primarily on a network of madrasas that educated Afghan refugees and on political parties belonging to the Deobandi movement whose teachings are based on an austere interpretation of Islam (Rashid 2000:29).

The Taliban made rapid military strides and by 1996 had 90% of Afghanistan under their control with the power structures of warlords replaced by quasi- control exercised by the Taliban leadership (Davis 1998:57). The regime initially attempted to ban poppy cultivation in the country – drug production and consumption antithetical to the group's

religious ideology. In fact the UN and US were hopeful that if the Taliban succeeded in taking over the country, it would stem Afghanistan's opium and heroin production.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Taliban prohibition did not last, and the regime lifted its opium ban in 1996 drawn in part by the lucrative enticements of drug profits but also prompted by the strong political inducements to rectify its widespread lack of popular legitimacy, support and control in southern Pashtun regions. The key opponent in southern regions was the warlord Ghaffar Akhundzada, brother of the late Mullah Nasim Akhundzada, who like Mullah Nasim was a key facilitator and benefactor of the region's strong opium economy and derived a great deal of popular support and financial gain from the narcotics industry. Therefore reversing the opium ban and allowing warlords to continue trading in drugs became a way to consolidate The Taliban's control of southern regions and "co-opt" previously uncooperative strongmen like Ghaffar Akhundzada into the new ruling coalition (Felbab-Brown 2010:124-125).

In consequence the drug industry went on to generate significant fiscal revenue for the Taliban regime, evolving into a de-facto legal source of finance for the group, which saw the opium production increase by 43% over the period of 1994-2001 (Thompson 2006:170). The regime taxed opium production with the traditional agricultural tax – *ushr* levying taxes on landowners and drug traders alike. A then all time high of 4500 metric tonnes was reached in 1999, estimated by the UN Drug Control Program to be worth \$183 million at the farm-gate, which at the time accounted for ¾ of global supply and raised an estimated \$ 15 million raised through the *ushr* tax and \$ 30 million from the

¹⁶The then director of the United Nations Drug Policy office in Pakistan Giovanni Quaglia declared rather optimistically and cavalierly that "in these circumstances, the [drug] problem [in Afghanistan] can be dealt with in ten years' quoted in Felbab-Brown 2010 p125

centrally levied zakat for the regime (Transnational Institute 2001, Rubin 2000: 1798).¹⁷ Further to this, the regime began taxing heroin laboratories' outputs: charging between \$50-70 per kilogram depending on whether the final product was morphine base or crystal heroin (Bartholet and LeVine 1999:40-43).

The Taliban period of rule in Afghanistan has been noted by some scholars to have borne some resemblance to a Weberian "state" in that it had consolidated majority territorial control and centralised security (Goodhand 2009: 8, Rashid 2000: 6). That said the Taliban failed significantly to satisfy a 'legitimate' authority. The regime's extreme repression of the population¹⁸, fundamental disinterest in any other aspect of state responsibility – failing to establish social services or a functioning bureaucracy and allowing the complete disintegration of erstwhile social services and state administration (Goodson 2001: 67-91) for most practical analytical purposes did not constitute anything close to a legitimate and effectual "state". Moreover, in the circumstance that the Taliban focused on territorial control and the regulation and control of opium – controlling 97% of the opium produced in Afghanistan (Blanchard 2009: 23) and making significant investments in extension services in the opium economy¹⁹ with no comparable advances in other domains of society – it is more the case that Afghanistan

¹⁷ *Ushr* is the traditional Islamic tithe that is collected on all agricultural products, usually levied at 10% at the farm gate, which often is paid in kind rather. *Zakat* is the specialist opium tax that the Taliban had later developed as the opium economy expanded.

¹⁸ Women were forbidden to attend schools, work outside the home or receive medical care. Sports, music, dancing were strictly prohibited as were reading any material published outside the country. Religious police from the Ministry of Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice patrolled the streets, looking for offenders who failed to grow sufficiently long beards and women found walking on the streets without a male relative or whose ankles were showing were lashed on the spot. The Taliban in addition frequently packed stadiums with crowds of tens of thousands to witness amputations floggings and executions while thieves had their right hand and left foot amputated.

¹⁹ This included the issuance of licenses to farmers to maintain the Taliban's regulatory and oversight as well as provision of fertilizer

during this period experienced an annihilation of the state and was instead ruled by a predominant warlord regime that assumed a pointedly narco-cartel like character.

The Taliban's unexpected opium cultivation ban in July 2000, which saw to a 90% drop in cultivation between 2000-01 (UNODC 2003: 45) is a sharp demonstration of the Taliban's cartel fidelities. The ban was driven by the regime's motivation to boost the price of opium as booming poppy cultivation during the 1990s in Afghanistan saw to plummeting opium poppy prices at the farm-gate, hitting an all time low of \$26 per kilogram in 2000. As a result of the ban, the price of opium shot up to approximately \$350-450 per kilogram in 2001 (Maas 2011: 17-19).²⁰ Furthermore, when the cultivation ban went into effect, it was estimated that 3000 metric tonnes of opium and 200 metric tonnes heroin were stockpiled in the country (ICG 2001). According to DEA spokesman Will Glaspy, the Taliban regime was believed to be stockpiling as much as 65% of each year's harvest with further reports that the Taliban itself had sufficient stockpiles to last anywhere from two - ten years to service the western European heroin market (Jacoby 2002).

Furthermore, while the cultivation ban was strictly enforced, the Taliban made no such overtures to seize drug stocks or arrest traffickers, with opium bazaars continuing to operate and the regime earning much higher taxation revenues following the ban now that the opiate products they taxed experienced a ten-fold increase in value. For all intents and purposes, the opium ban was an ingenious strategic ploy by the Taliban that increased its earnings from the opium industry at the cost of destitution for Afghanistan's majority rural population who relied on the opium cultivation as the key source of livelihood- most indicative of the Taliban's disregard to exercise basic state function vis-à-vis society.

²⁰ 600% from \$100 to \$700 estimate from other sources, which one to use.

A FLAILING STATE DROWNING IN A SEA OF POPPIES: 2001- PRESENT

The degree to which the vacuum of state authority would have persisted under the Taliban is unknown as the United States invasion in November 2001 brought the rapid fall of the regime, with great hope that the instability, conflict and fragile political and economic order that characterised the past thirty years would be improved. In spite of such optimism, modern day Afghanistan is in a precarious condition. External intervention in the country has exacerbated the latent centrifugal forces of warlord machinations as well as advancing a resurgent neo-Taliban force, both forces of which are underpinned by the illicit opium economy. In this way, present day Afghanistan more than in any previous period is being held ransom to the pernicious fragmenting ramifications of the narcotics economy.

The Bonn Agreement that formed the new Afghan state following the fall of the Taliban did not constitute a sustainable political settlement; it signified a victor's peace involving a coalition of actors who fell on the right side of the US led 'war on terror'. The 2001 US invasion rather than mounting a nationwide invasion with large numbers of foreign troops saw the US and its allies opt for a "light foot print" approach that utilised local proxies and their militias with predictably unfortunate outcomes (Jal 2011: 1-24, Khan 2011: 5)). The Afghan warlords relied upon, which included Ismail Kahn, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammed Fahim, Hazrat Ali all have significant links with the opium economy as determined from the previous decades of warlord in-fighting and Soviet resistance (MacDonald 2007: 110).²¹ Crucially, subsequent processes of coalition building by

²¹ The \$ 70 million paid by the United States in return for warlord support in intelligence and military operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda according to Afghan narcotics expert Jonathan Goodhand was quickly recycled into loans to farmers to finance the next

President Hamid Karzai for a new Afghan government saw these drug lord- warlords co-opted into formal ranks of the state.²² This strategy of “warlord democratisation” integrated these strongmen into new power positions in various Ministries, provincial governorship or military appointments, but has not resulted in a severance of these actors from their autonomous economic networks and patronage structures broadly based on the drug industry (Guistozzi 2004: 36).

The underlying reason for the failure of this form of co-option is that the central apparatus is so chronically weak and dependent on external patrons for aid and support that provincial elites retain the upper-hand and leverage in centre-periphery bargaining processes. An article written in the Washington Post in April 2003 by Mahmood Karzai brother of the President, Hamed Wardak, the Afghan Vice President of the Chamber and Jack Kemp former US Congressman claimed that ‘unfortunately the re-emergence of these warlords is directly related to US financial and military support’ (Washington Post 2003). From this perspective, the Karzai government created a governance deficit early on by appointing corrupt and violent local warlords who undertake fluid political arrangements based on ‘spot contracts’ or constant hedging vis-à-vis the state (Surhke 2011: 256). These warlord politicians ostensibly serve the role of state officials while simultaneously playing their traditional role as traditional warlord powerbrokers by maintaining autonomous power enclaves separate from and against the dictates of the state (Gannon 2004: 35-46).

spring’s poppy crop; because the flood of foreign dollars in the money market had a significant deflation effect that impelled a quick unloading of US dollars into profitable domestic investments (Goodhand 2003:pg)

²² Fahim became defense minister, Hazrat Ali took control of Nangarhar – a province rich in poppy, Ismail Khan reinstalled himself in Herat where he readily taxed the lucrative cross border opium traffic with Iran, Rashid Dostum got Mazar-e Sharif and control of the trade to the North.

The operationalisation of this significantly compromised political structure is underpinned in the opium economy. Backed by substantial firepower and manpower, warlords consolidated their personal patronage systems by gaining the loyalty of police and military officials by allowing them to participate in the various taxation activities of the drug trade. Most warlord affiliates are reported to charge traffickers fees between 15-18% for securing transportation routes as well as charging heroin labs between 12-15% (Felbab-Brown 2010: 137). The crippling incapacity of the official political transition to counteract the unofficial political traditions of Afghan society is most clearly seen in the case of Sher Mohammed Akhundzada. Sher Mohammed is the nephew of Mullah Nasim Akhundzada - who as previously outlined was the reigning drug-lord who established southern Afghanistan's opium industry during the Soviet occupation. In 2005, nine metric tonnes of opium was found in the basement of Sher Mohammed's house which prompted his removal from the Governor post (Gopal 2010). He however was later re-appointed as a senator to the Afghan upper house by President Karzai in 2006 on the basis of Sher Mohammed's predominant influences in the Pashtun in southern Afghanistan (Goodhand and Mansfield 2010: 22). Furthermore, Hazrat Ali, one of the key Northern Alliance strongmen relied on by the coalition in the Tora Bora operation against Al-Qaeda operatives was appointed as the security chief of Nangarhar. From this position, Ali consolidated his control over the drug trade with poppy farmers from Nangarhar reporting that Ali's men came to their villages in pickup trucks to buy raw opium at first for transportation to processing labs in Pakistan but later on reportedly to labs inside the Afghan border owned by Ali himself (Mishra 2005, Macdonald 2007: 106). In the same way as Sher Mohammed, while Ali was removed from his security chief position in 2004 following international pressure, he successfully ran for election in 2005 for the seat in Nangarhar and is widely acknowledged to continue his narcotics dealings today (Goodhand and Mansfield 2010:17, Schorn 2009). This phenomenon of deeply

entrenched corruption flowing from the illicit narcotics economy goes as far up Afghanistan's political institutions as President Hamid Karzai's own brother, the recently assassinated Wali Karzai. Wali Karzai was the chairman of the Kandahar Provincial Council and broadly acknowledged as a key drugs trade operative – controlling key nodes of the trafficking networks and transportation assets across southern Afghanistan and into Baluchistan, Pakistan (Rubin and Shane 2011, Risen 2008, Al Jazeera 2009).

All of these cases demonstrate the broader point that the opium economy entrenches extant power structures in the provinces that significantly weakens the authority of central state power. Moreover, in addition to continuing their opium connections, many of these warlord politicians have learned to manipulate anti-narcotics policies to appease Kabul and the international community while continuing to reap the profits illicit economy as well as the dividends of counter-narcotics initiatives. For example during the eradication campaign in Nangarhar during the 2001-2002 season, the UNODC study of the province reported stories of pervasive corruption where farmers paid ‘facilitation fees’ to local and regional commanders to ensure that their opium crops were precluded from crop eradication (UNODC 2003:3). These regional commanders simultaneously pocketed the compensation money provided by these compensated eradication initiatives, effectively reaping a double monetary gain from the opium economy through payments from the farmers and the government. Further, during the 2002-03 in the key opium producing province of Helmand, the Governor Sher Mohammed was widely acknowledged by counter-narcotics officials and media reports to have imposed eradication to the northern fields of competing Noorzai and Itzakzai tribal men, while exempting crops in southern areas of fellow Alizai tribesmen who benefited from the price increase resulting from competition elimination (Rubin 2009, Chouvy 2004, Moreau and Yousafzai 2003). Mohammad Atta Noor, the widely praised Governor of Balkh in spite of his “effective

implementation” of poppy eradication from 2004-08 is further demonstration of the duplicity of opium warlord-druglord politicians. Atta while undertaking poppy eradication simultaneously protected drug smuggling routes into Uzbekistan – arresting and detaining the Karzai- appointed chief of police when he seized a large shipment of opium, regaining the seized crop (Macdonald 2007:63).

As Mankin argues, the opium economy is both a consequence of local ethnically based power structures and its further entrenchment, which taken together corrodes the state from within (Mankin 2009). State authority therefore is a farcical arbitrage of influence whereby actual political power in Afghanistan is now closely aligned with the capacity to generate money and patronage through the drug economy. The Drug War Chronicle claims that 60% of those elected to parliament in the 2005 elections are linked to warlords and the drug trade (Drug War Chronicle 2006) while the World Bank acknowledges that drug profits are financing local warlords and political elites (Byrd and Bundenburg 2004: 25-39). In this sense, given the organisational structure of Afghanistan’s opium economy where “rehabilitated warlords” play the dominant roles, estimated by the Council on Foreign Relations to have taken an estimated \$2.3 billion in 2003 from opium proceeds – the extent of corruption in Afghanistan from the illicit narcotics economy is unparalleled (Council on Foreign Relations 2004). The state is not merely suborned by the drug industry, but the state has in effect formed a symbiotic partnership with the drug trade.

This de-facto criminalisation of the state has expectedly trickled down for the dysfunction of key state administrative bureaucracies. For example, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) according to one report is afflicted by a ‘multi-tiered graft’ and ‘concentric circles of corruption’ premised on narcotics (Kent 2007). In reference to the MOI, Syed Ikramuddin, the Minister of Labor said ‘except for Minister of Interior himself, all the

lower people from the heads of department down are involved in supporting drug smuggling' (Balduf and Bowers 2005:1). Through bribes the MOI is playing a key role in organising protection for opium markets by making appointments in the police structure at provincial and district levels that provide for the facilitation of drug activities and also the policing of opposing competitors. In an investigative report on the drugs trade it was reported that a police chief in a poppy growing area could expect to pay up to US\$10 000 in bribes to the MOI for six monthly periods when the salaried position pays only US \$60 per month (Wilder 2007). The implication of this being that a police chief in control of a poppy growing area could extract returns from farmers and traffickers for non-enforcement of the law that easily surpasses the cost of securing his appointment. While the precise figures as to how much a policeman earns from kickbacks from the narcotics trade are difficult to confirm, it has been estimated by Afghan counter-narcotic officials that a border police commander in eastern Afghanistan earns \$ 400 000 a month from heroin smuggling (Loyd 2007). Afghan officials privately admitted to a study undertaken by Wilder that 80% of personnel at the MOI might be benefiting from the drug trade (Wilder 2007). This problem however is not restricted to the MOI. Of the 250 000- 400 000 civil servants who are working within the Afghan government, Afghan officials estimate that perhaps 100 000 of these are directly benefiting (through transportation fees, profits or bribes) from the drug trade (UNODC 2010).

Most significantly in Afghanistan, the assemblage of protective actors, networks and institutions, like the opium economy itself is extremely footloose. Patterns of capture and corruption can shift across ministries and to other state institutions in order to evade regulatory mechanisms. For example, under mounting international pressure in 2008, President Karzai removed the deeply corrupt Zara Ahmad Moqbel. Moqbel was notorious for selling positions and appointing predatory police chiefs who often colluded with drugs traffickers as the Minister for Interior (Boone 2010). In January 2010, Zara Ahmad

Moqbel was re-appointed, ironically as the head of Afghanistan's Counter-Narcotics Police (Farmer 2010). According to a secret cable to Washington released on December 2nd 2010 by Wikileaks, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry wrote that Moqbel 'is perhaps the worst of the candidates. Former Deputy Interior Minister and MP Helaludin Helal claimed to us January 11 that Moqbel was supported by the drug mafia' (Wikileaks 2010).²³ In further cables released by Wikileaks following Moqbel's appointment and meetings between deputy level US diplomatic and military officials to consider possible courses of action, Eikenberry adds that more direct measures such as firing corrupt officials or putting them in jail, are not on the agenda due to 'lack of capacity and lack of political will' (Wikileaks 2010a).²⁴

Ultimately, the Faustian power arrangement between the illicit economy and Afghanistan's political institutions since the US invasion has established a system where the political decisions made by the government are influenced by profit seeking at the national level and hierarchical power structures all the way down to the local level. In this way the deeply embedded nature of the illicit economy in state institutions projects an

²³ In the vote for the position – which was widely seen by the 249 member *Wolesi Jirga* as an opportunity to solicit donations for their upcoming reelection campaigns, Moqbel according to Eikenberry's sources set a record for these donations paying Jirga members about US\$8000 to 15 000 each.

²⁴ This sense of political recalcitrance to the deeply institutionally and structurally ingrained protection of illicit economic interests is demonstrated in the fate of the Afghan Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF). The MCTF was formed in 2009 to investigate corruption and organised crime, focusing in particular on organised crime within the government. While the task force did deliver initial results with the arrest of several high ranking members of the Afghan security organs on corruption charges, it quickly ran into trouble when it began to focus on Karzai's inner circle, with the International Crisis Group explicitly noting in their 2011 report on Afghanistan that the MCTF is 'significantly undermined by President Karzai'. This conflict peaked following the arrest of Mohammad Zia Salehi, a senior presidential adviser and chief of administration for the National Security Council in August 2010. Within days of Salehi's arrest, Karzai called for an investigation into the MCTF itself – all but shutting down its operations. The MCTF has since become effectively defunct with several Afghan investigators in the units forced out, including the task force chief Brigadier General Nazar Mohammad Nikzad - who reportedly left the country for fear of retribution from government officials.

alternative criminal authority complex within the state apparatus that diffuses power away from the state. Far more than paying off low level functionaries, and the passive taking of bribes to allow the drug industry to occur, the situation in present day Afghanistan is the active facilitation of criminal enterprise by its institutions and leaders with the illicit economy changing the impetus for decision making and the implementation of laws.

This “narcotisation” of state is taking place against the backdrop of an upsurge in armed insurgency that has tapped into the popular resentment of the Karzai government and the vast corruption and inefficacy of the state for widespread violence that threatens to throw the Afghanistan into complete collapse (Mullen 2010, Rubin and Sherman 2009).

Incidentally, the Taliban insurgency²⁵ is increasingly taking a lead role in the control and regulation of the opium economy (Thruelsen 2010)– exploiting its strategic strength in the south where approximately 95% of opium poppies since 2009 have been grown (UNODC 2010:1). US Assistant Secretary of State for Narcotics and Law Enforcement reports that the various militant forces of the insurgency are encouraging farmers to cultivate opium poppy and protecting drug routes and traffickers in their regional strongholds (Oehme II 2008: 81-83)while British General Richards, the ISAF commander stated the violence in southern Afghanistan is inextricably linked to drugs (The Economist 2007).

²⁵The insurgency, contrary to common but dangerously simplistic understandings among policy-makers and the media is not a monolithic force but actually a complex amalgam of shifting alliances among several actors composed of the Quetta Shura Taliban (QST) – or more commonly, the Taliban; the Haqqani Network (HQ) under Jalaluddin and his son Sirajuddin and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s militia group (HIG). While each force has slightly different motivations that has at times seen to internal fissure and conflict, particularly for competition over key territorial control of key drug trafficking routes, the insurgency by and large are motivated by common goals of driving the United States and NATO forces out of Afghanistan, undermining the Afghan government and achieving political control over the Pashtun areas that span the Afghan-Pakistan border.

The participation in the opium economy not only provides the Taliban insurgency with crucial operating funds with most recent figures from the UNODC putting total insurgency earnings at the conservative end of approximately \$170 million²⁶ (UNODC 2009:5), but more importantly consolidates their territorial control and political legitimacy. In the face of otherwise ideological hesitancy by the population, the Taliban is gaining increasing political capital by virtue of the fact that it is extending protection to the some 30-50% of Afghanistan's population who are involved in some aspect of the opium economy from the anti-narcotics initiatives of the Afghan state (UNODC 2009:7) As was the case in the previous era of the Soviet occupation, the Afghan economy and agricultural infrastructure is significantly under-developed and damaged from periods of continuous conflict. Therefore in circumstances of insecurity where there is a severe lack of access to essential infrastructure, irrigation, markets and microcredit, the opium poppy is low risk crop in a high- risk environment. The poppy is extremely lucrative, resilient to harsh climate and soil conditions and is offers price stability relative to licit agricultural products as licit agricultural products face intense external competition from foreign producers who have significant comparative advantage over Afghanistan's infant agricultural industry (Mansfield 2004:54-57).²⁷

On top of the Taliban's growing protective cultivation role, of growing concern is the insurgency's apparent increasing vertical integration of the opium industry in attempts to capture a large proportion of earnings to fund their operations. In southern Afghan

²⁶ Drug profits are of course not the Taliban's only source of income. Charitable donations from individuals and patron organisations in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates are a significant portion of the Taliban operating funds. Furthermore, insurgent groups with strong historical connections to al-Qaeda increasingly finance themselves by co-opting licit businesses – primarily in construction and logistics.

²⁷ In the 2004 growing season, Afghan farmer could expect a gross income of 12 700 per hectare under poppy cultivation with the average poppy farmer generating \$ 3900 if a third of a hectare was in cultivation. This was twenty times as much as he would earn by growing wheat,

regions of Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan where the insurgency holds near monopoly of coercion, it appears that the insurgency is turning to more profitable processing and exporting ends of the business (Peters and Ressler 2010:15-16). The immense scale of Taliban drug operations became clear in May 2009 when NATO and Afghan troops launched a major offensive to clear militants out of an opium market based in Marjah, where alongside the seizure of a staggering ninety- two metric tonnes of heroin, opium, hashish and poppy seeds and chemical pre-cursor chemicals – the market also housed a Taliban command centre, complete with elaborate communications systems including suicide vest and large weapons cache (Associated Press 2009, Committee of Foreign Relations, US Senate 2009). Further, according to a press release by the Afghan Defense Ministry, an October 2009 drug raid on a Taliban base in Helmand recovered forty- five metric tons of opium along with 1.8 metric tonnes of processed heroin, which alone would have been worth \$4.3 million on the local wholesale market (Associated Press 2009a). Moreover, the number of refineries south of the bend in the Helmand River in the Taliban strongholds of Garmser and Deshu districts has climbed in recent years – suggestive of increasing Taliban collaboration with criminal organisations. Although officials say it is hard to determine the precise number of heroin processing labs since the operations have become smaller and more mobile (Peters and Ressler 2010:28), the local Institute for War and Peace Reporting has reported conjectural claims from lab workers that indicated there were more than one hundred refineries in the southern Helmand Valley area (Tassal 2010).

According to the Counter-Terrorism Center at Westpoint and the interviews their researchers have undertaken with Afghan and US officials, Taliban commanders are increasingly taking the role of running or managing heroin labs (Peters and Ressler 2010:27). Senior Taliban commanders in the south appear to be taking a broader role in

the drug trade moving into more profitable processing and exporting and shifting their focus off taxing poppy farmers and drug convoys (Peters and Ressler 2010:29). This shift in focus from farm level taxation to processing and exporting end indicates the Taliban is behaving more like a drug cartel, with US law enforcement and military officials now tracking more than three dozen separate smuggling operations - many of which appear to be answering directly to the Taliban (Peters and Ressler 2010: 24). In addition, the Taliban are reported to be shifting into the business of moving drug shipments across Afghanistan's borders into Pakistan and Iran where the wholesale value of drugs more than doubles (UNODC 2010:2). As noted by Afghan drug experts David Mansfield and Jonathan Goodhand, cooperation between regional warlords, formally integrated into the state apparatus and the Taliban insurgency in the carriage of the opium business are frequent in southern Afghanistan (Mansfield and Goodhand 2010: 32).

Moreover given the growing concentration of cultivation in Taliban controlled southern regions and continued, indeed increasing exports over the northern borders into Central Asia and onward to the European markets (UNODC 2010: 13), it logically follows, despite the lack of confirmed reports that there is a degree of functional collusion between corrupt state officials and Taliban forces in facilitation for the passage of opium and opiates across country. In this sense, in addition to the growing strength of the insurgency: reported in 2009 by the ANSF to have presence in 72% of the country and in complete control of thirteen districts (Tait 2009, Roggio 2009)– all of which have become non-state opium cultivating spaces governed by shadow Taliban governments (ICG 2011a:1-2), there is possibility that Taliban campaigns for territorial claims are now driven by narcotic interests as much as they are by state displacement motivations, indicative of the increasing fluidity and convergence of economic and political interests in insurgent activity. This increasingly criminalised nature of the Taliban insurgency is

supported by interviews conducted by veteran Associated Press journalist Gretchen Peters who found that 80% of 350 of those she surveyed who work in or alongside the drug trade in twelve areas along the Pakistan/Afghanistan border of Taliban control said that the Taliban commanders' first priority was to make money rather than to recapture territory and impose the strict brand of Islam they espoused while in power (Peters 2009: 21)

CONCLUSION

The opium economy has over the past thirty years played a key role in the decline, fragmentation, indeed failure of the Afghan state by providing coercive capacity, territorial control and political legitimacy for warlords and various other ideologically driven anti-state militant forces. The infiltration of the opium economy into state institutions is particularly marked in the present era, underpinned by the fact that “ex non-state actors” - Afghanistan's powerful suite of tribal warlords are playing a key role in the institutions of the new Afghanistan by assuming formal positions in the state apparatus. Given the historically entrenched and socially embedded nature of the illicit narcotics economy both within and outside formal state structures and the vicious cycle of instability that characterises present-day Afghanistan, the prospects of state recovery in Afghanistan appear increasingly bleak.

CHAPTER FOUR: Colombia and Afghanistan in comparison

The illicit narcotics economy in Colombia and Afghanistan, despite clear differences in structure, evolution and the role played by key actors nevertheless underscores the broader point that the drug industry has played a formative role in driving both states into a process of decline and erosion by impeding extant state institutions from effective function and providing state power rivals with the means to usurp state sovereignty. In present circumstances where the Colombian state has experienced a palpable improvement in overall security with the state regaining much of the territorial control lost to the FARC insurgency and paramilitary forces, as well as curbing the extent of state capture by the drugs industry against the continuing decline of Afghanistan; of significance to scholars and in particular policymakers is the question of quite simply, why the difference in trajectory? What has allowed the Colombian state to regain its strength and restore some semblance of security despite the continued presence a largely unchanged illicit drug economy? What lessons, if any, does Colombia's success hold for the seeming intractability of the conflict in Afghanistan that is fuelled by an extraordinarily strong opium economy? Is the same turn-around in Colombia likely to be replicated in Afghanistan? What then does this intimate about interaction between illicit narcotic economies, the state and conflict?

To address these questions, this chapter makes some comparative observations about some of the similarities and differences in Colombia and Afghanistan along three key dimensions of foreign involvement, economic essentiality and political institutions and culture.

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT

Crucial to the success of the Colombian state in curbing the FARC insurgency has been military assistance from the United States. Of particular significance has been the fact that US military aid in Colombia has remained strictly within the bounds of indirect assistance in the provision of money, training and hardware. While Colombia is now the third highest recipient of US military aid after Israel and Egypt and the leading recipient of US military training, the US military footprint, measured in manpower on the ground is limited with no American troops assigned for combat duties. In fact during 2005 and 2008, the number of US military personnel varied from 136 to 563, all in tactical, advisory or strategic capacity with civilian contractors from 173 to 454²⁸ (Rochlin 2011: 736; Vuters and Misth 2006:171). Such limited direct US involvement provides a strong element of legitimacy to the Colombian fight- back, and removes the previous state security deficit which non-state armed groups and criminal- narcos had all exploited and assumed a defacto-state role in. This kind of long-arm security strategy by the United States not only allows all gains made to be directly conferred to the Colombian state itself, but also delimits the opportunity for non-state armed actors to exploit nationalist indignation against foreign intercessions – which in the past the FARC has mobilised as a key rallying point. For example, the FARC had frequently compared US sponsored drug eradication efforts, like Plan Colombia with the US intervention in Vietnam – in areas under its control the group had put up billboards that read, Plan Colombia: *los gringos*

²⁸ There is some controversy and debate among scholars about the legality and efficacy of the use of military contractors in Colombia. Many have argued that contractors have been utilised by the US military to commit significant atrocities in the Colombian conflict, while at the same time devolving the United States directly of any responsibility for these actions. Private military firms (PMF) are capable of exercising a covert foreign policy as propriety information is secret so the State Department is not obliged to provide details – in fact under current US law Congress does not have to be notified of PMF under \$50 million which means that official US sponsorship of PMF involvement in Colombia is without high levels of scrutiny of accountability. There has been some evidence that DynCorp, a key PMF relied upon by the United States have engaged in combatant roles.

ponen las armas, Colombia pone los muertos (Plan Colombia: The gringos supply the weapons, Colombia supplies the dead) (Lazare 2001:17). Therefore in this sense, the shift in US engagement in the post-9/11 era away from a previous fixation with counter-drug initiatives has been key to reducing the potential vitriol and nationalist propaganda that non-state armed rivals, in particular the FARC can utilise to coral popular support.

Furthermore, the changed security agenda of the US in the post-9/11 era has seen a complementarity emerge between Colombia and the US with respects to their attitude towards the drug industry. While the primary concern of successive Colombian governments has been the minimisation of instability and violence flowing from the drug industry, rather than a priority on reducing supply per se, the US' concern prior to 9/11 in Colombia has always been supply-side reduction. In a changed security environment where the notion of "terrorism" has gained increasing traction, Colombia's key non-state armed groups, the FARC and (now demobilised) AUC were placed on the State's Department's list of terrorist organisations next to the likes of Al-Qaeda. Resultantly, the United States has, not purposively, but simply as a result of a changed security agenda, shifted focus away from counter-narcotics policies in Colombia, providing Colombia with room to advance security initiatives in consolidation of the state's coercive force, without anti-narcotics pressures.

The same post 9/11 US security agenda has unfortunately not had the same positive impact in Afghanistan. The NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan is very similar to Colombia's paramilitaries during the 1990s – both being proxy combatants serving weak central states unable to provide security through its own security apparatus. Although the foreign forces in Afghanistan are far less indiscriminate, arguably more effective and not involved in the narcotics as their paramilitary contemporaries were, the delegitimising

and weakening impacts of “stand-in” military forces- particularly foreign military troops in Afghanistan is significant. Far from supplementing the coercive capacity of the state, foreign forces are increasingly serving as a platform for the insurgency to coalesce rising nationalism against the Karzai government, seen by many as an “American puppet government”. Moreover, despite the recent US ‘surge’ in troops with clear parallels to the significant militarisation efforts of Plan Patriota - NATO/ISAF troops are struggling to reverse the trends in a similar way in Afghanistan as was the case in Colombia, and may be less useful than if attention was re-directed to further increasing the number of military trainers being deployed to help build a viable Afghan army.

To be sure, the supremacy of the United States military in all likelihood far surpasses any start-up army that Afghanistan could reasonably be expected to mount in such a limited period of time and such efforts may be in vain. Nevertheless, what Colombia’s success against the FARC highlights is that the enhancement of the state’s military, demobilising paramilitary forces is the underlying factor to successful counter-insurgency by providing the population with the perception that the state in and of itself is capable and strong.

Therefore with the Afghan National Police notoriously corrupt, frequently colluding with drug traffickers (Wilder 2007) and the Afghan National Army playing a secondary role in most operations in Afghanistan today (Boone 2011, Radin 2011), there is significant scope for improvement if Afghanistan hopes to achieve anything of a similar sort to Colombia’s recent improvements in being able to discard the military support of NATO/ISAF forces. Certainly, the corruption and incompetence of the Afghan government is the critical driver of the insurgency, issues of which elude easy solutions, and therefore a strengthening of the Afghan security apparatus in pursuit of the Colombian model of recovery may see little change in the Taliban’s strength. That said, it nevertheless is the case that efforts to build up a state’s security apparatus to provide

better security is a welcome step in the right direction for any weak state, even if it does not bring about any immediate palpable changes in the degree so required. Colombia is strong case for the fact that in absence of security, counter-narcotics initiatives are unsustainable.

Moreover, Colombia emphasises that counter-narcotics based policies are wholly ineffective to bankrupting its insurgent partners. Following the biggest eradication campaign in history, Plan Colombia failed to significantly reduce the FARC's operational capacities. The US Office of National Drug Control Policy estimated that Colombia's anti- drug efforts reduced the FARC's overall profits per kilogram of cocaine from the range of \$320-\$460 in 2003 to \$195 to \$320 million in 2005 (GAO 2008:25). This figure however does take into account other forms of FARC income including extortion, kidnapping, oil smuggling which in the absence of drug profits are relied upon to maintain FARC operations. After a year of market adaptation following the implementation of Plan Colombia, in which coping strategies including pruning of coca plants after fumigation, replanting with younger coca plants or coca plant grafts, cultivation of areas where plants have smaller chances of being detected and more resistant forms of crops, the FARC were quickly able to regain coca income (Felbab Brown 2010: 103). In this sense, non-state armed actors will only adapt to changed market conditions, while relying on other forms of funding in the interim. If the same logic from Colombia was applied to the Taliban insurgency, then it would reasonably be expected that counter-narcotics policies for counter-insurgency purposes would be just as likely ineffective as the Taliban are reported to receive significant donations from patrons in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are estimated to account for 50% of total operating funds (ICG 2011: 1)

ECONOMIC ESSENTIALITY

Given the condition of Afghanistan's economy following three decades worth of foreign invasion and conflict - the importance of the opium poppy in Afghanistan is unprecedented. Opium is not simply a crop but the predominant (arguably only) feasible industry and the sole non-criminal beneficiary of opium is not only the farmer, but a much larger number of people indirectly connected to the demand created by the opium economy. The reduction in poppy cultivation in Nangarhar in 2004-05 provides a clear picture of the substantial macro-economic impact the drug economy and the extent of the illicit economy's entrenchment in Afghanistan. The cultivation ban impacted a variety of different socio-economic groups beyond opium farmers – rural farmers with no land but who were hired during the weeding and harvesting season were estimated to have lost as much as US \$1000 in off-farm income. This loss of income significantly reduced the majority rural population in Nangarhar's purchasing power and consequently halved the turnover of businessmen and shopkeepers in the provincial and district markets. Furthermore, unskilled daily wage labourers in the neighbouring provincial capital of Jalalabad where small manufacturing industries serving Afghanistan's emerging consumer market, experienced both a reduction in daily wage rates and the number of days they were hired as follow-on effect of reduced demand in Nangarhar (Mansfield and Pain 2008: 3-11).

Therefore, the question of the illicit narcotics economy, far more than is the case of Colombia where even at its peak narcotics production accounted for no more than 2-3 % of its GDP is in significant distinction to Afghanistan (Maas 2011: 9), where the illicit economy is more than one third of the overall economy and more than half of the licit GDP (UNODC 2009: 2). The overall macro-economic impact of the opium economy

therefore not only affects farm income but also has significant impacts on the balance of payments, tax revenues (through imports), the rate of exchange, employment, retail turnover, and key “post-conflict” industries of construction (Martin and Symansky 2006:25-25). This highlights that the opium economy for the while in Afghanistan, in absence of a complete overhaul of the country’s significantly underdeveloped economy with no industry or agricultural alternative that can provide the same returns, stability and security as the opium, is entrenched. Colombia on the other hand while having a significant population of the rural poor also has viable commodity export markets in flowers and coffee as well as a strong industrial sector in Medellin.

In this way, drug revenue in Afghanistan unlike in Colombia is not just about enriching trafficking organisations but also a large obliged populace of tribal followers. To some extent, in an economy like Afghanistan the drug trade can be viewed as a metric for local development as trade in opium poppy prompts exchanges in goods and the creation of infrastructure including houses, fuel depots and mobile phones (Mansfield and Pain 2008:7). Therefore, in Afghanistan, to the extent that the opium economy produces at the micro-level productive economic goods and services the assumption of the linear correlation between drugs and instability does not always hold. The stability and opportunities that the trade provides - even if strategically threatening are nevertheless important at the local level. Therefore, in the background of a governance, security and law enforcement issue waits a far deeper and challenging problem of economic reconstruction of what effectively is a pre-modernist society that has been frozen by thirty years of war. Despite the recent shift to alternative livelihood policies in Afghanistan to encourage opium farmers towards licit alternatives including fodder, fruit and wheat, the problem in absence of basic security in the country is that licit alternatives are not easily transportable to markets, whereas in the case of opium crops – private traffickers or more

often, local commanders linked to the Taliban or controlling warlords come to the farm-gate to purchase (Goodhand and Mansfield 2010: 15). Furthermore, when 95% of opium cultivation is in southern regions of dominant Taliban control – a great proportion of international aid and state assistance is unable to reach those farmers in most need. Indeed, it can be logically deduced that even if financial aid and assistance were able to penetrate into areas of Taliban control, given the importance of opium to the insurgency – whether or not alternative development will actually take place and development funds not diverted to the insurgency is a pressing concern (Caulkins, Kleiman, Kulick 2010:7-14).

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURE

The most significant issue however in terms of illicit economies and the state aside from international factors and economic development, when examining Colombia and Afghanistan is political organisation and culture. Despite Colombia's near partial collapse at the end of the 1990s as a result of the combined forces of the illicit economy, decades long violent internal conflict that has seen to some of the world's highest rates of murder, kidnap and the only country in the world that has an established academic discipline of 'Violentology' (Rochlin 2011:717), Colombia has throughout this period retained at the bare minimum, government bureaucracy and governance structures. While government institutions have been infiltrated and corrupted by the drug industry, the extent of this is minor in comparison to Afghanistan where the illicit narcotics economy basically underwrites political society and is the basis of its reigning patrimonial political culture. Where much of the functional governance activity at the local level is informal, conducted neither by well-defined entities with local sovereignty nor by administrative departments accountable to Kabul but by traditional kin group structures – the capacity of

any central state apparatus to enforce its edicts is significantly lacking in Afghanistan today.

Anti-corruption drives, electoral funding reform and institutional overhauls to reduce the extent of drug- based infiltration and state capture in Colombia is unlikely to take place in Afghanistan. While the hesitancy and reluctance of President Karzai to effectively target corruption in Afghanistan has been widely condemned by the international community, it is critical to consider Karzai's approach as part of a longer tradition in Afghan state-building and governance through the accommodation of powerful competitors. The persistent salience of "informal" actors – religious, tribal and militant in Afghan politics has been part of Afghan political strategy since the time of King Amanullah in the 1920s and his reign of what arguably was the most successful period of state-building in Afghanistan (Mukhopadhyay 2009:3). Therefore, "corruption" as is understood in the present mode of liberal democratic theory is actually consistent with the political culture of tribal societies in Afghanistan where traditions including clientelism, familiasm, nepotism and gift giving are considered normative and standard (Macdonald 2007:67).

Of course, in saying this is not to condone or suggest tacit acceptance for the patterns of predation, incompetency, mismanagement of Afghanistan's political elite today.

Moreover, the point here is to emphasise that the links between political institutions and corruption emergent from the narcotics economy in Afghanistan is unlikely to be overcome through the same initiatives, reforms and institutional overhauls that has taken place in Colombia. Given the deep level of involvement of Afghanistan's state officials and the historically rooted, socially embedded, politically indispensable role of the opium economy in Afghanistan, not seen at all in Colombia, the internal de-legitimation of the state in Afghanistan through drug state capture is likely to be enduring.

Conclusively, in comparison to Colombia, the fragmentation of the state by the illicit narcotics economy in Afghanistan is far more significant than is (was) the case in Colombia and perhaps intransigent to significant change. More people are reliant on the drug economy in Afghanistan than Colombia. Furthermore, for the foreseeable future, the government and its international supporters will be able to accomplish little in Afghanistan without the support or neutrality of de-facto power holders who combine functions as politicians, tribal ethnic leaders, commanders of armed groups and significantly key drug actors. In this way, the Taliban insurgency will continue to tap into the grievances emanating from the Faustian bargain of Afghanistan's present political arrangement while in absence of security, also continue to benefit from the lucrative illicit economy. The amalgam of interests that the illicit opium economy has now infiltrated in Afghanistan means that all these actors have an interest to keep the country from developing full stability. This being the case, Colombia's lessons for progression towards gradual recovery in re-storing state legitimacy and coercive capacity from the illicit narcotics economy, while reasonable, nevertheless appear elusive for the crumbling Afghan state.

CONCLUSION

Illicit narcotic economies are multi-faceted and destructive phenomenon that produce goods that have an extraordinarily wide range of malignant impacts on individuals, social cohesion, political function and economic development. That said, more than a criminal malfeasance, critical public health issue and impediment to economic development, this thesis has argued that the illicit narcotic economy in Afghanistan and Colombia is the central force that has driven both states into decline and erosion.

In both states, the fragmentation of state power as a result of the operation of the illicit narcotics economy has been broadly similar. First through internal erosion by way of the infiltration of state institutions and the usurpation of the state's coercive force. Second through, external attack by funding anti-state actors who contest the state's authority.

In Colombia, illicit drug interests have infiltrated all key state institutions from political parties, law enforcement, the judiciary and administrative bureaucracies. Money from narcotics in addition greatly expanded the strength of Colombia's main anti-state forces of the guerrilla insurgency and paramilitary forces to the extent that at the zenith of their power, their territorial and coercive means surpassed that of Colombian state. The gradual ascension of the Colombian state from the brink of imminent collapse as a result of the illicit narcotics economy in the last ten years has been the basis of significant military action and state institutional strengthening. That said, the hazard of the illicit narcotics economy remains and there is potential for the illicit narcotics economy in Colombia to restructure and morph into a new organisational setting that may have the potential to once again drive the state into decline.

In Afghanistan, the opium economy in partnership with the *mujahideen*, various Taliban militant forces and warlords have established autonomous power bases - carving out territorial control, coercive capacity and maintaining popular bases separate from the state. In the present era of Afghan state building, the opium economy is the driving force behind the infiltration and debilitation of the state apparatus. The symbiosis between Afghanistan's state structures, power-holders and the drug trade, with the relationship deeply embedded within traditional patrimonial political organisation of Afghanistan means that the failure of the state is likely to be engrained.

Agendas for future research could examine whether other sorts of illicit economies – both for goods including diamonds, timber, human organs, toxic and industrial waste, weapons and services like document forging have the same fragmentation of state power effect. Furthermore, given Colombia's recent recovery, of particular interest would be a comparative analysis with Mexico and the emerging Mexican drug economy. Provided that the same sort of recovery trajectory has proven unlikely in Afghanistan, it would be of great interest to see if the same or different parallels can be drawn to the Mexican case - which shares almost analogous narcotic/conflict dynamics with the Colombia of twenty years ago.

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